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A Landscape Analysis of “Grow Your Own” Educator Strategies in Wisconsin Rural Schools

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Executive Summary

A large share of Wisconsin’s 400+ school districts are rural, and nearly half of all students enrolled in public schools statewide attend rural schools. Persistent challenges faced by rural districts in attracting and retaining educators, however, are contributing to an increasingly dire situation for the state’s rural communities. This report summarizes findings from a yearlong research project investigating strategies being used by rural districts to address educator shortages, including a diverse set of “grow your own” (GYO) initiatives which involve school districts working with educator preparation programs (EPPs) and other local partners to identify, recruit, and prepare local candidates to become educators.

Our mixed-methods research design draws upon two statewide surveys (of rural superintendents and local site coordinators of the Educators Rising GYO program), along with site visits to five rural districts, to accomplish two main goals: first, to identify strategies being used by rural districts to attract, recruit, and hire teachers; and second, to describe the landscape of GYO initiatives being utilized by rural Wisconsin districts and local partners to address educator shortages. Broadly speaking, our work suggests that rural school districts are not waiting on state or federal policymakers to solve longstanding staffing challenges for them, but instead are actively engaged in implementing a mix of national GYO programs such as Educators Rising and “homegrown” GYO initiatives as one solution to chronic educator shortages. Not surprisingly, a distinct set of both successes and challenges have emerged as rural districts attempt to implement, launch, sustain, and scale up GYO initiatives that meet their needs.

Key findings that emerge from our work include the following:

Educator shortage perceptions and strategies for attracting, recruiting, and hiring:

- Superintendents and Educators Rising site coordinators in rural districts have similar perceptions of the severity of educator shortages facing their districts. On a scale of 1–5 (with 5 the most severe), rural superintendents’ mean rating was 3.67, with more than 60% rating their district’s shortage as either a 4 or 5. Rural site coordinators’ mean rating was nearly identical (3.69), and 65% rated their district’s shortage as a 4 or 5.
- Rural superintendents reported using 3–4 loosely-connected strategies each in the areas of *attracting*, *recruiting*, and *hiring* prospective educators, although the *most commonly-used* strategies aren’t necessarily those that rural superintendents feel are *most effective*.
- Only a handful of rural superintendents (3%) report that they collect any data on the effectiveness of the GYO strategies they currently utilize.

Educators Rising:

- Educators Rising chapters in Wisconsin rural schools represent a wide range of organizational maturity, from well-established chapters in existence for as many as seven years to those that were just getting launched during the 2022–23 school year.
- Most rural Educators Rising site coordinators are teachers, with very few receiving any type of release time for this work and only about half receiving a stipend.
- Very few rural Educators Rising site coordinators report having a supportive relationship with a local educator preparation program (EPP), although they report getting strong support from the state Educators Rising coordinator.
- Despite the program’s obvious emphasis on teaching as a career path, site coordinators talked about Educators Rising as an opportunity to cultivate a broad set of career readiness skills, even if students do not ultimately pursue careers in education.
- Rural Educators Rising students recognize the benefits of teaching in their home school and community, which implies that strategies to incentivize students to return home may be powerful motivations to take a local teaching position.
- Rural Educators Rising students and alumni expressed a savviness related to financial decision-making and the realities of teacher pay in Wisconsin. The majority of current students, and all but one alumnus, had earned college credit while in high school from one or more forms of dual enrollment opportunities.
- Reflecting on their time in high school, Educators Rising alumni pointed to activities that placed them in front of children early and often as influential factors in their career paths.
- While based on a very small initial sample, preliminary data from our look at rural Educators Rising programs suggest that it shows significant promise as one strategy for meeting staffing needs in rural districts. Most current Educators Rising students across the rural schools we visited indicated a clear desire to be a teacher, and many alumni of the program had actually completed training/licensure requirements and taken teaching positions in rural schools.
- Given the relatively low cost of launching and operating Educators Rising programs (including the option for rural districts to join an innovative new multi-district model), it is very likely a *cost-effective* model for addressing rural educator shortages as well.

We close by offering a set of policy recommendations related to sustaining and scaling up GYO strategies in rural contexts across Wisconsin. In particular, we call for additional financial investment in GYO programs and ongoing evaluation of their implementation and impact, modeled after initiatives in states across the country, including our neighboring states.

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Introduction and Policy Context

Wisconsin has a strong tradition of local control in PK-12 education, and nowhere is this more evident than in the many rural communities that characterize the state. Endemic educator shortages in rural schools, however, represent a serious challenge to educating rural students and sustaining rural communities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Wisconsin has 325 districts classified as either Rural or Town¹ (see Appendices A and B). Combined, these districts account for more than 75% of all districts statewide (not including independent charter schools). Persistent and increasingly dire educator shortages, however, are creating an educational crisis with significant implications for the academic success of rural youth, the development of the next generation of public leaders, and rural community sustainability. A recent poll conducted by the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WIRSA), for example, indicates that the 2022–2023 average of two open positions per rural district will increase next year to more than four (Stanford, 2022).

Since 2016, Wisconsin voters have passed local referenda to support their public schools in record numbers (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2022), underscoring the importance of local schools to local communities and taxpayers despite recent economic challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. Instilling civic virtue and developing democratic citizens is a central purpose of schooling in the U.S. (Labaree, 1997). Moreover, in rural communities, the school district is often the largest employer of middle-class professionals (Harmon & Schafft, 2009), while the presence of a school in a rural community raises property values, attracts professionals, and increases the likelihood of business development and physical infrastructure (Sipple et al., 2019). Given the interdependence of rural schools and communities (Seelig, 2017), it is vitally important for Wisconsin policymakers and local leaders to ensure that all schools, including those in rural regions of the state, have access to high-quality and committed educators.

According to a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute (Garcia & Weiss, 2020), factors underlying staffing shortages include high numbers of educators leaving positions in their current schools (or leaving the profession entirely), decreasing numbers of educator applicants needed to fill these vacancies, and difficulties retaining educators with appropriate professional credentials. Overall, these factors are more likely to have negative effects on educators in high-poverty

¹ For the purposes of this project, we defined rural districts in two ways. The first was the membership roll of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, which was a close partner in our work (especially in terms of our survey of rural superintendents). The second is the [locale classifications](#) used by the National Center for Education Statistics to describe the location of all public schools and districts in the U.S. in relation to urbanized areas. Specifically, we use two of the four locale classifications (Rural and Town) to define rural districts. We note that both the Rural and Town locale classifications have three sub-categories (Fringe, Distant, and Remote) which describe the proximity of a school to an urbanized area.

schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Ingersoll et al., 2018). Additionally, educator labor markets are known to be highly localized (Reininger, 2012), meaning that geographic proximity and familiarity are key components in decision-making both on the part of prospective educators (Boyd et al., 2005) and by school districts (Engel & Cannata, 2015).

“Grow Your Own” (GYO) educator training and recruitment programs are an increasingly common category of strategies adopted by school districts (Garcia, 2020; Hanover Research, 2016) to address educator shortage challenges. GYO programs are partnerships between higher education and school districts that support educator preparation and recruitment by attracting and serving the needs of “homegrown” educator candidates (Garcia, 2020). There is some evidence that educators with a rural background are more likely to be recruited to, and remain in, teaching positions in rural schools compared to those who come from other (non-rural) backgrounds (Lazarev et al., 2017; Miller, 2012; Ulferts, 2016). Furthermore, rural districts’ ability to retain educators also decreases costs associated with hiring and training a constant stream of new educators (Reininger, 2012).

Compatibility or “fit” between educator candidate and school needs is critical (Tran et al., 2020) for teacher retention, and the effects of hiring a strong and committed pool of candidates is an important aspect of school improvement and workforce stability. Research also suggests that rural educator retention is related to the strength of educators’ relationships with colleagues, administrators, students, and the broader community (Seelig & McCabe, 2021), and GYO programs both build upon and encourage these relationships. In this way, GYO programs are potentially beneficial for rural schools due to educator candidates’ prior knowledge of the social fabric of the community and their familiarity with a rural environment.

There is also growing interest in state and federal policies to support GYO initiatives that vary in scope and “entry point,” from programs that encourage middle/high school students to become educators to those that support adults (often paraprofessionals) in obtaining full licensure (Garcia, 2020). Recently, the Biden administration made federal pandemic relief funds available to address educator shortages, including the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER), and Higher Education Emergency Relief. These funds encourage implementation of GYO programs across geographic locales and political jurisdictions as possible solutions to educator shortages. Importantly, however, there is no clear understanding of how to define program success in these investments.

Among the many GYO programs being implemented across the country and in Wisconsin, we include a specific focus in our work on Educators Rising, as it is (according to the program’s website) “one of the largest Grow Your Own Programs at the high school level in the United States,” and one that is relatively well-known in Wisconsin. Educators Rising is coordinated by PDK International, an organization that supports educators and school leaders through professional learning, research, and advocacy activities. The program’s [website](#) describes

Educators Rising as “a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO)² with intra-curricular learning opportunities integrated into existing education and training programs” and “a community-based movement that provides Grow Your Own programming through the Educators Rising Curriculum and supporting student activities.” The website also notes that Educators Rising “has a presence” in all 50 states, with local affiliates in 37 states (including Wisconsin).

State-level Educators Rising affiliates appear to be housed most often at state education agencies, educator preparation programs, and state-level teacher unions, according to [data](#) reported by PDK International. In Wisconsin, the state-level affiliate was established as a teacher-led initiative in 2017 at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), with ownership of the state-level affiliate shifted to the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) in 2019. Three different individuals have served as the state-level coordinator in Wisconsin, with the current coordinator being a recently-retired teacher (and former state teacher of the year) from a rural Wisconsin district who is contracted for a small appointment (120 hours) with a small stipend. DPI recently removed all reference to the program on its website following a request from PDK International around ownership of the Educators Rising curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

Our interest in documenting the landscape of GYO strategies being implemented in rural Wisconsin is based on the hypothesis that rural schools and districts are not waiting on state or federal policymakers to solve persistent staffing challenges, but are instead developing and implementing a mix of national and locally developed initiatives in response to this issue. To this end, our study seeks to address two key questions:

- Which specific strategies are rural Wisconsin districts utilizing to attract, recruit, and hire educators, and how effective do district leaders perceive these strategies to be?
- How does implementation of one specific national “Grow Your Own” model (Educators Rising) look across rural Wisconsin districts, and what are the prospects for sustaining and scaling up this program as one potential solution to rural staffing challenges?

While we did include one question on both of our surveys asking key stakeholders in rural districts to describe the magnitude of the staffing challenges their district faces (as described below), we intentionally focused our work on *solutions* rather than on *problems*. There is ample evidence, as noted above, that staffing challenges faced by rural districts are real and likely worsening; accordingly, another study affirming this did not seem as useful as one which investigates what rural districts are actually doing to address staffing challenges, along with prospects for evaluating, improving, and sustaining/scaling up these efforts.

² In Wisconsin public schools, Educators Rising operates as a student club rather than as a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO). This distinction, as we discuss below, is important in several ways, including scheduling challenges and access to funding.

Conceptual Framing

Given the focus of our study on GYO initiatives and the inherent connection between recruitment strategies and retention factors, we guided participants into reflecting on three interrelated, yet distinct, categories of strategies: *attracting*, *recruiting*, and *hiring*. These discrete categories helped us identify specific components of broader conceptual strategies and examine specific elements that either support or inhibit local efforts, as well as identify particular models that may encompass more than one category on the pipeline.

Figure 1. Overlapping Educator Pipeline Strategies



We define **attracting strategies** as cultivating interest among prospective educators, including current middle/high school students, college students, professional support staff or substitute teachers, and community members. Examples include hosting an Educators Rising chapter, offering job shadowing or mentoring opportunities for students, campus visits, and providing financial support for graduates or paraprofessionals interested in pursuing teaching as a career.

Recruiting strategies are defined as active identification and engagement of potential educators with the consideration of employment, and/or promotion of school or community to increase potential educators’ exposure to a specific school or district. Examples include hosting student teachers, promoting district qualities, connecting with various networks to identify potential candidates, and providing/promoting attractive pay/benefit packages.

Hiring strategies are defined as specific human resources-aligned practices such as hiring emergency-certified teachers³ or long-term subs, offering pay differentials for hard-to-staff areas, creating a district recruitment plan, and inviting potential candidates to visit for a community or school tour and hiring before the summer. For this category of strategies, it is important to note

³ Wisconsin [licensing regulations](#) began referring to these as License with Stipulations several years ago.

that all districts must invest in hiring new educators (meaning that there are often resources allocated to these strategies), whereas intentional strategies for attracting and recruiting educators are not necessary prerequisites to hiring.

Our focus on strategies being used by rural Wisconsin districts for attracting, recruiting, and hiring educators should by no means be interpreted as our belief that retention strategies are unimportant in addressing educator shortages. In fact, we agree completely that shortages cannot be fully addressed exclusively by supply-side strategies (e.g., those that seek to *increase new entrants* into educator labor markets), but rather must be accompanied by a robust set of efforts to *retain current educators* already in the labor market. GYO programs such as Educators Rising will not, in other words, produce enough new entrants into educator labor markets at a state level to address educator shortages, but we argue that they *do* represent a viable strategy for individual districts. We also note that many of the same strategies districts use to attract, recruit, and hire educators also influence educators’ decisions regarding whether to remain in the same school and district, seek out a new position, or exit teaching entirely.

Methods

We utilize an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell et al., 2003) to describe the current landscape of GYO strategies used by rural Wisconsin school districts, based on data collected from surveys, case studies, and stakeholder interviews across two phases of work.

In **Phase 1**, we designed, administered, and analyzed surveys of two key groups of stakeholders⁴ in fall 2022 to identify (a) strategies utilized by rural districts to address educator shortages; and (b) potential case study sites for hosting day-long site visits during spring 2023. The first survey, conducted in conjunction with the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WIRSA), was sent via email to nearly 300 rural⁵ superintendents over a three-week period in November 2022 to learn about strategies being used for attracting and recruiting new candidates, as well as modifying district hiring processes (financial incentives, etc.) in order to attract prospective employees. Importantly (and intentionally), we also asked superintendents to rate the effectiveness of each of the strategies their district uses, as we hypothesized that there might be substantial differences in superintendents’ views of the efficacy of these strategies. The rural superintendent survey yielded approximately 200 full or partial responses depending on the question, for an overall response rate of more than 70% (including both fully and partially completed surveys).

The second survey, developed and administered in conjunction with the statewide Educators Rising coordinator, was sent via email to local site coordinators of the 40+ Educators Rising

⁴ Survey results described in the following section are provided to illustrate overall findings and recommendations, yet they are not exhaustive. For example, results about superintendent demographic characteristics are not described here, although data were collected. Both survey questionnaires and complete results are available upon request.

⁵ We use the following National Center for Education Statistics locale codes to define rural districts: 31 (Town Fringe), 32 (Town Distant), 33 (Town Remote), 41 (Rural Fringe), 42 (Rural Distant), and 43 (Rural Remote).

chapters across the state as of fall 2022.⁶ This included a set of almost 30 chapters that serve one or more rural Wisconsin districts, including a multi-district consortium housed at one of Wisconsin’s regional education service agencies (CESAs). The survey of site coordinators was designed to inform key organizational characteristics of each chapter (how long it has been in existence, how the coordinator position is funded and/or supported, etc.) and what types of programming and activities are offered to high school students. While we surveyed all Educators Rising chapters across Wisconsin, we were particularly interested in those serving rural districts.

Approximately 60% of rural site coordinators completed the survey, although we note that several Educators Rising chapters were so new (having just launched during the 2022–23 school year) that site coordinators did not feel prepared to complete the survey. The much smaller number of completed site coordinator surveys (in comparison to the rural superintendent survey) clearly warrants caution in terms of generalizability, although we note that one completed survey was submitted by one of Wisconsin’s Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) on behalf of a newly formed consortium of 15 rural districts. This consortium, which we describe below in the “Innovative Collaborations” section, includes a handful of students from member districts who are interested in Educators Rising but had no teacher or other staff member to take on the role of site coordinator. Accordingly, the total number of rural districts represented by completed site coordinator surveys is approximately 30.

Phase 2, which took place February–May 2023, featured several types of qualitative data collection. We conducted site visits to five rural Wisconsin districts selected for both geographic representation (located across different regions of the state) and maturity of their Educators Rising program (number of years the program has existed), based on responses from the superintendent and Educators Rising site coordinator surveys.⁷ Specifically, we spent a full day in each school district, meeting with stakeholders that included a mix of school board members, superintendents, principals, site coordinators, and high school Educators Rising students to learn more about strategies being utilized to attract, recruit, and hire educators. A total of 24 current high school students participated in focus groups across all sites combined.

Interviews with site coordinators at the two most mature Educators Rising chapters (Mauston and Wisconsin Rapids) also created a unique opportunity to interview recent alumni who participated in the program during high school and are now either enrolled in college pursuing education degrees or are already teaching. Specifically, we interviewed eight Educators Rising alumni (three current college students and five current teachers) to better understand how participation in the program influenced career pathways. There appear to be few longitudinal studies that track alumni of Educators Rising and other high school-based GYO programs into

⁶ As of this writing (July 2023), the state coordinator reports significant interest in new districts forming Educators Rising chapters, with approximately 70 chapters slated to be active for the 2023-24 school year.

⁷ This study does not meet the University of Wisconsin-Madison Institutional Review Board’s definition of research according to 45 CFR 46.102(d); therefore, IRB approval was not required. However, all interview and focus group participants were read a description of the study and provided verbal confirmation of their consent to participate beforehand. Participants also provided verbal consent to have the interview or focus group recorded, and to have their first name associated with direct quotes. District, school, and town names are not pseudonyms, and descriptions are based on publicly available data.

college and careers (and none that we are aware of in Wisconsin), so we are pleased to include the perspectives and experiences of this small but important set of stakeholders.

A final type of qualitative data collection involved interviews and/or email exchanges with key stakeholders who do not work directly for rural districts but have participated in and supported these districts’ GYO efforts. This group included leaders from educator preparation programs that have active partnerships with rural districts as well as regional education service agencies serving rural areas of Wisconsin. We also connected with PDK International to learn more about how Wisconsin’s support of Educators Rising at a state level compares to other states.

Table 1 summarizes selected characteristics of the five rural site visit districts. We note that while these districts share some key attributes that we used in deciding which districts to visit (most notably their small size), they are also intentionally varied in terms of region of the state, student demographics, and how long they have had an Educators Rising chapter in existence.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Rural Site Visit Districts

	Blair-Taylor	Colby	Cuba City	Mauston	Wisconsin Rapids
NCES Locale Code	Rural Distant	Rural Fringe	Rural Distant	Rural Fringe	Town Distant
Region and CESA ⁸	West (CESA 4)	Central-North (CESA 10)	Southwest (CESA 3)	West-Central (CESA 5)	Central (CESA 5)
Total 4K–12 enrollment	629	964	684	1145	4838
% White students	90.0%	65.0%	93.1%	83.9%	81.1%
% Latino students	6.4%	31.5%	3.9%	8.0%	6.0%
% Economically Disadvantaged	46.9%	52.8%	32.2%	59.2%	53.3%
% English Learners	1.0%	22.0%	1.2%	1.5%	2.7%
Postsecondary Enrollment Rate (3-Year Average) ⁹	50.1%	46.6%	74.6%	40.6%	47.7%
# Years Educators Rising Program in Operation	1 st year	5 th year	1 st year	7 th year	7 th year

Source: 2021–22 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction District Report Cards and data from Educators Rising state coordinator.

Summary of Findings

Below we summarize key findings that emerge from the two phases of our work, organized first by stakeholder group (rural district and school leaders vs. Educators Rising site coordinators) and then by the type of information we collected from each (surveys and interviews), followed by two particularly innovative collaborations we learned about:

- Rural district/school leader perceptions of staffing strategies and GYO initiatives:
 - Superintendent survey
 - School and district leader interviews
- Rural Educators Rising chapters:
 - Site coordinator survey
 - Interviews and focus groups with site coordinators, students, and alumni
- Innovative collaborations

⁸ CESA = Cooperative Educational Service Agency (regional educational service provider).

⁹ As one indicator of academic readiness across the five rural high schools we visited, we show the pooled three-year “first fall” postsecondary enrollment rate for each district’s high school for the graduating classes of 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22, as reported by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s [WiseDash Public Portal](#). DPI receives these data from the National Student Clearinghouse each year, and first fall enrollment rates show the percentage of each graduating class that has enrolled in a postsecondary institution (two-year or four-year) by November 1 of the year of high school graduation. We use three years of pooled data rather than a single year to help “smooth out” what are often large year-to-year fluctuations inherent with small graduating classes.

Rural Leaders’ Perceptions of Staffing Strategies and GYO Initiatives

Superintendent Survey

As previously described, a final pool of 288 rural Wisconsin school superintendents (defined as those who lead districts with NCES locale codes of Rural or Town) with verifiable contact information was developed in conjunction with the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WIRSA). Over a three-week period in November, 198 electronic surveys were fully completed, with an additional 16 surveys partially completed, for a 74.3% overall (full and partial responses) completion rate and a 68.8% full completion rate. Respondents reflect a diverse geographic spread of rural districts across the state, which enables comparison across areas with varying industries (e.g., tourism/service, agriculture, manufacturing), degrees of remoteness from urban centers and educator preparation programs, and racial and economic diversity.

Perceptions of Educator Shortages

Following an initial set of demographic questions about rural superintendents’ level of experience and career pathway, respondents were asked to describe the severity of the educator shortage in their district on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the most severe. **Table 2** summarizes rural superintendents’ perceptions of educator shortages by locale code. The overall mean rating among all rural superintendents was 3.67, with 61.7% rating their district’s educator shortage as either a 4 or 5. Fringe districts (Town and Rural districts located closer to urban areas) had substantially lower mean shortage ratings (indicating superintendent perceptions of less severe shortages) and much lower percentages of superintendents rating their shortage as a 4 or 5.

Table 2. Rural Superintendent Perceptions of Educator Shortage by Locale Code

	Number of Districts Responding	Mean Shortage Rating (1–5)*	% Rating Shortage as 4 or 5
Locale Code:			
Town Fringe	9	3.11	33.3%
Town Distant	34	3.97	76.5%
Town Remote	4	5.00	100.0%
Rural Fringe	29	2.93	34.5%
Rural Distant	80	3.66	62.5%
Rural Remote	49	3.92	69.4%
Total	206	3.67	61.7%

*1=least severe and 5=most severe

Strategies for Attracting, Recruiting, and Hiring

Rural superintendents were prompted to select from a curated list of strategies they are currently utilizing for attracting, recruiting, and hiring future educators, and to then rate how effective each strategy has been on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the most effective. Respondents could select as many strategies as relevant as desired, and could also write in responses in an

“other” category. **Tables 3–5** show the most commonly used strategies, along with perceived effectiveness ratings.

Regarding strategies used by rural districts to *attract* educators (**Table 3**), superintendents most often reported using 3-4 different strategies from the list of options, although some reported using as few as one and as many as eight. No single strategy, however, emerges as a clear favorite; instead, rural superintendents report using a variety of attraction strategies, with the most common being mentoring, job shadowing, and/or teaching assistant opportunities for current high school students. We also note that the *most commonly used* strategies for attracting educators aren’t necessarily those that rural superintendents feel are the *most effective*; for example, the most effective strategy (mean rating 3.97) is financial support to paraeducators or other school employees to pursue teacher licensure, even though this strategy is used in less than 10% of rural districts.

Regarding strategies being used by rural Wisconsin districts to *recruit* and *hire* (**Tables 4 and 5, respectively**) prospective educators, a similar pattern emerged: most districts report using a handful of loosely connected strategies, but the strategies deemed most effective by rural superintendents are not necessarily the most commonly used strategies. Under recruitment strategies, for example, hosting student teachers is viewed as the most effective strategy by rural superintendents, yet nearly one-fourth of respondents indicated their district does not use this as a recruiting tool.¹⁰

Table 3. Rural Strategies to Attract Prospective Educators, with Perceived Effectiveness

Strategy for <i>Attracting</i> Prospective Educators	% of Rural Superintendents Indicating their District Uses this Strategy	Mean Effectiveness Rating on 1-5 scale (5 = most effective)
Mentoring, job shadowing, teaching assistant opportunities for current students	58.6%	3.57
Campus visits to educator preparation programs	55.6%	3.41
Offering students dual or transcribed credit	53.5%	3.68
Financial support for paraeducators or other school employees to pursue licensure	33.8%	3.94
Financial support for district alumni to enroll in educator preparation programs	26.3%	3.76

¹⁰ As relates to rural districts which reported not hosting student teachers, their reasons for not doing so were not specified in the survey. It is not clear, in other words, whether districts were interested in hosting student teachers but were unable to do so (for example, not being located close enough to an educator preparation program and/or not having any prospective student teachers express interest).

Table 4. Rural Strategies to *Recruit* Prospective Educators, with Perceived Effectiveness

Strategy for <i>Recruiting</i> Prospective Educators	% of Rural Superintendents Indicating their District Uses this Strategy	Mean Effectiveness Rating on 1-5 scale (5 = most effective)
Connect with EPPs to identify candidates	84.8%	3.69
Provide competitive salary/benefits	84.3%	3.95
Advertise/promote your district	79.3%	3.43
Host student teachers	77.3%	4.01
Network with other superintendents	72.2%	3.48

Table 5. Rural Strategies to *Hire* Prospective Educators, with Perceived Effectiveness

Strategy for <i>Hiring</i> Prospective educators	% of Rural Superintendents Indicating their District Uses this Strategy	Mean Effectiveness Rating on 1-5 scale (5 = most effective)
Include current educators in the process	93.4%	3.98
Hire emergency-credentialed (license with stipulation) educators	88.9%	4.04
Hire early (pre-summer)	88.4%	4.18
Invite interested candidates to visit	77.8%	4.05
Hire long-term subs	73.2%	3.79

We asked rural superintendents to share their *perceptions* regarding the effectiveness of the strategies they use for attracting, recruiting, and hiring educators, but also included a follow-up question asking whether they collect *any actual data* on the effectiveness of these strategies. **Tellingly, only 3% reported that they collect any data on the effectiveness of the strategies they currently utilize.** This finding leads directly to one of our policy recommendations below, which is that Wisconsin needs to establish a data infrastructure, timeline, priorities, and funding around evaluating GYO initiatives for attracting, recruiting, and hiring, in order that we can make more informed decisions about what kinds of programs to launch, sustain, and expand.

Two Sides of the Coin: Advantages and Challenges of Working in Rural Schools

A final set of open-ended survey questions asked about rural superintendents’ perceptions of both the advantages and challenges of working in rural communities. Prior research on rural educator recruitment and retention has identified a set of *community* characteristics (external to the school itself) as important factors in educators’ decisions to start (and remain) in rural school settings (Seelig & McCabe, 2021; Ulferts, 2016). These include availability of affordable housing and childcare, proximity to hospitals and healthcare, and access to social and recreational opportunities. A parallel set of *school* characteristics is also cited as a frequent determinant of employment decisions in rural schools, including the ability to form close relationships with colleagues, students, families, and communities.

Our findings largely mirror these trends from prior research. In terms of advantages that accompany working in rural districts, rural superintendents we surveyed identified school-community relationships as one distinct advantage, due to the central role that rural schools play as the heart of their communities. Other characteristics of rural schools such as small class sizes, being able to work in a “family-like” atmosphere, and limited disciplinary issues, were also cited as advantages of working in a rural district. Some superintendents also noted that smaller size allows district leadership to be more nimble and flexible, allowing them to make changes with less “red tape” than in larger districts with numerous departments and layers of decision-makers.

On the other hand, rural superintendents also identified a set of challenges that accompany their work in rural settings. Most prominently, they expressed widespread frustration with district finances, specifically naming challenges caused by the state school funding formula and the constant need to go to referendum to keep their schools open. While these sentiments are certainly not unique to rural districts, Wisconsin’s school funding formula is widely perceived by rural superintendents as impacting rural districts in a particularly negative manner. Numerous superintendents noted, in fact, that many rural districts face a set of funding challenges, including declining enrollment and large amounts of property owned by either non-resident taxpayers or by governmental entities, which do not generate tax revenue.

Rural superintendents often connected rural school and community challenges to their increasing difficulties attracting and retaining educators. For example, they identified a set of community challenges that affect educator recruitment and retention, such as limited social and cultural opportunities (particularly for younger staff) along with a lack of community infrastructure, including limited housing and transportation options and insufficient internet access. Some superintendents also mentioned challenges related to community demographic changes, such as the aging population in rural areas, family and student transiency, and youth outmigration after high school. Relatedly, superintendents pointed to declining student enrollment and the burden of multiple expectations or “wearing many hats” on current staff as challenges.

Interestingly, the strengths and challenges of work in rural communities often present as two sides of the same coin (Seelig & McCabe, 2021). For example, tight-knit relationships between educators and communities are often cited as both a *strength* (“we really know our students and their individual needs”) and a *challenge* (“everybody knows everyone’s business”) associated with working in rural schools. Small school size functions in a similar manner, in that it allows for cohesion and close relationships, but also creates a set of fiscal and staffing challenges such as increased educator workload due to having fewer staff available to cover duties such as athletic and co-curricular activities and family/community engagement.

School and District Leader Interviews

School leaders, district leaders, and a school board member were prompted during interviews to reflect on district-specific strategies they utilize to attract, recruit, hire, and retain educators. This section provides details on common strategies found across multiple districts and highlights several innovative and promising strategies that may be adaptable in other rural districts. As

noted previously, the categories of attraction, recruitment, and hiring often overlap; however, isolating strategies in this way also illuminates opportunities for targeted investment and support.

College Credit Attraction Strategies for High School Students and Paraprofessionals

In all five of the rural districts we visited, attraction strategies focused on developing interest among current high school students and alumni in entering and completing teacher licensure programs. Common strategies, as noted in **Table 2**, include offering job shadowing or mentoring opportunities for high school students and providing opportunities for students to earn college credit in high school through various dual enrollment options.¹¹ Family and consumer science teachers already offered a number of courses for transcribed credit in three districts through their local technical colleges, in fact, while an Introduction to Education course was offered in Mauston and Colby for dual credit, as a “zero hour” class before the school day began.

While dual enrollment offerings have clear advantages for students, the Mauston principal identified an important challenge as relates to staffing: “The difficult part is that you need a master’s [degree, to teach dual enrollment]...I can’t look at my young teachers and tell them to get it for financial reasons because they’ll never get it [their financial investment] back...So I’m going to lose that dual enrollment option here pretty quick, and that’s going to hurt.” The principal understands the value of dual enrollment courses for attracting high school students into teaching, but also recognizes the challenges of not offering adequate financial compensation for current educators to pursue the credentials needed to teach dual enrollment classes.

Beyond attracting high school students, Colby and Blair-Taylor also offer financial support for paraprofessionals to pursue a teaching assistant certificate or an associate’s degree. In Colby, the superintendent described a program through the regional technical college, Northcentral Technical College (NTC), as a licensure pathway: “They have a one-year certificate program that’s nine credits...if you’re an employee and you want a teacher certificate, we’ll pay for that. We also have an opportunity if you wish to pursue beyond the one-year certificate, they offer a two-year Foundations of Education associate’s degree...Their certificate program ladders into their two-year associate, and then their associate degree program ladders into I want to say about six universities now.”

Recruitment Strategies Depend on Relationships and Partnerships

Although all districts we visited posted open positions on the [Wisconsin Education Career Access Network](#) (WECAN),¹² recruitment strategies were heavily dependent on school and district leaders’ relationships with educator preparation programs. The two principals we spoke with, in Cuba City and in Mauston, described how they took initiative to reach out to institutions

¹¹ Dual enrollment programs include a variety of initiatives that allow high school students to take classes that earn college credit (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2023). This includes programs in which classes are taken either on college campuses (such as the University of Wisconsin System’s Early College Credit Program and the Wisconsin Technical College System’s Start College Now program) or at students’ high schools (such as the UW System’s College Credit in High School program and WTCS’s Transcribed Credit program).

¹² WECAN is the state-sponsored electronic portal for districts and schools to post position vacancies and educator candidates to post their qualifications. See <https://wecan.waspa.org/>.

of higher education to talk about teaching in rural schools with college students, solicit interest for open positions, attend job fairs on campus, and discuss hosting student teachers or interns. The principal at Cuba City also praised a recent student intern (which is different from the traditional student teacher designation) from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. This program, known as the [Wisconsin Improvement Program Teaching Internship](#), is run by DPI and requires the district and a university partner to qualify to host and mentor the student intern, while the intern is required to submit paperwork showing their credentials and allowing them to work with children in school settings. According to DPI, intern status allows the student to be in a classroom by themselves for up to 50% of the day (with the other 50% paired with a cooperating teacher). In Cuba City, the intern cost the district \$6000 for the semester, which is significantly less than a licensed teacher, and \$5500 went directly to the student intern (which is obviously a much different arrangement than the traditional unpaid student teacher placement).

Furthermore, the Cuba City principal explained that student interns and student teachers are offered an automatic interview if a position is open for which they are qualified to apply. As mentioned above, Colby and Mauston also guarantee an interview for any open teaching position to alumni of their local Educators Rising chapter. While this strategy could also be classified as hiring, it is noted here as a recruitment strategy because high school students clearly know about this opportunity, and it may already be affecting whether they are interested in returning to the district after college graduation for a teaching position.

Recruitment strategies used by rural districts also draw upon relationships with entities other than educator preparation programs. As noted in the superintendent survey findings above, limited cultural amenities and lack of housing options for either renting or purchasing homes in rural communities often serve as barriers to recruiting and retaining new rural educators. These issues may be less problematic in rural districts that are located closer to larger metropolitan areas (such as districts classified as Rural Fringe), but were identified by rural superintendents as prominent challenges in our survey. We found evidence that rural districts are using formal and informal partnerships in their communities to address these challenges. As one example, the principal in Mauston described working closely with local realtors to provide potential teacher hires with housing options, and the Mauston school board member noted that they have students take prospective teaching candidates on a tour of the community. Not only does this allow potential new hires to imagine living and working in the community, but also encourages students to “show off” community assets such as the natural environment and local attractions.

Hiring Concerns Related to Competitive Market for New Teachers

Hiring strategies were generally similar across the five districts, perhaps because all districts need to have hiring procedures and processes in place. Hiring strategies mainly focused on two areas: addressing teacher pay concerns and competing for new hires in innovative ways. School and district leaders in the five districts we visited are still negotiating and developing new practices to replace the step-and-lane pay scale for teachers that ended with the passage of Wisconsin’s controversial Act 10 in 2011 (see Sinz, 2022 for details). In order to hire and retain quality educators, district leaders mentioned a variety of financial and supplemental incentives,

including rewarding educators for service and professional learning with pay increases, offering stipends to veteran educators to mentor their peers, and prioritizing strong retirement and insurance benefits. In Wisconsin Rapids, for example, the district rewards staff for professional development by annually increasing their base salary instead of providing stipends. The superintendent believes this incentive prevents veteran educators from “maxing out” as with the former salary schedule, and provides all educators with opportunities for salary increases.

When Competing on Pay Doesn’t Add Up, Rural Districts Hire Early and Creatively

Four districts are also experimenting with strategies to recruit and hire educators earlier in the school year, so that they may hire before larger and better-resourced districts begin skewing the playing field. Wisconsin Rapids is more centrally located and larger than the other four districts, which allows the district to negotiate from a position of relative financial strength compared to smaller districts nearby. The superintendent is aware, in fact, that many neighboring small rural districts are wary of Wisconsin Rapids’ perceived ability to “poach” their educators, although he noted this is not a strategy the district systematically uses or condones.

Other rural superintendents we spoke with similarly recognize the difficulty of competing with larger and wealthier districts (rural and otherwise), and are therefore attempting to adjust hiring timelines as a way to get ahead and lock in their new hires. For example, in Mauston, educators are incentivized with a bonus to notify the district of their decision to retire before the state-required date. In Colby, the superintendent described a new board-approved policy that allows the district to provide full-time wages to a new educator for a one-semester overlap with the educator they will replace. He explains that this provides the new educator “a year to understand the scope of the courses they’re picking up and to learn with that veteran teacher.” This option for hiring and training a new teacher allows Colby to consider hiring college students who graduate in December, instead of waiting until the more typical end of spring semester hiring process when the competition is more intense.

Rural Educators Rising Chapters

Site Coordinator Survey

Who Are Site Coordinators, and How do They Perceive Severity of Staffing Challenges?

Most of the Educators Rising site coordinators who completed the survey (75%) are classroom teachers, although this group also includes guidance counselors, building-level administrators (principals and assistant principals), and instructional coaches. Half (50%) of rural site coordinators founded their school’s chapter on their own, while the remaining half were either asked by their principal to start the program or inherited the program from a former site coordinator who left or retired. We also note with interest (but not surprise) that 69% of rural site coordinators reported spending much of their own childhood in rural communities.

Rural site coordinators also encompassed a range of years working in their current school, with the group consisting of a mix of veteran and early-career educators. Many of the rural Educators Rising chapters in Wisconsin are relatively new, including those in their first year of

existence during the 2022-23 school year. Interestingly, rural site coordinators had almost the exact same perception of the severity of the educator shortage crisis as rural superintendents, with a mean rating of 3.69 (on a scale of 1–5, with 5 denoting the most severe crisis) for site coordinators compared to 3.67 mean rating for superintendents. Approximately two-thirds of rural site coordinators (11/17) rated their district’s educator shortage as either a 4 or a 5.

How are Site Coordinators Supported, and With Whom do They Partner?

We also sought to learn about how rural districts support the site coordinator role in terms of factors such as stipends, release time, and a budget for student activities. Survey results indicate that only three of the 16 site coordinators (19%) reported having course release time to support leadership and management of their chapter, and the same (small) number has a specific budget to support student activities such as visiting educator preparation programs and attending the state Educators Rising conference. Just over half of rural site coordinators (9/16, or 56%) report that they receive a stipend for performing their coordinator duties.

Rural Educators Rising site coordinators were also asked to describe the extent to which they have formed partnerships (formal or informal) with other institutions or organizations (outside of their school and district) to help support their work as site coordinators. Perhaps due to the fact that the Educators Rising state coordinator has also served as local site coordinator in her district, a majority of respondents noted that they have supportive relationships with other Educators Rising chapters. In addition, over a third of respondents indicated that they had a supportive relationship with their local CESA (of which there are 12 across the state).

Perhaps most surprising from the partnership data is that only 7% of rural site coordinators reported having a supportive relationship with an educator preparation program. Given the obvious importance of a college degree in preparing high school students for careers in education, this finding seems noteworthy as an area for improvement.

Strategies for Recruiting Students

Rural site coordinators also described the strategies they use to recruit students by selecting from the curated list shown in **Table 6**, which also shows site coordinators’ perceptions of how effective students think each strategy has been, using a 1–5 rating scale (with 5 being the most effective strategy). Several recruitment strategies, such as schoolwide announcements, informal “word of mouth” recruiting, and more organized peer-to-peer recruitment efforts (such as students making presentations in classes), are widely used by site coordinators as recruitment tools, although site coordinators perceive that word of mouth and peer-to-peer recruiting methods are much more effective in the eyes of their students. Qualitative data summarized below affirm that students often expressed a desire to increase the membership of their Educators Rising chapter, and that student perceptions of the effectiveness of commonly used recruitment strategies differ somewhat from site coordinators’ perceptions of effectiveness.

Table 6. Strategies Used by Rural Educators Rising Chapters to Recruit Prospective Students (with Perceptions of Effectiveness)*

Strategy for Recruiting Prospective Students into Educators Rising	% of Rural Site Coordinators indicating that they use this strategy	Mean Effectiveness* on 1-5 scale (5 = most effective)
Schoolwide announcement	87.5%	3.50
Word of mouth	87.5%	4.57
Peer-to-peer recruiting	81.3%	4.69
Flyers/posters	68.8%	3.67
Class announcements	56.3%	3.89
Social media	31.3%	3.25
Activity fair	31.3%	4.25
Student assembly	6.3%	3.00

*Perceived effectiveness rating shows site coordinators’ perception of how effective students think each recruitment strategy has been.

Student Activities

We were also interested in learning what kinds of activities rural Educators Rising chapters offer to interested students. **Table 7** shows the most common student activities, along with site coordinators’ perceptions of how positively students have reacted to each activity (using a 1–5 scale, with 5 indicating strong agreement that students perceive the activity positively). We note that several activities, such as holding an informational meeting for students to learn about teaching as a career, are commonly offered Educators Rising activities, while others (such as providing financial support either for alumni attending college or for current high school students to attend the Educators Rising convention) are less common. We also observe that two of the activities site coordinators believe students react to most positively (going on college campus visits and offering dual enrollment courses) are only offered by half of rural Educators Rising chapters; as discussed below, this may be because rural site coordinators have difficulty raising funds for more costly events such as buses for campus visits.

Table 7. Rural Educators Rising Students Activities (with Perceptions of Positivity)*

Activity Type	% of Rural Site Coordinators indicating that they offer this activity	Mean Student Positivity Rating* on 1-5 scale (5 = most positive)
Informational meeting to learn about teaching	75.0%	4.25
Encourage students to attend state Educators Rising conference	68.8%	4.36
Intern in a classroom for academic credit	68.8%	4.55
Shadow a teacher	62.5%	4.30
Take students on college campus visits	50.0%	4.75
Offer dual/transcripted credit courses	50.0%	4.75
Implement all/part of national Educators Rising curriculum	37.5%	4.00
Hold welcome/kickoff event	12.5%	4.00
Provide financial support to Educators Rising alums attending college	6.3%	3.00
Provide financial support to attend state Educators Rising conference	6.3%	n/a

*Positivity rating shows site coordinators’ perception of how positively students have reacted to each activity.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Site Coordinators, Students, and Alumni

Educators Rising site coordinators in rural districts we visited elaborated on several of the key themes that emerged from the statewide site coordinator survey. In particular, they described the range of activities offered to students as strategies for nurturing interest in education careers, as well as how they support and structure these activities within their own local context. Current students who are part of rural Educators Rising chapters, along with alumni from two of the chapters, also shared their perspective on participating in the program during high school and how it influenced their thinking about career choices.

Site Coordinators Adapt Purpose and Activities to Meet Student Interests

Educators Rising is described as a standalone program with a national curriculum, but in the rural Wisconsin districts we visited, site coordinators described how they assemble a variety of activities and opportunities for students to explore careers in education. For example, two coordinators taught an Introduction to Education class as an optional “zero hour” (before-school) class that earned students dual enrollment college credit. In Cuba City, the site coordinator did not teach the Introduction to Education course herself, but instead offered students the opportunity to take it with a teacher in a neighboring school district. All site coordinators also offered optional classes during the school day to provide job shadowing or skill development experiences such as tutoring for young students. All sites also offer and encourage volunteer opportunities for students to give back to their school and community; for example, Educators

Rising students in Mauston prepare and host a breakfast for retired teachers, while in Wisconsin Rapids, students organized community blood drives. In Cuba City, Colby, and Blair-Taylor, students organized family nights for elementary students.

Interestingly, the site coordinator’s specific teaching assignment appeared to directly influence opportunities for students to develop knowledge about teaching as a career path, with this being especially the case among site coordinators who were also Family and Consumer Science teachers and/or advisors for the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) program. For example, site coordinators in Blair-Taylor, Cuba City, and Wisconsin Rapids were all Family and Consumer Science teachers who have been able to recruit students into Educators Rising by asking students enrolled in the education-related courses they teach if they might also be interested in Educators Rising. While the specific classes that serve as fertile recruitment ground varied by district, they included offerings such as Child Development, which are often offered for transcripted credit through a local technical college. Because of this pre-existing set of complementary coursework for exploring teaching as a career, the Blair-Taylor and Cuba City Educators Rising chapters, which are only in their first year, have been able to successfully recruit students into the program and provide relevant experiences.

Rural Educators Rising site coordinators also described how they tailor the purpose of the program to their specific local context and student interests. **Despite the program’s obvious emphasis on teaching as a career path, site coordinators talked about using it as an opportunity to cultivate general career readiness skills, even for students who do not ultimately choose to become educators.** The site coordinator in Blair-Taylor, for example, explained how Educators Rising is one of many career exploration opportunities that are “...helping [students] prepare for [their] future no matter what it is...whatever it takes for us to help [them] get to where [they] want to be.” Specific career readiness skills that site coordinators report the program helping to develop include communication skills (such as writing emails or preparing speeches or announcements) and leadership skills (such as organizing and planning school and community events). We also noted with great interest how one site coordinator has expanded the definition of “teaching” to include out-of-classroom instructional roles, noting that 100% of her Educators Rising students will go into “teaching” in some sense, even if not in a traditional “brick and mortar” school. This included a student interested in nursing, with the site coordinator describing how she told this student that nursing involves a teaching function in the sense that “you’re teaching patients how to help themselves.” This sentiment among site coordinators, that participation in Educators Rising is beneficial for all students (not just those interested in education careers), was also shared by students themselves, as discussed below.

While career exploration and exposure to education-related course content appear to be common local aims of rural Educators Rising chapters, the program is also adaptable to meeting the needs of diverse student populations as relates to college access and enrollment. In Colby, the student population is nearly one-third Latino, 22% of students are English Learners, and over 50% of students are economically disadvantaged (see **Table 1**). The site coordinator in Colby, accordingly, discussed how many of her Educators Rising students were first-generation college students, and how this influences the activities and supports that she provides. She explained

that “...lots of times I’m the first person to take them to a college, take them on a college tour, talk to them about classes and what they can do, and what do [they] want to be? I’m there to just kind of be that extra support for them, that first line.” Relatedly, the site coordinator noted that students with parents who are college graduates (and educators in particular) may be less likely to join the Educators Rising chapter, because they “already know their path,” and may have less need to do college campus visits or learn about how to plan for college applications.

Students Navigate Competing Priorities under the Educators Rising Club Model

In the rural high schools we visited, students spoke of participating in many different co-curricular and extracurricular activities, which they regarded as one advantage of a smaller school environment. At the same time, this creates intense competition for their time (along with schoolwork, jobs, and family), and the club model of Educators Rising means that meetings need to be “squeezed in” before or after school or during lunch, and site coordinators cited this as a definite challenge to recruitment efforts and scheduling of activities. The site coordinator in Cuba City, for example, noted that “...A lot of kids have to work...You know, these kids are very savvy. ‘I can go and work at McDonald’s for \$15. I’m not going to work over here for eight bucks an hour.’ They have a hard time seeing that down the road, this \$8 an hour job at the daycare is going to be the best thing that you can do for your [future] job.”

While this particular quote by the site coordinator on the “pay vs. useful experience” dilemma pertains specifically to participating in Educators Rising, we note that it can also be applied more generally to the broader challenge of requiring prospective educators to complete unpaid practicums and student teaching in order to obtain teaching certification. In other words, it hardly seems surprising that at least some college students would view the expectation of completing the traditional unpaid semester of student teaching as a disincentive to pursuing a career in education when their peers pursuing other career options have access to paid internships that feed into better-paying careers.

Students Draw Inspiration from Site Coordinators

In Cuba City, Educators Rising students expressed feeling supported to pursue teaching careers by adults in their lives (such as school staff and family members), but this was not the case in all the rural schools we visited. Broader societal debates about teacher pay, disrespect for teachers, and the politics surrounding what is taught in schools were definitely reflected in student conversations about education careers. Parental or familial support for considering teaching as their future profession was mixed, for example, with some students reporting encouragement to pursue education careers while others reported being actively discouraged from doing so.

What did *not* vary across sites was how students described the importance of the site coordinator as a positive influence on education as a viable and rewarding career option. Across all five schools, students consistently described the positive influence of the site coordinator on their career considerations and involvement in their chapter’s activities. **Site coordinators were clearly viewed as role models and mentors who encouraged and nurtured student interest**

in Educators Rising specifically and in education-related careers more broadly. We note that this supportive role need not, and did not, preclude students from being clear-eyed about the challenges of teaching in today’s environment, as they were both well aware of and willing to discuss issues of low pay, animosity toward teachers, and the challenges of teaching children with widely differing interests, home lives, behavioral issues, and academic readiness.

Students Draw Encouragement from Peers to Pursue Teaching Careers

Beyond acquiring job skills and learning about education-related careers, rural Educators Rising students also identified the importance of being part of a peer group that views teaching as a noble and worthwhile calling. Students reported that their Educators Rising chapter offered them support as they weighed the pros and cons of career choices, and provided a “safe place” to express interest and excitement about careers in education. Students in Mauston, for example, talked about how their peers help them push back against the idea that they shouldn’t be teachers because they don’t get paid well, because Educators Rising is “...a group of people that are supportive of this same job.” Another student explained that “I’m just glad that there’s more than just me, or more than just one of us that wants to become a teacher...we have people we can talk to about it. We have people we can relate to. And it’s kind of a place where you can feel at home and feel safe to talk about this stuff.” A student in Wisconsin Rapids echoed this point in noting that “The one thing [about Educators Rising] I definitely like is being with people who want to be in the same field as you...because it’s just more of, you feel kind of accepted in what you want to do and not as judged for the [career] choices you want to make.”

Given the emotional, social, and academic support students reported receiving by being part of Educators Rising, as well as career exploration and skill development opportunities, it was not surprising to hear students express their desire to increase membership in their local chapters. This was clearly true in the newer chapters (several of which are in their first year of existence), but even in Wisconsin Rapids and Mauston (whose chapters have been established for seven years), students called out the need for better recruitment strategies to bolster interest and membership. Students suggested advertising in the school paper or creating a slideshow and increasing the frequency of announcements about chapter activities and meetings, while others suggested targeted recruitment of 8th graders before they get to high school, as well as focused recruitment of specific groups like male students. As noted previously, the club model for Educators Rising, under which meetings and activities are held before or after school (or during lunch), is viewed by students and site coordinators alike as a challenge to recruitment efforts.

Students Have Strong Interest in Education Careers, but Weigh Options and Destinations

A final theme emerging from our discussions with rural Educators Rising students involved their thinking around future careers and where they see themselves living. **We note, very encouragingly, that 21/24 students we spoke with indicated that they wanted to be teachers.** In terms of where they see themselves launching their teaching careers, it was clear that students weigh a complex set of considerations in making these decisions. One of the key underpinnings of GYO programs, of course, is identifying students (and in some cases, current adults) who may have an interest in returning to their home community (or one similar to it) to teach. While the

rural high school students we visited with were clearly very early in their decision-making processes regarding careers and where to settle, we heard encouraging validation of the GYO model, in the sense that almost half of our small sample (11/24) expressed clear interest in returning to their home community or school after college. A graduating senior in Colby, for example, noted that she would likely stay in Colby for “a couple of years, maybe five, ten years” because the district offers Educators Rising students a guaranteed interview if they get their teaching license. Another student in Blair-Taylor talked about her job with the local daycare and how meaningful it is to her, because “...it’s kind of like family there...you get so close to the people around here [that] you just don’t want to leave.” Other students were more “on the fence” and undecided about where they would work after college, but many were only in their first or second year of high school. One described how connecting with students was important to him, and while he felt “...there may be a chance I come back, because I just want to give back to the school that helped me get to where I am,” he also might prefer an even smaller school “because it gives me a chance to connect with my students more.”

Another subset of rural students we met with (9/24) were thinking they would *not* return to teach in their home communities, because they wanted to live and teach in larger schools or communities to “get new experiences.” One student in Colby dreamed of teaching abroad, while another from Wisconsin Rapids explained that “as much as I love the school, I don’t personally think I’m going to teach here. I also think that just branching out and being in a different environment will help your teaching career because if you come back and [it’s] still the same teachers from when you were in school, it’s going to be the same thing. And you want to bring a new aspect to a different school, whether it’s in Wisconsin or out of state.”

Perhaps the most important takeaway from students’ discussions around career and location options is that they represent a healthy mix of recognizing the potential benefits of teaching in their home school and community as well as craving new experiences, much like their peers considering other career paths. We emphatically note that this does not in any way diminish our belief that Educators Rising represents a very cost-effective GYO model that more rural districts should consider adopting. Rather, the point here is that specific strategies to incentivize students to return home may act as powerful motivations to take local teaching positions, such as the automatic interview offered to Educators Rising students in Colby.

Participation in Educators Rising has Perceived Benefits beyond Education Careers

Students who participate in Educators Rising identified several benefits of learning about teaching as a profession, even for peers not actively considering careers in education. Several Wisconsin Rapids students, for example, described how **Educators Rising provided them with skill development opportunities beyond teaching that they believed were adaptable to other careers, such as time management, leadership experience, professional comportment, and communication etiquette.** In Cuba City, students highlighted the importance of hearing from teachers and administrators about the realities of teaching, and how learning about these experiences can be inspiring for students on their career exploration journey. A student in Colby, for example, reflected on how being involved with Educators Rising helps students learn about

teaching “even if you’re not sure you want to be a teacher...it still gives you the opportunity to experiment with what you want to do.”

Educators Rising Alumni Provide Promising Initial Evidence of Program Impact

We noted above that two of the rural districts we visited (Mauston and Wisconsin Rapids) have had active Educators Rising chapters for seven years, which provides enough time to identify and follow up with a small group of “alumni” of these two schools’ chapters who have pursued teaching careers. Using contact information that site coordinators in these two districts have maintained on their own (which we recommend using as a model for a longitudinal statewide evaluation of the program; see Policy Recommendations section below), we reached out to selected alumni to reflect on how participation in Educators Rising influenced their career path. In particular, we were interested in learning more about how Educators Rising helped alumni think about career options, persevere in college, and make decisions about teacher job markets.

Table 8 summarizes key details about the eight Educators Rising alumni we interviewed. Three are currently enrolled in an educator preparation program (EPP), including one who is already teaching, while five others have finished their EPP program and have teaching assignments (including two who are moving to different schools for the 2023-24 school year). Perhaps most notable is the fact that four of the six Educators Rising alumni from rural high schools are already (or will be) teaching in rural schools (those with a Rural or Town locale code) in their hometowns, while the remaining two are launching their teaching careers in small cities (Eau Claire and Neenah) not far from where they grew up. While this is clearly a very small sample, it provides promising support for the notion that **rural schools are likely to derive substantial benefit (at a very modest cost) from implementing Educators Rising as a GYO model.**

Table 8. Rural Educators Rising Alumni – Selected Characteristics

First Name and School District	Year Graduated from HS	EPP Enrolled in and/or Graduated From	Year Graduated from EPP	Number of Years Teaching	Type of School Where Alum is/will be Teaching
Bridget, Mauston	2020	Viterbo	Expected 2024	1 year	Rural Fringe
Dayonna, Mauston	2017	Viterbo	2021	2 years	Town Distant
Erin, Mauston	2022	UW–Platteville	Expected 2026	N/A	N/A
Kaitlyn, Mauston	2017	UW–Whitewater	2021	2 years	Rural Fringe*
Kelsey, Mauston	2018	UW–Eau Claire	2022	1 year	Small City
Marissa, Mauston	2022	UW–Stout	Expected 2026	N/A	N/A
Paige, Wisconsin Rapids	2016	UW–Eau Claire	2019 (Dec)	3 years	Town Distant
Sydney, Wisconsin Rapids	2019	UW–Stevens Point	2023	N/A	Small City**

*Kaitlyn taught previously in a Rural Remote site but will move to a Rural Fringe school for 2023–2024.

**Sydney is a graduating senior who has just accepted a new position for the 2023–2024 school year.

Alumni Consider College/Career Options Using Educators Rising as a “Springboard”

Alumni of rural Educators Rising chapters offered several valuable insights during our interviews with them. One is that this group of young adults displayed a savviness in terms of the information and cost they used to make decisions about college and career choices. One alumnus, for example, decided to attend a less expensive college because “...to be quite frank, knowing what somebody is going to make in education, I would never tell somebody to go somewhere like UW–Madison, because you can receive the same education elsewhere for a fraction of the cost. And, again, when you’re graduating and making under \$40,000 a year, it’s not really worth paying the amount of money for the equivalent in education, in my opinion.”

Rural Educators Rising alumni also leveraged opportunities made available to them in high school to earn college credit. Only one alum, in fact, had not taken any dual enrollment courses that were directly related to education while in high school (and we note that the one who did not was pursuing culinary education, and took a number of relevant transcribed courses in that field of study). Six of the Educators Rising alumni had taken the Introduction to Education course during their high school years, although for some the credits only transferred as a general or elective course and not for education credit (an unfortunate situation we address in one of our policy recommendations below). Two alumni took advantage of transcribed courses offered through family and consumer science (although only one was able to get these credits to count

for education courses), while two others received associate’s degrees before transferring to four-year programs for teacher certification.

Alumni Appreciate Opportunities to Consider Teaching Careers

Another takeaway from our interviews with rural Educators Rising alumni is that these young adults reported being exposed during high school to a variety of activities that helped develop their thinking about education as a career pathway, not all of which were specifically related to their high school’s Educators Rising chapter. Reflecting on their time in high school, several alumni pointed to activities that placed them in front of children early and regularly as the most influential in their career paths. Activities they recalled being particularly helpful included organizing and hosting events for teachers, visiting college campuses, attending the annual Educators Rising summit, taking dual enrollment courses, tutoring other students or taking a classroom assistant class, and learning directly about the profession from teachers.

Several Educators Rising alumni also described how important the program had been for them in helping shape their thinking during high school about potential career options. A current teacher, for example, reflected on how Educators Rising helped foster an understanding that “teaching is a worthwhile profession” and similarly helped clarify her thinking about potential majors, noting that **“I think the biggest thing is I found Educators Rising really impactful and really important...I think it played a big role in me becoming a teacher and being as excited as I was about it.** I don’t know if I would have come into college [with a major] declared, [and] ready to go [into] elementary education...I’m going to go in as that, because I know that’s what I want to do.”

Innovative Collaborations

Beyond Educators Rising programs themselves, we encountered many examples of promising GYO programs being implemented as strategies for addressing staffing challenges. We describe below two initiatives that strike us as particularly promising in terms of being able to launch quickly (and at relatively low cost) and then evaluate, modify, sustain, and scale up. We emphasize that these are clearly not the only examples we could have highlighted, since one of the main challenges we face as a state in the GYO space (as described in our first policy recommendation below) is the lack of a repository/clearinghouse of information about these programs, similar to what other states have established. We also lack data on the effectiveness of GYO programs that have been launched thus far, which leads directly to another of our policy recommendations below.

GROW Consortium

Shortly before launching this project, we began working with the GROW Consortium, which features four rural districts in south-central Wisconsin (Cambridge, Lodi, Sauk Prairie, Wisconsin Heights) that have used a 2022 Workforce Innovation Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to develop and implement a sustainable, multi-pronged GYO model. Key components of the GROW GYO model, which is overseen by a

steering committee comprised of representatives from all four districts that meets regularly, include the following:

- Scholarships and financial incentives for current students and recent alumni:
 - GROW 1: \$1000 annual scholarships for one current high school senior from each district to attend college intending to major in Education
 - GROW 2: \$2000: 10 \$2000 annual scholarships for alumni of the four districts enrolled in college and majoring in Education
 - GROW 3: 7 \$10,000 awards for alumni graduating from college with teaching certification and commit to teaching in one of the four member districts for at least three years
- Dual enrollment course offerings: the consortium has partnered with UW-Whitewater to offer online courses that earn students credit for a bachelor’s degree in Education during their junior and senior years of high school
- Job shadowing/Pre-Student Teaching: several elementary teachers in member districts offer opportunities for current high school students to work in their classrooms on a regular basis while earning academic credit
- Financial sustainability: each member district commits funds on an annual basis to allow for continuation of the program after the initial WEDC grant ends

As of this writing (summer 2023), all four of the main components of the GROW initiative are progressing as scheduled. Equally encouraging is the fact that the consortium has already been contacted by several districts interested in replicating the model, including one we visited as part of our investigation into rural GYO practices who learned about it through informal channels (word of mouth). If Wisconsin stakeholders were able to collaboratively establish (and publicize) a mechanism for disseminating information about rural GYO programs (such as a clearinghouse or repository), it is not difficult to imagine much wider proliferation of the GROW model across the state, with interested districts free to adopt key characteristics of the model and adapt as appropriate for their local context.

CESA 10 Multi-District/Regional Educators Rising Chapter

As we have described previously, most of the Educators Rising chapters in Wisconsin are based in school districts and utilize a local site coordinator to plan and implement (with guidance from the state Educators Rising coordinator) a set of activities for students interested in potential careers in education. This organizational model makes sense for many districts given the close connections that current teachers have with students. We also learned from several stakeholders, however, that the district-by-district organizational model for launching and operating Educators Rising chapters may not work as well for small rural districts that face the challenge of either (a) not having a local site coordinator step forward to organize a local chapter; and/or (b) replacing a site coordinator when they leave or retire. In these instances, there may be a missed opportunity

in the sense that a handful of students interested in exploring careers in education via Educators Rising may not have this option.

One of Wisconsin’s 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) has addressed this challenge by forming a multi-district Educators Rising chapter of rural districts. Gwen Janke is the Director of College and Career Readiness for CESA 10, which serves 29 mostly rural districts in the northwestern part of the state. She became aware of Educators Rising several years ago, and identified numerous rural districts that had interested students but not a site coordinator. CESA 10 thus developed its multi-district regional chapter, which was launched in late fall of 2022 and has grown to more than 15 districts that collectively have 130 students participating in activities that include student professional development opportunities, visits to EPPs, and job shadowing opportunities in nearby school districts. Each district has an identified staff member who is included on all communication from CESA 10, and a leadership council was formed to include student representatives from each district. Many of the school districts participating provided students the opportunity to travel to the state Educators Rising convention in the spring.

This model of a multi-district, regional Educators Rising chapter of rural districts organized by an entity other than a school district appears to be the first of its kind in the state, but one that shows great promise in terms of potential expansion. Clearly, there are challenges associated with the multi-district organizational model that a single-district chapter led by a school staff member does not encounter, such as coordinating schedules across multiple districts with different calendars and daily bell schedules. At the same time, the idea of a multi-district chapter seems to offer a promising, low-cost model for expanding Educators Rising into rural districts that face chronic staffing challenges, and one that could presumably be replicated in other regions of the state by CESAs, an EPP, or other organizations (perhaps with a small stipend for the coordinator and seed funding to get launched, as described in our policy recommendations section below). Additional information on the CESA 10 multi-district Educators Rising model can be found at <https://ccr.cesa10.org/educators-rising>.

Policy Recommendations

Our work over the past year investigating the implementation of Educators Rising and other GYO strategies in rural Wisconsin school districts reveals a somewhat mixed picture of both promising practices as well as clear challenges. **On the one hand, and on a very encouraging note, we learned through surveys, interviews, and site visits that rural districts across the state are not waiting for policymakers to develop solutions to longstanding staffing challenges. Instead, they are actively involved in developing, implementing, and adapting a set of “homegrown” GYO strategies, often in conjunction with other rural districts and with partners such as educator preparation programs and CESAs, in order to address chronic staffing issues.** We believe that several of the strategies and initiatives we learned about, including the two highlighted above, show considerable promise in terms of cost effectiveness, potential for impact, and sustainability/scalability.

While we found promising evidence of Educators Rising and other GYO strategies being used by rural Wisconsin districts to address staffing issues, however, **our work also identifies a set of challenges associated with launching, sustaining, and scaling up GYO initiatives.** We offer the following policy recommendations for consideration in response to these challenges.

1. Establish a Repository/Clearinghouse/Inventory of GYO Programs

Several stakeholders indicated that a key impediment to expanding GYO initiatives is the scattered nature of information about these programs in general (including those in rural settings), and about Educators Rising specifically. Wisconsin seems to lack, in other words, a repository or clearinghouse for accessing key information about GYO programs, including an inventory (describing which districts are currently implementing which types of GYO programs, how long these initiatives have been in existence, and how they are funded), and what (if anything) is known about the effectiveness of these initiatives.

In the case of Educators Rising, for example, DPI’s website has [limited information](#) about Educators Rising, which (as noted previously) is due to PDK International requesting that DPI remove this information. The website of the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), which coordinates the program in Wisconsin, also has an [Educators Rising page](#) with selected resources, including a map showing local chapters across the state. There does not appear to be a way to identify from the map, however, which specific districts host the local chapters, and thus no immediate way to contact local site coordinators to network or learn more.

More broadly (beyond just Educators Rising), our conversations with Wisconsin stakeholders suggests that our state would benefit from having a centralized repository of information about GYO programs in general, and perhaps those targeted at rural areas in particular. Parts of this are in place: DPI’s [Education Workforce web page](#) has several helpful links to GYO resources, including guidance on how to get GYO programs launched. DPI also has a separate web page for the [Rural School Teacher Talent Grant](#), authorized by the Wisconsin Legislature in 2017 to allow CESAs to coordinate practicum, student teacher, and internship placements in rural districts, with pre-service candidates eligible for a stipend for working in a rural school and student teachers eligible for housing stipend or travel reimbursement.

However, there is not, to our knowledge, an inventory or repository of Wisconsin GYO programs, nor a specific GYO link analogous to what other state education agencies have developed. Within the Midwest, by comparison, the [Minnesota Department of Education](#), the [Michigan Department of Education](#), and the [Illinois State Board of Education](#)) have specific web pages dedicated to GYO initiatives. Importantly, Minnesota’s state-funded GYO initiative, which has been in existence since 2016-17, has a legislatively required annual evaluation report produced by the state education agency that we suggest could serve as a useful model for Wisconsin (see below). Looking beyond the Midwest, the Tennessee Department of Education has partnered with the University of Tennessee System to create the [Tennessee Grow Your Own Center](#), which has a helpful “Getting Started” section that includes a link to the state’s funding opportunity, a tool for making side-by-side comparisons of licensure requirements, and funding opportunities at the state’s educator preparation programs. Tennessee’s site also has contact

information for GYO initiatives at the state level, as well as for each individual school district that has at least one GYO program. The Texas Education Agency, similarly, has a [comprehensive website devoted to GYO programs](#), including lists of recent GYO grant recipients, and has partnered with the federally-funded Southwest Regional Education Laboratory to produce a [descriptive study](#) of grants awarded since 2018 under that state’s competitive GYO program.

Accordingly, it makes sense for Wisconsin to consider how to quickly establish (and regularly update) a central repository for GYO information, which could be housed at DPI, the UW System, one or more CESAs, or one or more of the state professional associations.

2. Establish Dedicated Funding for Launching Education-Specific GYO Initiatives

Wisconsin also appears to fall short (as of this writing) in comparison with other states across the country, including our neighboring states of Illinois, Minnesota, and Michigan, in terms of having a dedicated funding source for supporting education-specific GYO initiatives. The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) distributes competitive [Workforce Innovation Grants](#) that at least two education entities (the GROW consortium, highlighted above, and UW-Eau Claire) have used recently to launch and support GYO strategies in the PK-12 sector. The WEDC competition, however, is not specific to PK-12 education, as it makes awards in other employment sectors such as health services, housing, and transportation. Funding for an initial round of PK-12 GYO grants was included in an early version of Wisconsin’s 2023-25 biennial budget, but was removed.

Minnesota, by contrast, has since 2016-2017 funded an [education-specific GYO grant program](#) allowing school districts, charter schools, intermediate school districts, and cooperatives to apply for GYO Pathway grants for adults (current district employees or community members without a teaching license) or for current high school students. As noted above, GYO grantees are required to report data to the Minnesota Department of Education, which produces an annual report to the public. The Michigan Department of Education has a recently launched “[Future Proud Michigan Educator](#)” competitive GYO grant program, with the first round of grants announced in May 2023. In Illinois, the [Grow Your Own Teacher initiative](#) makes competitive grants available to school districts, and numerous other states (including [Texas](#)) have similar, education-specific GYO funding available on a regular basis supported by state funding. Furthermore, other states such as [North Dakota](#) and [Tennessee](#) have accessed funding from the U.S. Department of Labor to create apprenticeship programs for classroom paraprofessionals to have college tuition paid while working toward teacher licensure.

The recommendation we offer here, accordingly, is that Wisconsin establish an ongoing, education-specific (and K-12-specific) funding stream for supporting a mix of established and new GYO initiatives. The GROW consortium, which we highlighted above, offers a very promising model of a multi-level GYO initiative (with separate streams of funding for current high school students as well as recent alumni) that should be evaluated (Recommendation #3 below) and then, if shown to be successful, disseminated via a repository (Recommendation #1) and replicated through dedicated funding streams.

3. Create a process (including a data infrastructure) for rigorous evaluation and disseminating information about the effectiveness of GYO programs

Our very limited follow up of rural Educators Rising alumni (based on the small sample of students from Mauston and Wisconsin Rapids, the two most mature chapters) suggests that the program is likely making a substantial, cost-effective, and much-needed contribution to augmenting the educator pipeline in rural communities, with even greater promise of impact if the program can be scaled up. At the same time, we note that our survey of rural superintendents found that only 3% report collecting any data on the effectiveness of GYO initiatives they implement (including Educators Rising). This is perhaps not surprising, given the newness of many GYO initiatives and the challenges inherent in collecting data over time and across different jurisdictions in a manner needed to rigorously evaluate participation and effectiveness.

Despite the challenges inherent in collecting data needed to evaluate GYO programs such as Educators Rising, however, *not* doing so means that we will continue to have very limited (and mostly anecdotal) data with which to make decisions about funding, sustaining, and expanding GYO initiatives in rural areas. This would be a missed opportunity that Wisconsin can ill afford, as rural districts continue to struggle with staffing challenges. Fortunately, there are models from other states that Wisconsin can follow in terms of evaluating GYO programs, such as requiring data from individual GYO grant recipients (as Minnesota and other states do) and commissioning an annual evaluation of GYO activities and short/medium/long-term outcomes. Evaluations of GYO programs can be done by a variety of entities (a university, state education agency, or some combination of partners), with results disseminated widely (through a GYO repository, for example). It would also be possible to “start small” by developing an evaluation plan focusing initially on Educators Rising, which could, within a few years, have a sample of several hundred alumni whose progress through higher education and (hopefully) into the Wisconsin educator workforce could be tracked via a mixed-methods study involving an annual survey and selected interviews.

4. Invest in dedicated seed funding to establish, expand, and sustain local Educators Rising chapters with flexibility to implement locally driven programming

Our findings suggest that rural Educators Rising chapters vary substantially, from those in existence for years and offer a broad range of activities for students (job shadowing, formal education pathways and/or dual enrollment coursework, etc.) to those launched much more recently and having more limited offerings (such as sending a few students to the state Educators Rising summit). This implies that the program is highly flexible and adaptable to local context based on factors such as the availability and capacity of staff (including a site coordinator), the interests of students, and funding.

This flexibility and adaptability to local context (in contrast to a more rigid model of implementation) would appear to offer significant promise for expanding Educators Rising into more rural schools across Wisconsin—particularly if multiple models for launching and operating local chapters, such as the multi-district CESA 10 consortium model described above, were available as options for rural districts. Other CESAs should be encouraged to follow CESA

10’s lead by organizing similar multi-district chapters, perhaps under an initial seed grant funded by state dollars, with local coordinators encouraged to participate in the statewide network of Educators Rising affiliates (organized by the state coordinator) and perhaps in a specific community of practice for CESA Educators Rising coordinators (who would have dedicated time for this activity).

We also believe, based on our work over the past year, that Educators Rising represents a very promising and cost-effective GYO model that merits a dedicated funding stream separate from our broader recommendation (#2 above) to fund GYO initiatives statewide. Simply put, the initial and ongoing costs associated with Educators Rising are quite modest in comparison with other GYO initiatives, not to mention the high costs districts incur every year with recruiting, hiring, and training teachers.¹³ We believe that a dedicated source of state funding to support a modest stipend and course release time for Educators Rising site coordinators, along with financial support for student activities (pizza lunches, buses to the state Educators Rising convention, etc.), would likely prove to be a cost-effective strategy for helping rural districts address chronic staffing challenges.

It is reasonable to expect that interested rural schools and districts would assume some of the responsibility for funding the establishment and ongoing operation of Educators Rising chapters, since they would be the primary beneficiary of these programs. At the same time, budgets in rural districts are tight (with many rural districts facing declining enrollment), which implies that having a stable source of seed funding in the state budget to help offset the costs of establishing rural Educators Rising chapters would likely go a long way toward expanding the reach of this important initiative, both in terms of the number of local Educators Rising chapters as well as the number of students they are able to serve (and the range of activities they make available). Other states may have models for how to do this effectively, perhaps through competitive grant programs overseen by a state education agency, university, or other partner organization.

5. Determine the optimal organizational model(s) for Educators Rising chapters (student club vs. Career and Technical Student Organization)

PDK International, which coordinates Educators Rising at a national level, describes the program as a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO), and [recent guidance](#) from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (circulated by PDK International) notes that school districts may use federal (Perkins) funding to implement GYO programs (without explicitly naming Educators Rising as an example) for high school students. Educators Rising chapters currently operating in Wisconsin public schools, however, exist as student clubs (technically, as Career Exploration Student Organizations) since Educators Rising has not been designated as a CTSO in Wisconsin. Several programs in other (non-education) career pathways, such as business, agriculture, and health professions, currently have CTSO status in Wisconsin, including the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America

¹³ The [Learning Policy Institute](#) (2017), for example, estimates costs ranging from \$9000–\$20,000 for recruitment, hiring, and initial training associated with each teaching vacancy.

(FCCLA) program, which has an education component (which focuses largely on early childhood education rather than K–12).

The distinction between student clubs and CTSOs is not simply semantic, as it means from a funding perspective that Educators Rising chapters in Wisconsin must secure local funding to support student participation in activities such as the annual Educators Rising conference and trips to educator preparation programs, rather than having access to federal (Perkins) funding as CTSOs do. Numerous Educators Rising site coordinators and other key stakeholders shared with us that having to fundraise locally (as opposed to having access to Perkins funding) limits both the number of students they are able to work with as well as the range of activities they offer to help cultivate students’ interest in education careers. Stakeholders also shared, as we described previously, that operating Educators Rising as a student club rather than under a co-curricular model or as a CTSO creates scheduling challenges, as activities need to be scheduled before or after school, or during study hall, which creates frequent conflicts with other activities such as athletics and student jobs. Accordingly, while CTSO status is linked to specialized funding, it may also provide local Educators Rising chapters with more scheduling options (which presumably would, in turn, make it easier to recruit more students to participate).

Designating Educators Rising as a CTSO in Wisconsin would require a thoughtful review of the various tradeoffs associated with such a decision, including schools and/or districts possibly needing to re-allocate funding from existing CTSOs they currently support with Perkins funding. Rural stakeholders consulted for this project did indicate, however, that they would at least like to have the option of supporting Educators Rising with Perkins funding, given the chronic nature of their staffing challenges. We also note that PDK International, which sponsors Educators Rising at a national level, reports that the program is recognized as a CTSO in at least 13 states (and possibly others, since current data were not available at the time of this writing).

6. Review and strengthen articulation agreements between school districts, technical colleges, and UW System campuses

We were encouraged by the number of high school students from site visit districts who both have an active interest in careers in education *and* have taken advantage of opportunities to earn college credit through dual enrollment and transcribed credit offerings. At the same time, we heard from Educators Rising site coordinators and alumni that the articulation agreements which govern credit transfers between the Wisconsin Technical College System and the UW System—and sometimes between different campuses *within* both systems—create unnecessary barriers. These barriers include dual enrollment and transcribed credits transferring as general or elective credits (but not education-specific), which lengthens the time students need to complete education degrees. More time needed to complete degrees, in turn, means more expenses (and more debt) for students about to enter a profession that is comparatively low-paying to begin with. While it is beyond the scope of our work to delve deeply into the specifics of credit transfers for specific courses, we offer as a general policy recommendation that articulation agreements for common courses (such as Introduction to Education) be reviewed—and clearly communicated to students.

7. Encourage and strengthen partnerships between educator preparation programs and rural school districts

Interviews with school and district leaders illuminated the pressure and challenges districts face in establishing effective pipelines of teaching candidates graduating from educator preparation programs. This role has always been part of district and school-level leaders’ portfolio of tasks, but has been exacerbated in recent years by declining teacher candidate pools and the many other “hats” that superintendents, principals, and other administrators are asked to wear. Our broad recommendation, therefore, is to encourage (and perhaps incentivize) educator preparation programs (and their program outreach and recruitment coordinators in particular) to intentionally establish and expand the partnerships they have with rural school districts. Rural leaders in our study were keenly aware of the need to have meaningful and sustainable connections with educator preparation programs, yet emphasized how much their capacity in this regard is limited by the time they must commit to other roles. Thoughtful investment from higher education in coordinating these relationships could go a long way toward augmenting teacher pipelines for rural districts.

8. Review, strengthen, and expand opportunities to provide financial compensation for student teaching

We heard from numerous stakeholders that the traditional model of having prospective educators complete an unpaid student teaching experience creates a significant financial barrier for many students as they complete licensure requirements for teaching. This is especially true for student teachers placed in rural districts, who often need to travel significant distances from their educator preparation program for an entire semester. In other career pathways (such as business), by contrast, a paid internship is more typical.

In Wisconsin, DPI coordinates the [Wisconsin Internship Program](#), which “pairs promising student interns with experienced cooperating teachers in a semester-long clinical experience.” We are also aware of individual educator preparation programs, including those that have a specific focus on preparing rural educators, that have garnered financial support (often through external grants) available for student teachers. Rural stakeholders we consulted, however, noted that there does not appear to be much information about how many prospective rural educators take advantage of these programs, nor is there a high level of awareness that they even exist. Accordingly, it seems useful to include information on financial support for student teaching as part of a repository on GYO programs, perhaps with a specific focus on rural areas.

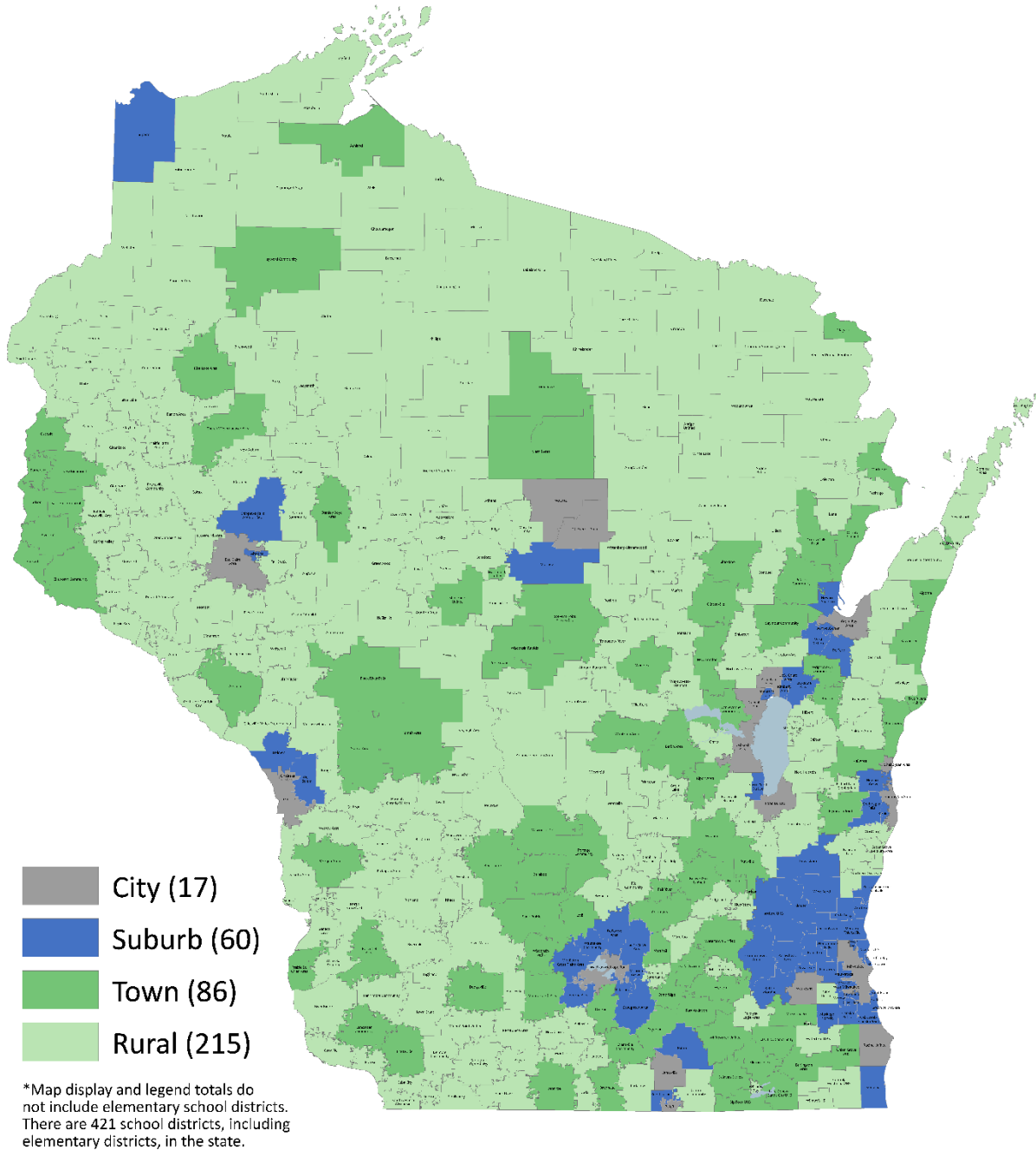
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Appendix A: Map of Wisconsin School Districts by Geographic Locale Code

School Districts by Locale



Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2020-21

Prepared by the Applied Population Laboratory
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of Community & Environmental Sociology

Appendix B: Wisconsin Public School Districts* Selected Enrollment Trends by Geographic Locale Type

Locale Type:	# Districts Fall 2022	Total Enrollment Fall 2013	Total Enrollment Fall 2022	Average Enrollment per District Fall 2013	Average Enrollment per District Fall 2022	Enrollment Change #	Enrollment Change %	% of Districts with Declining Enrollment
City	17	262,334	235,193	15,431	13,835	-27,141	-10.3%	17.6%
Suburb	77	246,424	241,417	3200	3135	-5007	-2.0%	41.6%
Town	91	183,537	172,620	2017	1897	-10,917	-5.9%	29.7%
Rural	234	170,335	161,630	728	691	-8705	-5.1%	24.4%
Total	419	862,630	810,860	2059	1935	-51,770	-6.0%	28.4%

*Not including independent (non-district) charter schools