

The Current and Future Educator Workforce in Wisconsin's Rural Schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper builds upon [previous work](#) investigating Wisconsin's rural educator workforce by (a) summarizing key characteristics of the *current* teacher workforce in Wisconsin's rural schools and how these may have changed over time; and (b) documenting ways in which the state's approved educator preparation programs (EPPs) are helping attract, prepare, and retain *future* rural educators. We find that rural districts have uneven access and relationships with the state's EPPs, which is largely (although not exclusively) a function of their physical distance from EPPs. We also find a wide range of programs and partnerships that EPPs have developed to help meet the staffing needs of rural schools statewide, such as dual-credit courses and placements specifically in rural districts for practicum and student teaching experiences, although we recommend that EPPs and other postsecondary institutions review the extent to which these are intentionally rural-focused. We close by summarizing several key issues that emerged from our inquiry into how Wisconsin's EPPs and other organizations are supporting both *current* and *future* rural teachers and offer potential policy recommendations for addressing these issues.

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Executive Summary

Despite increased awareness in recent years of staffing challenges faced by rural school districts in Wisconsin—which comprise nearly three-fourths of the state's 400+ local school districts and educate nearly half of all students statewide—rural communities continue to struggle with attracting and retaining educators. This is the second of two papers by the authors exploring staffing challenges facing Wisconsin's rural educator workforce. Our first paper (Carl & Seelig, 2023) looked at the rural educator workforce primarily from the demand side, and found that rural districts are not waiting on state or federal policymakers to solve longstanding staffing challenges for them but instead are actively implementing a mix of strategies (such as “grow your own,” or GYO, initiatives) to address teacher shortages.

Our first report also confirmed, however, that we lack important contextual information about key characteristics of our state's current rural educator workforce, and how those have changed (or not) over time. Importantly, there has also not been a review of the supply side of the rural educator pipeline, in the form of what Wisconsin's 40+ approved educator preparation programs (EPPs) are doing to help address rural district staffing challenges.

In this second paper, accordingly, we build upon our previous work by (a) summarizing key characteristics of the current teacher workforce in Wisconsin's rural schools and how these may have changed over time; and (b) pivoting to the supply side to learn more about what the state's approved EPPs are doing to help attract, prepare, and retain future rural educators. We focus on two questions to guide our inquiry:

- Part 1: What are key demographic trends that characterize Wisconsin's current rural educator workforce, and how have they changed over time?
- Part 2: In what ways are the state's EPPs and other key partners recruiting, preparing, and helping to retain rural Wisconsin's future educator workforce?

Key findings that emerge from Part 1 include the following:

- Using locale classifications developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, trend data show declining numbers of teachers working in rural districts, despite rural districts constituting more than three-fourths of all districts statewide.
- Wisconsin's rural districts are located further from the state's EPPs, particularly in the northern portion of the state, where most districts are rural and very few EPPs are located. Among rural districts, furthermore, those in the “Remote” subtype are the furthest away from the nearest EPP, thereby limiting rural districts' access to both student teachers (a key step in the hiring pipeline) and ongoing professional learning.
- Wisconsin districts' reliance on teachers with emergency credentials (Licenses with Stipulations (LWS)) has increased over the past 12+ years by more than 200% in rural districts (as well as other locale types), with Rural and Town districts combined accounting for nearly 40% of the statewide LWS instances.

- Teachers in rural districts have remained overwhelmingly (95%) white over the past two decades, despite increasing student diversity. Among other implications, this means that the racial/ethnic “diversity gap” between rural teachers and rural students more than doubled between 2006-07 and 2023-24.
- The largest share of rural teachers in 2023-2024 who were licensed since 2014 (72.5%) were trained in public sector EPPs, with several campuses within the University of Wisconsin (UW) System serving as the largest contributors numerically to the rural educator workforce.
- UW campuses (led by UW–River Falls) are also *proportionally* large contributors to Wisconsin’s rural educator workforce, as are several CESA-based and private sector licensure programs.

Key findings related to Part 2 include the following:

- College access programs (including dual-credit courses for high school students) play a promising role in encouraging pre-college students to pursue education careers. Dual credit has become widely available, helping promote education-specific courses as both an early introduction to teaching as a career and a low-cost investment from EPPs and school districts, as well as a no-cost investment by students and families.
- For traditional college students enrolled in a campus-based EPP, and for graduate students or post-baccalaureate students seeking licensure through an online or hybrid program, an intentional focus on rural schools, communities, students, or teaching *does not* appear to be featured much (if at all) in the typical curriculum.
- Scholarships for traditional college students in EPPs are one strategy for reducing the financial burden of traveling to a rural district for student teaching, which is an unpaid internship. The state-sponsored Rural Teacher Talent Grant (RTTG) scholarship is a popular program for encouraging student teacher placements in rural districts.
- While professional learning opportunities offered by EPPs vary widely, all the rural-specific programs identified in our study rely on grant funding (federal, state, and philanthropic). Given that rural teacher shortages are not only about the *supply of new teachers* into rural schools, but also the *retention of current teachers*, these programs offer creative investments into the long-term sustainability of rural schools.
- There is no single definition for a program or institution to be considered “rural-serving,” yet given the state’s significant rurality, it is strongly encouraged that EPPs and other postsecondary institutions conduct their own scan of whether what they offer is “rural-focused,” “rural-specific,” or “intentionally rural.”

We close by summarizing several key issues that emerged from our inquiry into how Wisconsin’s EPPs and other organizations are supporting both *current* and *future* rural teachers, and offer potential policy recommendations for addressing these issues.

Introduction

This is the second of two papers by the authors exploring Wisconsin's rural educator workforce. Our first paper (Carl & Seelig, 2023) looked at the rural educator workforce primarily from the demand side. Drawing upon data from two statewide surveys we conducted (one of rural superintendents and another of local site coordinators of the Educators Rising program), along with site visits to five rural school districts, our goals in the first paper were twofold. The first was to identify strategies being used by rural districts to attract, recruit, and hire teachers, and the second was to describe the rapidly evolving landscape of "grow your own" (GYO) initiatives being utilized by rural Wisconsin districts and local partners as one strategy for addressing educator shortages.

Broadly speaking, we found that rural districts are not waiting on state or federal policymakers to solve longstanding staffing challenges for them but instead are actively implementing a mix of strategies to address this issue. Wisconsin rural superintendents, for example, report using 3–4 strategies each in the areas of attracting, hiring, and retaining prospective educators that in most cases are loosely connected rather than components of a coherent and well-aligned plan. Rural superintendents also report, however, that the most commonly used strategies aren't necessarily the ones they feel are most effective, and that they are increasingly looking to a diverse array of GYO initiatives (including both national models such as Educators Rising and more "home-grown" efforts) that draw from local talent pools. Well-implemented GYO programs accomplish this by recruiting both (a) current adults already working in their local schools in roles such as paraprofessionals; and (b) current high school students and recent alumni who might have an interest in careers as fully licensed educators.

Our first report also confirmed, however, that there is much we don't yet know about both the successful implementation and longer-term effectiveness of GYO efforts in Wisconsin rural contexts. We also lack information about key characteristics of our state's rural educator workforce, and how those have changed (or not) over time. Importantly, there has not been, to our knowledge, a recent summary of what Wisconsin's 40+ approved educator preparation programs (EPPs) are doing to help address the staffing challenges being faced by rural schools.

In this second paper, accordingly, we build upon our previous work in two ways. First, we summarize in Part 1 key characteristics of the teacher workforce in Wisconsin's rural schools and how they have changed over time, including where they were trained. Second, we pivot to the supply side in Part 2 to learn more about what the state's approved EPPs are doing to help attract, train, and retain rural educators. Part 1 draws upon longitudinal data sets to document key characteristics of our state's rural educator workforce, such as demographic characteristics and which EPPs are the biggest contributors to the rural educator workforce in both an absolute and relative sense. Part 2 draws upon a survey of EPPs and other partners (including technical colleges and CESAs) and interviews with individuals associated with programs at four University of Wisconsin campuses to help identify how these organizations are helping attract, prepare, and retain future educators to work in Wisconsin rural schools.

Our current study focuses on two areas of inquiry:

- What are key demographic trends that characterize Wisconsin's current rural educator workforce, and how have they changed over time (Part 1)?
- In what ways are the state's EPPs and other key partners recruiting, preparing, and helping to retain rural Wisconsin's future educator workforce (Part 2)?

Study Design and Partners

We designed a parallel mixed-methods study to address our two research questions. The data collected to inform the answers to each question are distinct and address two discrete time points: the present and the future. However, the implications and recommendations are applicable from recruitment to preparation and retention of rural educators, thus encompassing both the present and the future. Although these phases of rural educator development are collectively referred to as a "pipeline," our findings point to the widely varied and often non-linear pathways that many individuals take on their journey to a teaching career. While we chose to organize our findings using these pipeline phases, we recognize the ways in which relevant programs and activities attend to the complex realities of preparing and retaining high-quality and committed educators in Wisconsin's rural schools.

Part 1 draws primarily on statewide data sets, while Part 2 utilizes a survey of programs across the Wisconsin higher education landscape that may be helping to address the rural teacher shortage, as well as both in-person and virtual semi-structured interviews with rural educators and administrators, program staff, faculty, current college students, and other key stakeholders. The details of each phase of the study are embedded in their respective sections, yet several points are critical for both. First, this study would not have been possible without the collaboration of representatives (faculty and staff) from four University of Wisconsin campuses: UW–Eau Claire (UWEC), UW–Oshkosh (UWO), UW–Stevens Point (UWSP), and UW–Madison. These campus partners helped identify survey respondents on their own campuses and across state-approved EPPs, technical colleges, and other agencies (e.g., CESAs). They also reviewed survey questions, provided feedback on the survey design and plan for administration, and encouraged colleagues to complete the survey. These partners also facilitated in-person visits to each of their campuses, including identifying and scheduling interviews with key stakeholders, and recruited participants for virtual interviews. Due to this collaboration, much of the qualitative findings are based on programs in these four UW campuses and showcase the range of activities engaged by each.

Second, the study benefited from longstanding relationships with key stakeholders in Wisconsin, based on decades of educator workforce research throughout the state. Bradley Carl is a founding Co-Director and Research Scientist at the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC), housed within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He has worked in education policy in Wisconsin for nearly 25 years, including at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and in several roles at WCER. His current research interests include the Wisconsin educator workforce, which he has studied through longstanding partnerships with DPI, state professional associations such as the

Association for Wisconsin School Administrators, the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, and the Universities of Wisconsin.

Jenny Seelig is currently a Senior Research Scientist with NORC at the University of Chicago. Her decade of research in Wisconsin began in her PhD in Education Policy Studies at UW–Madison, when she conducted a year-long ethnography in rural Wisconsin for her dissertation. Her work continued through her role as Assistant Director for the (former) Rural Education Research & Implementation Center and presenting on relevant educator workforce studies to rural educators, administrators, and other attendees at the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance annual conference. Jenny's experiences as a college lecturer and high school teacher also facilitated trust and understanding with educators in postsecondary and K–2 institutions.

Third, the authors extend their deep appreciation to the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership at the Universities of Wisconsin for their continued support of our work investigating Wisconsin's rural educator workforce. The Thompson Center has identified "Challenges Facing Rural Communities in Wisconsin" and "Current Challenges in Education" as two of its top research priorities, and we are grateful for their generous support of our work, which is situated at the intersection of these two priorities.

The remainder of our paper addresses our two main research questions, beginning with characteristics of the current rural educator workforce and then continuing with a look at how the state's EPPs and other partners are helping to attract, train, and retain future educators to work in rural schools.

Part 1: Wisconsin's Current Rural Educator Workforce: Key Characteristics and Feeder Patterns

One objective of our current work is to deepen our collective understanding of both the current rural educator workforce in Wisconsin and the supply pipeline between the state's 40+ approved EPPs and its many rural school districts. Our analyses below are among the first that we are aware of documenting both key characteristics of Wisconsin's current rural educator workforce as well as the "feeder patterns" between EPPs and rural districts. Specific questions of interest we explore in the data below include the following:

- How have the size and demographic composition of the current rural educator workforce changed over time, and how do these trends compare to changes in rural student enrollment?
- What percentage of the current, recently licensed rural educator workforce in Wisconsin public schools was trained at each of the state's 40+ approved educator preparation programs (EPPs)? In other words, which EPPs are the largest contributors in an *absolute sense* to the state's rural educator workforce?
- What percentage of each EPP's recent teacher license recipients were teaching in rural Wisconsin schools in 2023–24? In other words, which EPPs are the largest contributors to the state's rural educator workforce in a *proportional sense*?
- What percentage of the state's current rural teacher workforce is supplied by each "sector" (public, private, non-traditional) of the state's approved EPPs?

- How are the locations and feeder patterns among the state's EPPs related to their absolute and proportional contribution to the state's rural educator workforce?

About the Data

While there is no single (or “correct”) way to define rurality within the PK-12 educational context, locale classifications developed by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provide one useful tool for exploring what rurality means, and how it may have changed empirically (in terms of numbers of districts, teachers, and students) over time in Wisconsin. NCES uses four primary locale classifications (City, Suburb, Town, and Rural), which are general geographic indicators that describe the type of area where a school or district is located. Drawing upon data from the Census Bureau, each of the four primary locale classifications is further divided by NCES into three subtypes based on population size or proximity to populated areas. For this paper, we define rural districts in Wisconsin as those with either Town and Rural locale classifications. We also explore differences in rurality that may exist across the three subtypes of Town and Rural schools, based on our hypothesis that rural districts may be experiencing demographic changes and challenges in attracting and retaining educators differently based on a set of factors that includes their proximity to cities and EPPs.

NCES locale subtypes under the Town and Rural classifications that we include in our definition of rural schools in Wisconsin are as follows:

- *Town Fringe*: Territory inside an urban area with population less than 50,000 that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban area with population of 50,000 or more.
- *Town Distant*: Territory inside an urban area with population less than 50,000 that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urban area with population of 50,000 or more.
- *Town Remote*: Territory inside an urban area with population less than 50,000 that is more than 35 miles from an urban area with population of 50,000 or more.
- *Rural Fringe*: Territory outside an urban area that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urban area with population of 50,000 or more, as well as territory outside an urban area that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban area with population less than 50,000.
- *Rural Distant*: Territory outside an urban area that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urban area with population of 50,000 or more, as well as territory outside an urban area that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban area with population less than 50,000.
- *Rural Remote*: Territory outside an urban area that is more than 25 miles from an urban area with population of 50,000 or more and is also more than 10 miles from an urban area with population less than 50,000.

We utilize two main sources of data for our investigation into the current rural educator workforce in Wisconsin public schools. The first is DPI's publicly available annual Public School All Staff Report, which contains individual-level data each year for all employees working in Wisconsin public schools under a license issued by DPI. The second data source is a file from DPI (obtained under a data-sharing agreement) showing completers from Wisconsin's approved EPPs beginning in 2013-14, which is the earliest year for which data can be matched to the All Staff Report using a unique staff ID.

In matching these two data sets, we restrict the analysis to teachers (position code 53) who had (a) assignments as teachers in the 2023-24 school year; (b) a unique staff ID in both files; and (c) an assignment (or multiple assignments) totaling 0.5 FTE or greater in one or more traditional public school districts. This excludes a small number of teachers who work for one of Wisconsin's regional educational service agencies (CESAs) or a state agency (such as the Department of Corrections or state-operated schools for the deaf or blind).

Additionally, we can only look at feeder patterns for current (2023-24) teachers working in rural districts who received licenses from DPI since 2014, due to changes in unique staff IDs maintained by DPI beginning in that year. This means that our analysis focuses on the subset of current rural teachers (approximately one-third; see below) who received their first license from DPI within the past decade (between 2014 and 2023). This almost certainly means that our analysis focus on a younger subset of current rural teachers, compared to the entire rural teacher workforce.¹ We know of no obvious reason to think that feeder patterns from EPPs to rural districts would look different if we were able to go further back in time (including rural teachers who received their first license prior to 2014), but acknowledge this as a potential limitation of our work given the availability and contents of current DPI data sets.

In terms of data coverage, DPI's All Staff Report for 2023-24 indicates that just over 27,000 teachers were employed in rural schools (those with NCES locale type Rural or Town) in 2023-24. We are able to match 8850 of these (32.7%) to the EPP completer file and include them in our analyses below. An additional 53.3% have been teaching for more than 11 years and thus would have been licensed prior to 2014. A small percentage of rural/town teachers, 0.4%, lacked experience data, so we could not make determinations on their teaching tenure. The remaining 13.6% are "missing" licensure data because they were either (a) licensed in Wisconsin since 2014, but do not have an ID in the EPP file; (b) graduates of an EPP outside Wisconsin but licensed to work in Wisconsin under a reciprocal license; or (c) working under short-term license known as License with Stipulations. Table 1 below summarizes the data used in our analysis.

Table 1. "Coverage" of 2023–24 Rural Teachers in Data Matching

Category	Number of Teachers	Percentage of Teachers
In EPP completer file	8,850	32.7%
Not in EPP file, >11 years of experience	14,421	53.3%
No data*	3,670	13.6%
No experience data	<u>107</u>	<u>0.4%</u>
Total Rural Teachers	27,048	100.0%

¹ Data on EPP completers that we had access to tells us when they received licensure endorsement, but not their age or year of birth. Accordingly, we assume that while the group of nearly 9000 recent licensees we looked at is mostly younger, it also includes an unknown number of new, first-time licensees entering the rural educator workforce as career changers or as their first career.

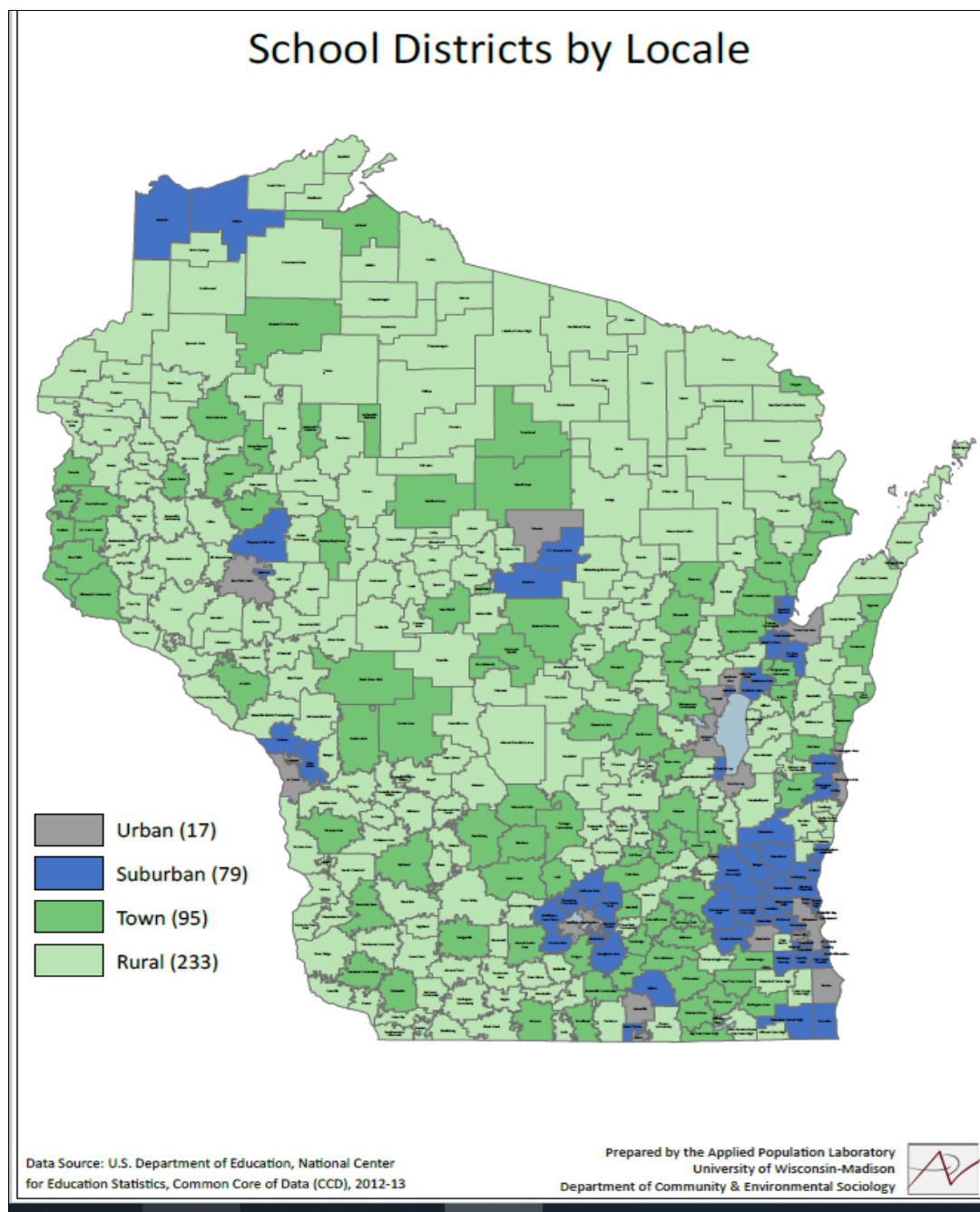
*No ID in EPP completer file, licensed out of state, or licensed on an emergency basis (License with Stipulations)

How have the size and demographic composition of the current rural educator workforce changed over time, and how do these trends compare to changes in rural student enrollment?

Wisconsin's public school districts have long had a distinctly rural flavor. Among the 420+ districts operating in 2023-24² (not including approximately 25 independent, non-district charter schools located mostly in the Milwaukee area), we see visually in Figure A and empirically in Table 2 below that nearly 80% were classified as either Town or Rural. This distribution is similar to 2006-07, where nearly the same number of school districts in operation statewide (425) included 81.1% classified as either Town or Rural.

² The total number of districts shown is 424 in Figure A (federal data from the Common Core of Data) compared to 421 in Table 1 (from DPI). The difference is likely attributable to how independent charter schools are counted across the two data sources, but is not large enough (three districts) to impact overall results discussed here.

Figure A. Wisconsin School Districts by Locale Type, 2023–24



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Table 2. Counts, Percentages, and Average Student Enrollment of WI School Districts by Locale Type and Subtype, 2006–2007 and 2023–2024

District Locale Type and Sub-Type	Count of WI Districts 2006-07	% of All Districts Statewide 2006-07	Total Student Enrollment 2006-07	Average Student Enrollment, 2006-07	Count of WI Districts 2023-24	% of All Districts Statewide 2023-24	Total Student Enrollment 2023-24	Average Student Enrollment 2023-24	% Change in Total Enrollment 2006-07 to 2023-24
City – Large	1	0.2%	89,912	89,912	2	0.4%	92,111	46,056	2.4%
City – Midsize	2	0.5%	44,825	22,413	1	0.2%	18,579	18,579	-58.6%
City – Small	12	2.8%	131,125	10,927	14	3.3%	134,611	9615	2.7%
<i>City Subtotal</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>3.5%</i>	<i>265,862</i>	<i>17,724</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>4.0%</i>	<i>245,301</i>	<i>14,429</i>	<i>-7.7%</i>
Suburb – Large	39	9.2%	122,534	3142	51	12.1%	137,712	3203	12.4%
Suburb – Midsize	13	3.1%	54,254	4173	14	3.3%	41,381	3762	-23.7%
Suburb – Small	13	3.1%	36,484	2806	12	2.9%	21,605	2401	-40.8%
<i>Suburb Subtotal</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>15.3%</i>	<i>213,272</i>	<i>3,281</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>18.3%</i>	<i>200,698</i>	<i>3186</i>	<i>-5.9%</i>
Town – Fringe	29	6.8%	63,902	2204	26	6.2%	52,600	2287	-17.7%
Town – Distant	48	11.3%	105,763	2203	59	14.0%	108,454	2169	2.5%
Town – Remote	15	3.5%	25,302	1687	6	1.4%	7682	1536	-69.6%
<i>Town Subtotal</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>21.6%</i>	<i>194,967</i>	<i>2119</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>21.6%</i>	<i>168,736</i>	<i>2,163</i>	<i>-13.5%</i>
Rural – Fringe	43	10.1%	48,367	1125	54	12.8%	31,138	916	-35.6%
Rural – Distant	107	25.2%	84,209	787	110	26.1%	102,846	773	22.1%
Rural – Remote	103	24.2%	63,907	620	72	17.1%	53,782	560	-15.8%
<i>Rural Subtotal</i>	<i>253</i>	<i>59.5%</i>	<i>196,483</i>	<i>777</i>	<i>236</i>	<i>56.1%</i>	<i>187,766</i>	<i>714</i>	<i>-4.4%</i>
State Total*	425	100.0%	870,584	n/a	421	100.0%	802,501	n/a	-7.8%

*Excluding independent (non-district) charter schools

Also evident in Table 2 are subtle shifts in the numbers of districts within both the Town and Rural locale types, including a small increase (11 districts) in Rural Fringe districts (those located closer to urban areas) and an even larger decrease (31 districts) in Rural Remote districts (those located the furthest from urban areas). Accordingly, Rural Fringe districts represent a larger share of all districts statewide (12.8% in 2023-24 compared to 10.1% in 2006-07), while Rural Remote districts represent a notably smaller share (17.1% and 24.2%, respectively). This signals, in other words, that the distribution of rural districts has shifted somewhat toward urbanized areas, with more Rural Fringe districts and fewer Rural Remote districts.

Figure B shows Town and Rural districts statewide by subtype and clearly shows that large swaths of the northern part of Wisconsin in particular are predominantly Rural Remote districts (those located furthest from urban areas), shown in purple.

Figure B. Rural and Town Districts by Locale Subtype

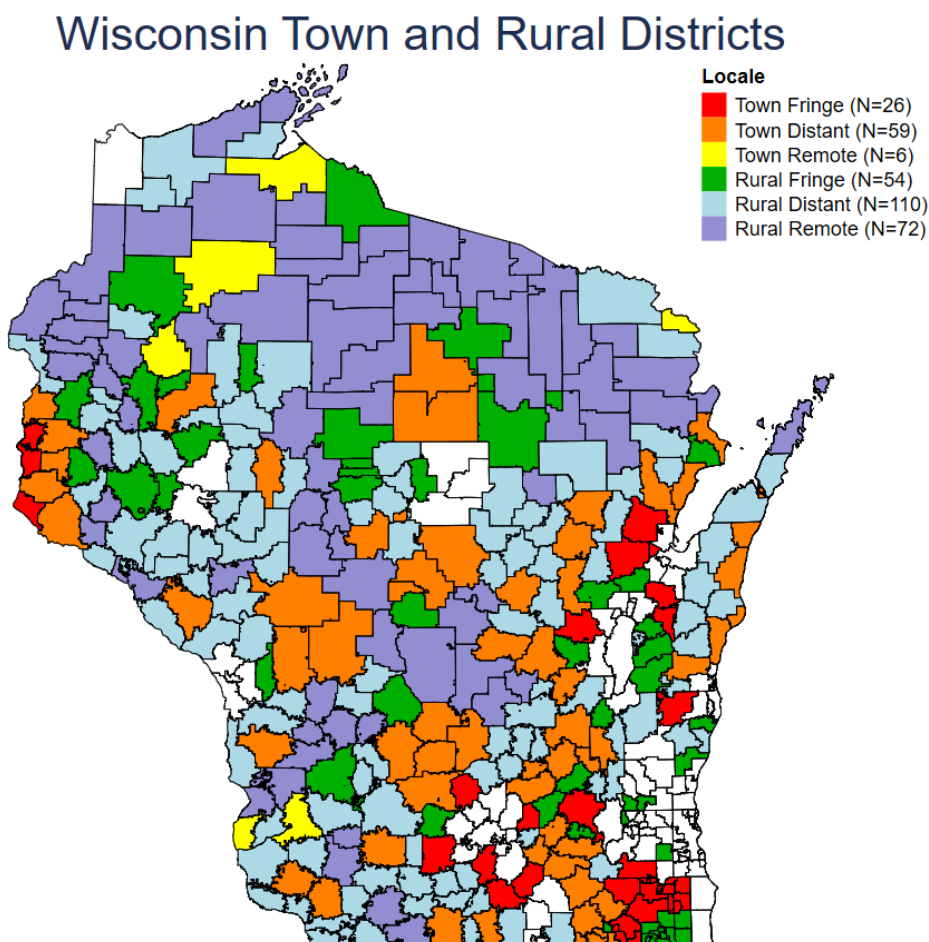


Table 2 also depicts selected trends in student enrollment by locale type, including the total and average student enrollment counts at the same two points in time (the 2006-07 and 2023-24 school years). Here we see several interesting statewide trends, including the following:

- Overall state enrollment (excluding non-district charter schools) decreased by nearly 70,000 students (almost 8%), with most of the decrease occurring over the past five years (particularly in the years during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic)
- Suburban districts as a group became larger in number but smaller in terms of total and average enrollment, although Suburb Large districts bucked this trend in becoming both more numerous and larger, particularly in terms of total enrollment as a share of the state total
- Rural Fringe districts became more numerous but smaller in terms of both total and average enrollment
- Rural Remote districts became less numerous *and* smaller in terms of both enrollment indicators (total and average enrollment)

Turning next to counts of rural teachers, Table 3 below shows statewide data by locale type and subtype at the approximate beginning (2006-07), midpoint (2014-15), and end (2023-24) of the most recent 20-year period for which comparable data by subtype are available. Here we observe a net increase of almost 1000 teachers statewide (1.9%) over time, although **both Town (-2.5%) and Rural (-2.9%) districts had decreases, while numbers of teachers working in suburban districts increased considerably.** A corresponding finding is that **Town and Rural teachers combined as a percentage of all teachers statewide has declined as well, from 53.3% of the state total in 2005-06 to 50.7% in 2023-24, even though Town and Rural districts remain more than three-fourths numerically of all districts statewide** (as seen previously in Table 1).

Table 3. Teacher Counts by Locale Type in Selected Years

Locale Type	2006-07	2014-15	2023-24	#Change	%Change
City	12,228	12,538	12,439	211	1.7%
Suburb	12,587	13,106	14,129	1542	12.3%
Town	12,368	11,917	12,061	-307	-2.5%
Rural	<u>15,754</u>	<u>14,964</u>	<u>15,294</u>	<u>-460</u>	<u>-2.9%</u>
State Total	52,937	52,525	53,923	986	1.9%
Rural + Town as % of Total	53.1%	51.2%	50.7%	n/a	n/a

Narrowing the focus to teacher counts over time for the locale subtypes we are including in our definition of rural (the three subtypes within both the Town and Rural categories), additional trends of interest emerge in Table 4. **Here we see that the overall decreases for both the Town and Rural locale types (shown previously in Table 3) were concentrated in the Distant and Remote subtypes that are located further away from urban areas, while Fringe districts (which are located closer to urban areas) had increased counts of teachers. This trend has several noteworthy policy implications that we discuss below, including greater distances between the Distant and Remote districts and the state's approved EPPs, which in turn limits these districts' ability to host student teachers.**

Table 4. Teacher Counts by Town and Rural Locale Subtype in Selected Years

Locale Subtype	2006-07	2014-15	2023-24	#Change	%Change
Town - Fringe	3750	3664	3782	32	0.9%
Town - Distant	7957	7615	7663	-294	-3.7%
Town - Remote	661	638	616	-45	-6.8%
Rural - Fringe	2197	2160	2410	213	9.7%
Rural - Distant	8531	8160	8227	-304	-3.6%
Rural - Remote	<u>5026</u>	<u>4644</u>	<u>4657</u>	<u>-369</u>	<u>-7.3%</u>
State Total	52,937	52,525	53,923	986	1.9%

In addition to looking at overall counts of teachers working in Wisconsin rural schools over time, it is useful to monitor counts of teachers working under temporary credentials (without full licensure), as one useful indicator of teacher shortages. In Wisconsin, a License with Stipulations (or LWS, formerly known as an emergency license or permit) issued by DPI allows educators to be employed in an assignment for up to three years while working toward full licensure.

Table 5 below shows LWS counts for teaching positions by locale type at the beginning (2012-13), midpoint (2018-19), and end (2023-24) of the most recent twelve-year period for which data are available. Usage of LWS increased by at least 200% for all four main locale types, with Rural and Town districts combined accounting for nearly 40% of the statewide LWS instances in all three years. Looking specifically at how reliance on LWS has changed over time in Rural and Town districts, we see in Table 6 that Fringe districts (those located closer to urbanized areas) had increases in LWS over time that were large (nearly 200%) but lower than for Distant and Remote districts located further from urban areas.

Table 5. Counts of Licenses with Stipulations for Teaching Positions by Locale Type in Selected Years

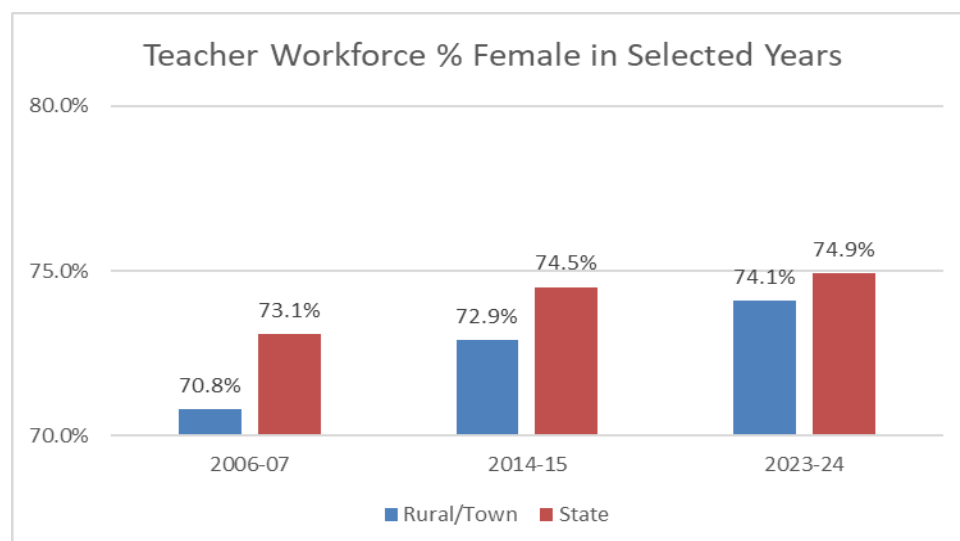
Locale Type	2012-13	2018-19	2023-24	# Change	% Change
City	460	1395	1566	1106	240.4%
Suburb	140	330	516	376	268.6%
Town	148	405	585	437	295.3%
Rural	<u>250</u>	<u>711</u>	<u>795</u>	<u>544</u>	<u>217.6%</u>
State Total	998	2841	3461	2463	246.8%
Rural + Town as % of State Total	39.9%	39.3%	39.8%	n/a	n/a

Table 6. Counts of Licenses with Stipulations for Teaching Positions by Town and Rural Locale Subtype in Selected Years

Locale Subtype	2012-13	2018-19	2023-24	#Change	%Change
Town - Fringe	35	79	104	69	197.1%
Town - Distant	98	298	427	329	335.7%
Town - Remote	15	28	54	39	260.0%
Rural - Fringe	37	68	107	70	189.2%
Rural - Distant	119	356	377	258	216.8%
Rural - Remote	<u>94</u>	<u>287</u>	<u>310</u>	<u>216</u>	<u>229.8%</u>
State Total	998	2841	3461	2463	246.8%

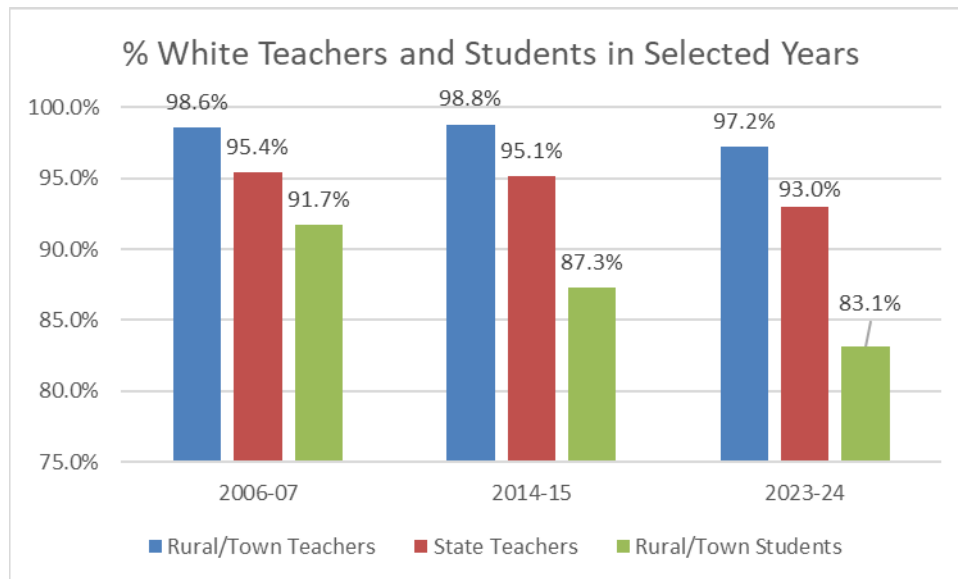
Having documented key trends in counts of rural teachers over time, which illustrates how many teachers are working in rural Wisconsin schools, we turn next to selected demographic characteristics of the rural educator workforce. *How has the rural educator workforce changed over time, and how do these changes compare to similar changes that may have occurred in the rural student population?*

Figures C and D below show the gender and racial/ethnic composition of the rural teacher workforce at the same beginning (2006–07), midpoint (2014–15), and end (2023–24) of the most recent nearly 20 years, along with the state overall trends. **With respect to gender (Figure C), we note that teachers in both Rural and Town districts, as well as Wisconsin overall, have been predominantly (70–75%) and increasingly female over the past two decades.** We also note that Rural and Town districts had been several percentage points lower on this measure relative to the state overall (indicating a slightly higher percentage of male teachers) in 2006–07 before becoming more female (nearly approximating the state overall) over the next 20 years.

Figure C. Teacher % Female in selected years, Rural/Town Districts and State Overall

With respect to the racial/ethnic composition of the rural teacher workforce compared to the state overall (Figure D), we see that rural teachers in Wisconsin have remained overwhelmingly (more than 97%) white over the past 20+ years, even more so than is the case for the state overall. Students enrolled in Wisconsin's Rural and Town districts, by comparison, were just over 83% white in 2023–24, down from nearly 92% in 2006–07. **The “diversity gap” between rural teachers and rural students, in other words, grew from 6.9 percentage points in 2006–07 (98.6% white teachers minus 91.7% white students) to 14.1 percentage points in 2023–24.** Put in simple numerical terms, the nearly 28,000 teachers working in Rural and Town districts in 2023–24 included fewer than 800 *teachers* of color, which was up markedly from just over 200 in 2006–07 but still far below the increases in *students* of color enrolled in rural schools (32,165 in 2006–07 compared to 60,086 by 2023–24).

Figure D. Wisconsin Teachers % White in selected years, Rural/Town Districts and State Overall



*What percentage of the current, recently licensed rural educator workforce in Wisconsin public schools was trained at each of the state's 40+ approved EPPs? In other words, which EPPs are the largest contributors in an **absolute sense** to the state's rural educator workforce?*

Table 7 presents data showing the percentage of current (2023–24) teachers working in Wisconsin rural schools that received their first license since 2014 from each of Wisconsin's 40+ approved EPPs. Using UWSP as an example, 1060 of the 8850 total teachers statewide who were working in a Wisconsin rural school in 2023–24 that received their first license since 2014 are UWSP graduates, representing 12% of the state's recently licensed rural teacher workforce. **Several campuses within the UW System, including UWSP, UW–Whitewater, and UWEC are the largest contributors to the rural educator workforce in an *absolute sense*, in terms of both number and percentage, reflecting the relatively larger size of public sector EPPs.**

Table 7. Number and % of Current (2023–24) Rural Teachers by EPP of First License Since 2014

Program Name	Sector	Fall 2023 Undergrad Enrollment**	# 2023-24 WI Rural Teachers	% 2023-24 WI Rural Teachers
ACT! PROGRAM*	Non-Traditional	n/a	37	0.42%
ALVERNO COLLEGE	Private	887	30	0.34%
BELOIT COLLEGE	Private	948	5	0.06%
CARDINAL STRITCH UNIVERSITY*	Private	n/a	82	0.93%
CARROLL UNIVERSITY	Private	2623	95	1.07%
CARTHAGE COLLEGE	Private	2642	43	0.49%
CESA 1 PBL PROGRAM	Non-Traditional	n/a	42	0.47%
CESA 2 LICENSURE ACADEMY FOR SCHOOL STAFF	Non-Traditional	n/a	23	0.26%
CESA 6 RITE PROGRAM	Non-Traditional	n/a	139	1.57%
CESA 7 TDC PROGRAM	Non-Traditional	n/a	22	0.25%
CESA 9 ETP PROGRAM	Non-Traditional	n/a	85	0.96%
COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION	Public (Tribal)	219	9	0.10%
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY	Private	2525	218	2.46%
EDGEWOOD COLLEGE	Private	1214	161	1.82%
EDUCATE-WI	Non-Traditional	n/a	478	5.40%
HOLY FAMILY COLLEGE*	Private	n/a	52	0.59%
LAKELAND UNIVERSITY	Private	2318	22	0.25%
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY	Private	1410	18	0.20%
MARANATHA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY	Private	759	17	0.19%
MARIAN UNIVERSITY	Private	1074	133	1.50%
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY	Private	7652	14	0.16%
MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY	Private	781	4	0.05%
NORTHLAND COLLEGE*	Private	485	19	0.21%
RIPON COLLEGE	Private	734	45	0.51%

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE IN WISCONSIN'S RURAL SCHOOLS

Program Name	Sector	Fall 2023 Undergrad Enrollment**	# 2023-24 WI Rural Teachers	% 2023-24 WI Rural Teachers
ST. NORBERT COLLEGE	Private	2089	116	1.31%
URBAN LEARNING COLLABORATIVE	Non-Traditional	n/a	18	0.20%
UW-EAU CLAIRE	Public	9304	708	8.00%
UW-GREEN BAY	Public	9853	325	3.67%
UW-LA CROSSE	Public	9378	580	6.55%
UW-MADISON	Public	36,797	290	3.28%
UW-MILWAUKEE	Public	18,047	198	2.24%
UW-OSHKOSH	Public	12,674	675	7.63%
UW-PARKSIDE	Public	3263	23	0.26%
UW-PLATTEVILLE	Public	6270	495	5.59%
UW-RIVER FALLS	Public	4675	438	4.95%
UW-STEVENS POINT	Public	7419	1060	12.0%
UW-STOUT	Public	6093	494	5.58%
UW-SUPERIOR	Public	2086	295	3.33%
UW-WHITEWATER	Public	9812	836	9.45%
VITERBO UNIVERSITY	Private	1443	466	5.27%
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE	Private	1021	<u>40</u>	<u>0.45%</u>
Total		n/a	8850	100.0%

*ACT! Program, Cardinal Stritch University, and Holy Family College have all been closed for several years, and Northland College also closed at the end of the 2024–25 school year.

**Fall 2023 undergraduate enrollment figures come from the [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System \(IPEDS\)](#).

*What percentage of each EPP's total teacher license recipients from 2014–23 were teaching in rural Wisconsin schools in 2023–24? In other words, which EPPs are the largest contributors to the state's rural educator workforce in a **proportional** sense?*

Table 7 provides a sense of which EPPs have contributed the largest *number* of graduates to the state's rural educator workforce. What conclusions, if any, can we draw about which EPPs send the largest *proportion* of their completers to work in rural settings? Table 8 shows the percentage of recent completers from each EPP (those who received their first teaching license between 2014–23) who were teaching in Wisconsin public schools by locale type (city, suburb, and rural/town) in 2023–24. This represents, in other words, a measure of the *proportional contribution* of each EPP to the rural educator workforce, accounting for the fact that some EPPs

(most notably, the UW campuses within the public sector) are generally larger in terms of enrollment.

Using Alverno College as an example for interpretation, 10% of the 300 total teachers trained at Alverno since 2014 who were working in a Wisconsin public school in 2023–24 were working in a Rural or Town school. **By this metric, several UW campuses (headed up by UW–River Falls) show up as proportionally large contributors to the rural educator workforce, as do several CESA-based (non-traditional) and private sector licensure programs.**

Table 8. % of Recent First-Time Teaching Licensees (2014–2023) Working in Wisconsin Public Schools by Locale Type in 2023-24

Program	N	City	Suburb	Rural/Town
ACT! PROGRAM*	59	25.4%	11.9%	62.7%
ALVERNO COLLEGE	300	53.3%	36.7%	10.0%
BELOIT COLLEGE	17	52.9%	17.6%	29.4%
CARDINAL STRITCH UNIVERSITY*	504	39.5%	44.2%	16.3%
CARROLL UNIVERSITY	446	26.2%	52.5%	21.3%
CARTHAGE COLLEGE	293	24.2%	61.1%	14.7%
CESA 1 PBL PROGRAM	206	43.2%	36.4%	20.4%
CESA 2 LICENSURE ACADEMY FOR SCHOOL STAF	51	33.3%	21.6%	45.1%
CESA 6 RITE PROGRAM	336	31.8%	26.8%	41.4%
CESA 7 TDC PROGRAM	55	36.4%	23.6%	40.0%
CESA 9 ETP PROGRAM	106	15.1%	4.7%	80.2%
COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION	10	0.0%	10.0%	90.0%
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY	670	27.9%	39.6%	32.5%
EDGEWOOD COLLEGE	543	41.4%	28.9%	29.7%
EDUCATE-WI	733	19.0%	15.8%	65.2%
HOLY FAMILY COLLEGE*	74	14.9%	14.9%	70.3%
LAKELAND UNIVERSITY	64	35.9%	29.7%	34.4%
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY	61	37.7%	32.8%	29.5%
MARANATHA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY	29	6.9%	34.5%	58.6%
MARIAN UNIVERSITY	301	33.2%	22.6%	44.2%
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY	162	48.1%	43.2%	8.6%
MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNIVERSITY	21	95.2%	4.8%	0.0%

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Program	N	City	Suburb	Rural/Town
MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY	35	37.1%	51.4%	11.4%
NORTHLAND COLLEGE	23	4.3%	13.0%	82.6%
RIPON COLLEGE	73	24.7%	13.7%	61.6%
ST. NORBERT COLLEGE	295	24.7%	35.9%	39.3%
URBAN LEARNING COLLABORATIVE	218	77.1%	14.7%	8.3%
UW–EAU CLAIRE	1187	22.1%	18.3%	59.6%
UW–GREEN BAY	633	28.3%	20.4%	51.3%
UW–LA CROSSE	1161	23.6%	26.4%	50.0%
UW–MADISON	988	39.8%	30.9%	29.4%
UW–MILWAUKEE	1362	43.0%	42.4%	14.5%
UW–OSHKOSH	1667	31.2%	28.3%	40.5%
UW–PARKSIDE	132	25.0%	57.6%	17.4%
UW–PLATTEVILLE	637	7.1%	15.2%	77.7%
UW–RIVER FALLS	508	8.1%	5.7%	86.2%
UW–STEVENS POINT	1598	17.1%	16.5%	66.3%
UW–STOUT	734	19.2%	13.5%	67.3%
UW–SUPERIOR	383	9.9%	13.1%	77.0%
UW–WHITEWATER	1813	20.5%	33.4%	46.1%
VITERBO UNIVERSITY	983	31.1%	21.5%	47.4%
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE	133	18.8%	51.1%	30.1%
TOTAL	19,615	27.5%	27.4%	45.1%

We might expect that the “pipelines” that exist between EPPs and Wisconsin school districts are influenced by differences across EPPs in terms of the types of communities from which they draw larger shares of their students. One reason this may be an expected association is due to the possibility of rural residents being most interested in teaching in rural schools; therefore, EPPs that draw from rural populations for their students may have a higher likelihood of contributing teachers to rural schools in those communities. Another possibility that this association exists is based on the likelihood that pathways between rural communities and specific college campuses are bidirectional in many ways; therefore, EPPs may lean on these connections to intentionally develop practicum and/or student teaching experiences.

In Table 9, we summarize data obtained from the Office of Policy Analysis and Research at the Universities of Wisconsin as one way of exploring these differences across the 13 four-year

UW campuses.³ Specifically, Table 9 shows the percentage of new freshman enrolling for Fall 2024 who graduated from Wisconsin high schools, broken out by the locale type of their high school. **Among incoming freshmen from Wisconsin high schools, students from rural communities represented the largest share of enrollment at UW–River Falls (76%), UW–Platteville (65%), and UW–Stout (62%), followed closely by UWSP (58%) and UWEC (54%). Not coincidentally, these are mostly the same campuses that are the largest contributors to the state’s rural educator workforce in either an absolute sense (Table 7) and/or a proportional sense (Table 8).** In several instances, such as UW–River Falls, it is useful to keep in mind that while a large percentage of their *incoming Wisconsin freshmen* are graduates of rural or town high schools, in-state students are a much smaller percentage of *overall undergraduate enrollment* at some campuses compared to others, due to large numbers of out-state students attending UW campuses through the Minnesota–Wisconsin tuition reciprocity agreement.

Table 9. New Freshman Enrollment by Locale, Fall 2024 (Graduates of Wisconsin High Schools)

Campus	Total # New Freshmen from WI High Schools	% of New WI Freshmen from Rural or Town High Schools	% Undergraduate Headcount Enrollment from WI
UW-Eau Claire	1397	54%	66%
UW–Green Bay	1129	45%	90%
UW–La Crosse	1897	47%	81%
UW-Madison	3795	34%	49%
UW–Milwaukee	3082	20%	89%
UW-Oshkosh	1231	40%	93%
UW–Parkside	436	27%	85%
UW–Platteville	1017	65%	76%
UW–River Falls	527	76%	54%
UW-Stevens Point	1641	58%	88%
UW–Stout	707	62%	62%
UW–Superior	137	53%	58%
UW–Whitewater	<u>1807</u>	<u>41%</u>	<u>83%</u>
System Total	18,803	42%	72%

³ Comparable data for the state’s private and non-traditional EPPs were not available for this analysis.

What percentage of the state's current rural teacher workforce is supplied by each "sector" (public, private, non-traditional) of the state's approved EPPs?

Aggregating the data from Tables 7 and 8 up to the "sector" level (public, private, and non-traditional⁴), we present in Table 10 the percentage of recently licensed teachers working in Wisconsin public schools during the 2023–24 school year by sector and locale. **About half of teacher licensees trained at public EPPs over the past decade, for example, were teaching in Rural or Town schools in 2023–24, while the remaining half was divided roughly evenly between City and Suburban schools. Private programs, by comparison, had a nearly even breakdown (approximately one-third each) across all three locale types.** Nearly half of teachers trained by non-traditional programs taught in rural/town schools in 2023–24.

Table 10. Percent of Recent Licensees by Sector and Locale Type in the 2023-24 Wisconsin Teacher Workforce

Program Sector	City	Suburban	Rural/Town	Sector Total
Public	24.7%	25.2%	50.1%	100.0%
Private	32.7%	35.6%	31.7%	100.0%
Non-Traditional	33.1%	19.8%	47.2%	100.0%

Table 11 presents the inverse, in a sense, of Table 10, by showing the distribution of recently licensed teachers trained by each EPP sector by locale type of the school they were working in during the 2023–24 school year. In other words, **in looking at all teachers working in Rural or Town schools in 2023–24 who were licensed since 2014, we see that the largest share (72.5%) were trained in public sector EPPs (which tend to be larger in terms of enrollment), compared to 18% trained at private sector EPPs and the remaining 9.6% at non-traditional EPPs.**

Table 11. Percent of 2023–24 Teachers in Each Locale From Each Prep Program Sector

Program Sector	City	Suburban	Rural/Town
Public	58.6%	60.1%	72.5%
Private	30.4%	33.3%	18.0%
Non-traditional	<u>11.0%</u>	<u>6.6%</u>	<u>9.6%</u>
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%

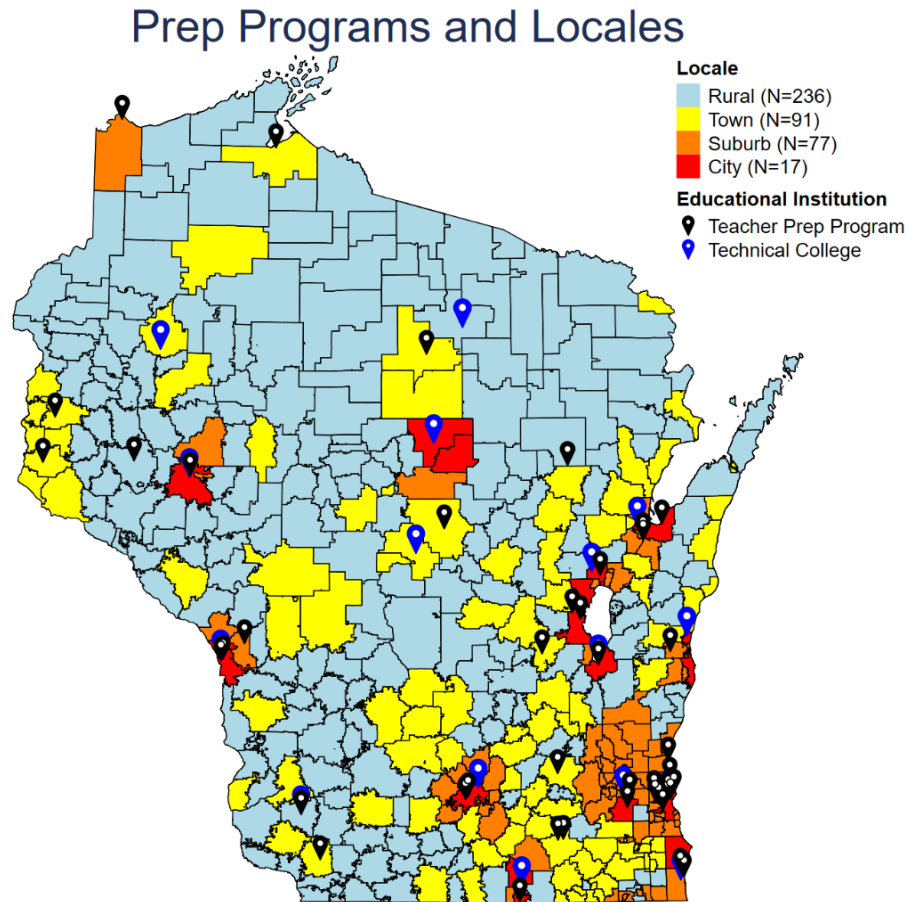
⁴ Non-traditional programs (formerly known as alternative certification programs) are those not housed within a public or private four-year university.

How are the locations and feeder patterns among the state's EPPs related to their absolute and proportional contribution to the state's rural educator workforce?

The extent to which different EPPs contribute to the state's rural educator workforce likely reflects a combination of factors that include program size (as discussed above), physical location, and mission. In terms of location, it makes sense that programs located in closer proximity to more rural areas of the state, and/or those that draw a greater share of their student base from rural high schools, are more likely to be larger contributors to the rural educator workforce. Conversely, EPPs located in or near urbanized areas (such as UW–Milwaukee and UW–Parkside in the public sector, and Marquette and Alverno in the private sector) likely draw a larger share of their student population from non-rural areas, and as such wouldn't be predicted to contribute as much to the rural educator workforce.

This general storyline is confirmed in Figure E below, which shows the locations of Wisconsin's 40+ approved EPPs (and technical colleges) overlaid onto a map showing the state's 420+ local school districts, which are color-coded by locale type to clearly identify Rural (blue shading) or Town (yellow shading) locale types. A clear visual pattern emerges here: **rural districts in most cases are located further from the state's EPPs, particularly in the northern portion of the state, where most districts are rural and very few EPPs are located.**

Figure E. Wisconsin School Districts by Locale Type With Locations of EPPs and Technical Colleges



Empirical data analyzed by the authors confirm the visual relationships shown in Figure E between district locale type and proximity to EPPs, and add an important level of detail by including locale subtypes. Specifically, Table 12 shows the average distance (in miles) between Wisconsin's 449 school districts (including independent charter schools), divided by locale subtype, and the nearest EPP (not including technical colleges, which often work with, but are not themselves approved EPPs). **Not only are Town and Rural districts (which collectively include more than three-fourths of all districts statewide) located further from EPPs, but districts in the "Remote" subtype are the furthest away in a physical sense from the EPPs which provide current and future educators with the training they need to do their jobs effectively.**

Table 12. Average Distance between Locale Types/Subtypes and Nearest EPP

Locale Type and Subtype	Number of Districts	Average Distance (in miles) to Nearest EPP
City – Large	18	2.5
City – Midsize	1	4.0
City – Small	18	5.3
Suburb – Large	46	6.6
Suburb – Midsize	12	4.4
Suburb – Small	9	10.8
Town – Fringe	23	12.8
Town – Distant	50	19.7
Town – Remote	5	43.6
Rural – Fringe	36	17.0
Rural – Distant	134	20.9
Rural – Remote	<u>97</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<i>Total/Average</i>	<i>449</i>	<i>20.1</i>

Longer physical distances from EPPs create numerous challenges for rural districts and prospective teachers from rural communities in terms of the educator pipeline, beginning with the fact that graduates of Wisconsin’s rural high schools have fewer (if any) nearby options compared to their peers from larger communities when it comes to choosing a college. Perhaps even more importantly, as we learned from the EPPs themselves in the qualitative phase of our work (summarized below), **some EPPs have established restrictions based on distance on which school districts they partner with for student teaching placements. This makes sense from a logistical (and financial) standpoint, but from a functional standpoint it both (a) restricts student teaching options for students from many rural communities who may be interested in placements near their hometown; and (b) deprives many rural districts of a key opportunity to recruit potential teachers by not being able to host student teachers.** In the following section, we explore in more detail how the state’s 40+ approved EPPs are cultivating the future rural educator workforce.

Part 2: Cultivating the Future Rural Educator Workforce through Wisconsin’s Educator Preparation Programs

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in Wisconsin emerged as a central yet unexamined actor in our first study of Wisconsin’s rural educator workforce (Carl & Seelig, 2023). While the results of our analysis on the pipeline of rural teachers (Part 1 of this paper) highlight specific pathways from certain EPPs to rural schools, a deeper understanding of what EPPs are doing to cultivate future teachers who choose to work in rural schools is necessary. The analysis below is based on two sources of qualitative data: 1) a survey of programs across the Wisconsin higher

education landscape that may be helping to address the rural teacher shortage, and 2) semi-structured interviews with program staff, faculty, preservice teachers, program participants such as rural teachers or undergraduate students, and key educational partners (e.g., CESA administrators, rural district administrators).

Specific questions we explore in Part 2 of our study include:

- What kinds of rural-focused educator recruitment, preparation, and retention programs or activities have Wisconsin EPPs developed?
- What are other examples of rural-focused initiatives for attracting, preparing, and retaining educators as developed by entities other than EPPs (e.g., technical colleges, CESAs)?
- What can we learn about intended outcomes and plans for sustainability for these programs or activities?
- What are the perceptions and experiences of participants involved in these programs or activities?

Methods: Program Survey and Site Visits

In Fall 2024, we designed and administered a survey to learn more about which programs and initiatives are being implemented across several different types of organizations in Wisconsin to help meet the staffing needs of rural schools. These organizations included:

- Wisconsin's 40+ approved EPPs (including public, private, and non-traditional programs, and both two-year and four-year campuses within the Universities of Wisconsin)
- CESAs (regional education agencies)
- Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) sites, some of which have articulation agreements for transfers to four-year campuses within the UW System
- Several other organizations, such as the Wisconsin Education Association Council, which oversee programs such as Educators Rising and Aspiring Educators (which work with high school and college students, respectively, who are interested in careers as educators).

In total, the survey was sent to 66 different organizations, with multiple recipients (whose contact information we gathered from websites and/or personal connections) from some of them. Each recipient was invited to forward the generic survey link to both other individuals within their own organizations and to other organizations in the state they know of who work with programs that are helping to meet the staffing needs of Wisconsin rural schools. We intentionally cast a broad net in terms of survey recipients, knowing that there are programs in existence (at EPPs, CESAs, and WTCS sites) that may not be explicitly marketed (or thought of by those who operate them) as rural-serving, even though they wind up having a distinctly rural flavor due to these organizations' location and primary constituent base.

We received at least one survey response from 33 organizations (half of those we reached out to), totaling 66 individual respondents, with some organizations having multiple respondents on behalf of different programs within the same organization (see the Appendix for programs identified in the survey). Some of the non-responding organizations were not surprising, as they are either located in non-rural areas, serve constituencies that are not primarily rural, and/or have limited (if any) educator workforce programs and initiatives that are specifically rural-facing. Furthermore, all respondents did not answer each question, and some respondents from the same organization did not answer in the same way. Where necessary for clarification, these nuances in the survey data are identified below.

After the program survey closed, qualitative data collection efforts pivoted in Winter 2025 to focus on a set of rural-facing teacher recruitment, training, and retention programs at four University of Wisconsin campuses—UW–Eau Claire (UWEC), UW–Madison (UW), UW–Oshkosh (UWO), and UW–Stevens Point (UWSP). These four campuses offered a range of program activities related to strengthening the rural teacher pipeline, although each program varied in terms of its explicit focus on rural education. This variation across programs was intentional, in that these four campuses represent different ways of understanding and addressing the needs of rural schools in the state. With assistance from our campus partners affiliated with these EPPs, 2–3 programs were identified per campus to examine through qualitative interviews and, we visited 3 campuses in person. Interviews were conducted, either virtually or in-person, with program staff, faculty, preservice teachers, program participants such as rural teachers or undergraduate students, and key educational partners. Table 13 provides an overview of participants interviewed by role and campus.

Table 13. Total Numbers of Participants for Semi-Structured Interviews

Campus	Program Names	# Program Staff & Faculty	# Program Participants	# Educational Partners	TOTAL by Campus
UW–Eau Claire	WEDC ⁵ Grant, Student Practicum Placements	4	1	N/A	5
UW–Madison	Project ACRES, College for Rural Wisconsin	3	6	3	12
UW–Oshkosh	Graduate-Level Programming, Student Practicum Placements	2	1	N/A	3

⁵ WEDC is the Wisconsin Economic Development Cooperation, which distributes [Workforce Innovation Grants](#) to help address regional workforce issues. [UW–Eau Claire’s grant](#) focused on alleviating workforce shortages in key areas of healthcare, education, and social services while improving the health and wellbeing of families and individuals in rural regions of Wisconsin.

UW–Stevens Point	Harju Center, Student Practicum Placements	4	10	2	16
TOTAL by Category		13	18	5	36

Collectively, the survey of programs and the qualitative interviews provided substantial information about the variety of programs in Wisconsin that are attempting to move the needle on recruiting, preparing, and helping retain qualified teachers in rural schools. Across the data, the identified programs can be sorted into the sections of the educator pipeline (Figure F) with which their activities align: Pre-College, During College, New Teacher Recruitment & Hiring, and Professional Supports/Opportunities (Retention). The following findings are shared using this pipeline metaphor. We highlight in the section below several examples of programs from each quadrant that were identified by survey responses and/or our site visits as cultivating the next generation of rural educators.

Figure F. Sections of the Educator Pipeline



Pre-College

Pre-college programs were not the central focus of this study, which instead explored the programs that EPPs and other providers of teacher preparation offer to help expand the pool of teachers interested in working in rural schools. **We anticipated these programs would be geared towards current college students and preservice teachers; however, the data indicate that college access programs, including dual-credit opportunities, which are designed for high school students, play a prominent role in encouraging pre-college students to pursue education careers. Furthermore, dual-credit opportunities can be classified as expanding college access for students, including those in rural high schools, who may otherwise face difficulties in paying for postsecondary education.** Research on diversifying the teacher workforce has pointed to the importance of investing in strategies that “include support for students to persist in their college studies through graduation (Noble et al., 2024).”

While dual-credit courses are offered across dozens of subjects and curriculum is provided by all 13 UW System and 16 Wisconsin Technical College System schools, as well as many private colleges (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2023), the specific dual-credit courses mentioned by stakeholders during our interviews as being key to strengthening the future rural educator workforce included various **Introduction to Education classes**. For example, Randolph School District is part of a consortium of schools that received a federal grant that supports increasing mental health professionals in schools (“Local School Districts,” 2023), but part of the funding is

being used to subsidize the costs for dual-credit education courses through UWO while other consortium partner schools are providing courses through UW–Whitewater's Partners in Education program.

In the survey, respondents identified 7/38 programs across organizations that indicated pre-college students are a focal population of their efforts, with dual-credit programs mentioned by 4 organizations. Survey data also provided details about dual-credit education courses being offered to students in rural schools by UW–Platteville, UW–Whitewater, and Western Technical College. A current teacher in Randolph School District described the value of these dual-credit education courses as a strategy to move the needle on the rural teacher pipeline: "Most students know they want to go into education by the time they graduate high school. I think that the attitude of certain institutes of higher ed is that high school teachers are incapable of teaching students how to become teachers or running early teacher prep programs. They believe that they can teach students once they get to college, but I think that's too late." **Importantly, dual-credit courses are not intended only for students in rural schools or to encourage students to teach specifically in rural schools. However, the fact that dual-credit opportunities have become widely available in Wisconsin high schools helps promote education-specific courses as both an early introduction to teaching as a career and a low-cost investment from EPPs and school districts, as well as a no-cost investment by students and families.**

Another college access program is the **College for Rural Wisconsin (CRW)**, which is a newer program at UW–Madison that encourages application to postsecondary institutions while specifically targeting students in rural Wisconsin high schools. CRW is donor-funded and part of the cross-institutional STARS (Small Town and Rural Student) network. As the program director explained, CRW "provides education and outreach on college-going to rural and small-town youth and the groups influencing their postsecondary decision-making. It is completely free, focuses on meeting students in their own communities, and uses Rural Peer Advisors—current college students who are from rural and small towns themselves—to provide near-peer mentoring and education."

In conversation with a group of five Rural Peer Advisors who travel to rural schools around the state to provide free services to pre-college students, one shared that "we do not represent the university itself, we just all happen to go here... We take our own knowledge from our experiences and things that we've gathered from being here at college and create these resources and then deliver them to these students. We drive out to schools all over Wisconsin. We've been really all over the state and we really are just there to serve the students in the schools in whatever way they need, 100 percent free, to students' families, schools, all that."

While CRW is still in its early years, the program is implementing a texting option so that rural high school students can continue to be in contact with the Rural Peer Advisors, potentially through the college application and matriculation process. CRW is also considering how to expand its program of Rural Peer Advisors beyond those located at UW-Madison, therefore incorporating other campuses with closer proximity to rural school districts around the state.

Finally, we heard from program staff and current rural teachers about the importance of **Educators Rising chapters** in rural school districts as a strategy to cultivate interest in teaching as a career. UWSP has invested in supporting Educators Rising chapters in districts across the state, including in rural districts. The [Harju Center for Opportunities in Education](#), in the School of Education, “partially funds, supports the coordination of, and hosts the [Educators Rising] statewide conference and competitions. We offer grant funding to school districts who are starting up Educators Rising chapters in their districts. We now are also offering grant funding to school districts who are going to start a project with their chapter to address issues of equity within their rural community” (survey response/program staff). The Harju Center was established with a \$5 million endowment intended to support current and future elementary and middle grade teachers in rural schools and beyond.

Furthermore, a rural teacher in the Rhinelander School District explained that although the Educators Rising program is open to all students (regardless of their commitment to teaching as a career), the superintendent has intentionally created an Educators Rising graduation ceremony to show that “the district promises them that once they get done with school that they're guaranteed an interview.” In between high school graduation and being hired as a teacher, however, is the process of matriculating into and completing a college degree and teacher certification. To this end, we turn now to programs that take place *during* college to address increasing the pool of future rural teachers.

During College

As expected, survey respondents (representatives of approved EPPs and technical colleges) and interview participants (who are affiliated with one of the four UW campuses we partnered with) provided extensive information on programs and activities that supported students during their time in college. In addition, several individuals shared details about non-traditional student programs that target a diverse range of adults, including paraprofessionals and licensed teachers or administrators already working in Wisconsin schools, as well as adults in post-baccalaureate programs pursuing teacher licensure. In our survey, 22 of 38 programs identified “during college” as a focus of their efforts.

The “During College” section of the educator pipeline includes college coursework and experiential learning activities such as practicum placements and student teaching experiences. CRW, mentioned above as a college access program for rural high school students, is also organizing on-campus events for college students who self-identify as rural. This component of their programming is new, and the program director sees value in continuing to offer support for rural student persistence. No other program reported an intentional focus on attending to the challenges facing rural college students once they are enrolled in a campus-based university.

For traditional college students enrolled in a campus-based EPP, and for graduate students or post-baccalaureate students seeking licensure through an online or hybrid program, an intentional focus on rural schools, communities, students, or teachers *does not* appear to be included in the curriculum. For example, one student teacher enrolled at UW-Madison shared that she was surprised by this lack of rural inclusion across many of her classes

that have “touched on diversity,” yet “rural is just not one that we’ve talked about.” Most often, faculty and practicing rural teachers, as well as preservice teachers/college students, would talk about college coursework as providing the specific skills and knowledge needed to be a teacher, regardless of location. For example, one UWEC professor explained that “we do talk about using the funds of knowledge that the students bring with them from whatever context that may be. But I don't specifically say this is what you would use with rural learners...I encourage them to think about the students that they’re working with, and to start there to bring them to reach whatever the objectives are.”

However, some rural college students and rural educators acknowledged that it might be helpful to hear about the differences that teaching in a rural school might entail. A current rural teacher in Adams–Friendship School District who received their college education at UW–Superior was surprised at the omission of rural schools, students, or communities in their program. She expressed that the rural school context is different from non-rural school contexts, and that “it’s super important that universities start preparing teachers for the fact that you are not only their teacher—you are their guidance counselor; you are their nurse.”

Despite a lack of recognition of rural schools generally in college coursework, some EPPs are attempting to incorporate rural education into their programming in creative ways that are complementary to traditional education coursework. For example, a survey response from UW–Platteville shared that they host a **rural education-themed conference** for their college students, local rural educators, CESA staff, and community members, which includes a keynote speaker and a job fair where administrators from rural school districts promote working in their districts.

Another creative approach to incorporating a rural component into education coursework has been piloted by UWEC through a multi-year, multi-faceted Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation grant. One of these grant components is a “**micro-immersion trip**” designed to bring college students to a rural school district for a day. UWEC has coordinated opportunities with two groups of rural districts in different parts of the state, representing different rural communities. Students are paired with teachers based on some preferences (e.g., grade level or subject) and districts match teachers to the students. The program has brought nursing and social work students, as well as education students, into rural schools. In the 2025–2026 academic year, a few of the Introduction to Education classes at UWEC will require the rural micro-immersion experience as part of their coursework, thus offering a valuable example of how to sustain a grant-funded program within an existing university structure to ensure continuity.

One college student, who participated in a micro-immersion trip visiting the Edgar School District, spent the day shadowing a teacher and observing her classroom. This student was motivated to go on the trip in part because she was *not* from Wisconsin or from a rural community: “I haven’t had much experience with rural schools, and so I feel like it would be good to have a diverse experience within rural schools, because that’s not where I grew up. I also just wanted to be in a classroom, because I feel like that’d be fun...I’m really glad that I went because it really opened my mind to how other schools can work. Because I had this one narrative of how schools can work, and it was interesting to break that up and see.” **This**

student's experience provides a useful example of how offering non-rural college students short-term, low-risk opportunities to learn about potential careers in rural districts could be replicated at other EPPs around the state, thereby expanding the pool of prospective rural teachers.

Another common approach to rural inclusion in EPP coursework was not about the content of the education course but the target student population, e.g., practicing teachers or adults who wished to change careers to become teachers. While not intentionally rural, these programs allowed for a potential pool of rurally located adults (e.g., paraprofessionals, career-changers, current teachers) to participate in college coursework and/or obtaining teacher licensure. Some of these programs can be considered “grow your own” programs as they work to cultivate future educators outside traditional entry points (Carl & Seelig, 2023). Several programs from the survey are included in this category: Excellence in Teaching Program (CESA 9), Autism for Educators (Chippewa Valley Technical College), Online PE Post-baccalaureate (UW–Superior), Reading Teacher and Reading Specialist Add-on Licensure (UWSP), School Counselor preparation in rural districts (UW–Superior), SPECED4U, online special ed degree program (UW–Superior), Special Education Transition to Teaching: SETT (UWEC), Teacher Development Center (CESA 7), and post-baccalaureate teacher licensure program (CESA 2).

UWO also provides several of these opportunities, including two licensure programs that can be tailored to specific subjects or areas of need in specific districts to address teacher shortages, in both rural and non-rural schools. UWO also offers graduate-level licensure and non-licensure programs in a hybrid format with both virtual and in-person components. The in-person coursework is on-site in a district that has teachers enrolled. UWO administrators work with local districts, including rural districts, to offer programs organized as “cohorts” to address a commonly desired type of licensure. One administrator noted that before the COVID-19 pandemic, UWO teacher education faculty traveled to schools to offer specific courses, and the university provided a reduced tuition rate in exchange for utilizing school space. Ultimately, the variety of programs offered across the spectrum of EPPs, technical colleges, and CESAs is impressive, and speaks to their investments in providing diverse entry points into teaching as a career. While not directly addressing the rural teacher shortage, a UWO professor shared that the intention is to “bring the programs to them in their area where they’re already living, which keeps them there” instead of requiring rurally located adults to travel to campus.

CESA 9's Excellence in Teaching Program was designed as a post-baccalaureate pathway program approved by DPI and implemented in response to the decline of traditional college students choosing education majors. This program was created to address rural teacher shortages by attracting adults with bachelor's degrees who already lived in rural communities or worked in non-teaching roles in the schools. As the CESA 9 administrator explained, “We designed that program as a grow-your-own program to have a different group of people we could tap into to become teachers in our rural schools and other schools as well.” Several of Wisconsin's 12 CESAs have a similar program, including the “Rite Program” with CESA 6, which is designed for college graduates who did not have a teaching background and were seeking initial licensure.

In addition to college coursework and licensure programs, **experiential learning activities** are common, and required, for educator certification. In particular, student practicums are the benchmarks of progression from student to practicing teacher: preservice teachers spend time over a semester or more in schools and classrooms, learning by observation and by engagement, and student teaching. During this time, the preservice teacher gradually takes on full responsibility for classroom management and student learning. Even though student teaching and practicum experiences are mandated by the state as prerequisites for completing a teacher licensure program, the placement coordinators from various EPPs shared the nuanced ways in which they were intentionally promoting and supporting these placements in rural districts.

At UWSP, the student placement process has been “opened up” to “allow people to keep a connection to their hometown” through a complex process of signing memorandums of understanding with every district that is a possible placement site and expanding the geographic region for placements to the whole state. As program staff shared, “Those schools with Educators Rising [chapters] are the schools that want our students to come back and do their student teaching there and then be hired. I hear from students all the time—I ask them when they sign up and they request a student teaching placement that’s out of the area: ‘Are you from there?’ ‘Yeah, I’m from there.’ ‘I’m going to be doing this with my high school teacher and we’re friends now.’” The UWSP practicum coordinator shared that their program coordinates 250–300 student teaching placements/year and over 1,000 practicum placements each semester. This indicates a high number of potential classrooms, schools, and districts directly affected by UWSP.

While the placement region is much smaller at UWEC, they also place about 200–250 students in student teaching placements each year. The program staff described the importance of creating and sustaining relationships with school districts, rural and non-rural, to facilitate student placements. For example, program staff explained that they recently met with a group of rural schools in the area surrounding UWEC to reintroduce the process of student practicum and student teaching placements, and to provide districts a sense of what UWEC is looking for in terms of placements. They also believed that this outreach facilitated open dialogue with rural districts because “they either hadn’t had a placement before...or nobody asked them or inquired.”

UWEC placement coordinators also emphasized homegrown students when the opportunity arises: “Most of the [rural districts] are just so happy if you approach them saying, ‘Hey, we’ve got a student teacher who came from your area and they want to student teach in your school district. Can you help me find a placement?’ They’ve been really helpful... We have ongoing relationships with Abbotsford and Colby and Spencer, as well as some places like Owen-Withee. We [also] just happened to approach a principal who got really excited because they never had a student teacher in their building before. Then it spread there, and then some of the other districts in Independence and down in the Augusta area, they also were really interested in getting some student teachers. It just was organic.” While these examples from two high-volume, high-production EPP programs (UWSP and UWEC) are not exclusively rural, the enthusiasm they’ve

received from these more expansive placement strategies signal a promising direction for rural districts.

Both UWEC and UWSP also engage in creative strategies to address concurrent challenges for college students that affect their practicum and student teaching placements in rural districts. These strategies focus on wraparound services and include housing options for students in the rural community where they are placed, or pairing students in a district so they can carpool or provide transportation funds to help offset the costs of travel. For example, UWSP has a partnership with the Rhinelander School District that began several years ago after UWSP staff traveled to Rhinelander to brainstorm with the district on how to develop a stronger educator pipeline with a pathway back to teaching in Rhinelander for their high school graduates. The district is offering five students in the elementary methods block (a suite of college courses) housing and board for the duration of their placement, and there is already discussion of whether the same group of students might do their student teaching there as well.

Another unique strategy to support rural practicum placement for college students is at UWEC, where program staff are aware that some students face challenges in taking a semester to student teach when they must also work to pay their bills. A program staff member explained that they took this challenge seriously and “facilitated a connection to a before- and after-school program within the Rice Lake School District, so any of the students who have been placed at Rice Lake, if they wanted to do that job and didn’t have any issues with the criminal background check...They were guaranteed a job within the school district for the before- and after-school program.”

Indeed, the **lack of pay for student teaching** is a common challenge that individuals seeking teacher licensure often face (Kawasaki, 2023; Manley et al., 2024). In effect, student teaching is an unpaid internship that is a full-day, full-week, required component for successful completion of a college degree program in teacher education and/or eligibility for licensure in the state. **Scholarships for traditional college students in EPPs are one strategy for reducing this burden, and the state-sponsored Rural Teacher Talent Grant (RTTG) scholarship is a popular program for encouraging student teacher placements in rural districts.** Since 2017, RTTG has been made available for college students in rural district placements and coordinated by CESA 8, in cooperation with program staff at individual EPPs across the state. Several survey responses named the RTTG as a program they utilize, including the College of Menominee Nation, Ripon College, Viterbo University, St. Norbert College, and UWEC, UWLX, UWRF, UWSP, UWST, and UWSUP. This grant program provides funds for student teachers placed in rural school districts (according to a list based on the NCES locale codes and provided annually by CESA 8) upon successful completion of their student teaching. Students, once placed, must complete paperwork for the grant prior to student teaching, and the EPP must sign off on the successful completion of student teaching before the funds are dispersed at the end of the academic year. The goal is to help offset transportation or housing costs for students who choose placement in a rural district, while also exposing EPP students to rural schools in hopes they will choose to work in rural schools.

While some EPPs offer other grant-supported scholarships for student teachers, RTTG is both explicitly rural and available through any EPP across the state. At UWSP, the teacher placement coordinator shared that in one semester their program was placing 36 student teachers and 11 practicum students in rural schools, thus allowing them to apply for the RTTG funds.

In addition, DPI manages a program that also offsets the costs of student teaching regardless of the geographic location of the schools. The Wisconsin Improvement Program (WIP) is an internship that has been available for school districts to apply for since the 1980s (Wisconsin DPI, 2024). Somewhat surprisingly, only program staff affiliated with student practicum placements mentioned WIP as a way to address rural teacher shortages as well as provide a paid student teaching experience to preservice teachers. Unlike the RTTG, this program is sponsored by DPI and paid for through the school district, with the EPP providing documentation verifying that the preservice teacher can and should be trusted as teacher of record for part of each school day they are in a district school. During the other half of the school day, the preservice teacher is paired with a cooperating teacher and supporting their classroom, just as in a traditional student teaching placement. Student teachers are paid directly by the school district on the same schedule as full-time teachers on staff, as opposed to the RTTG, where students receive the funds after the end of their student teaching placement. Both UWSP and UWEC have placed several WIP preservice teachers in rural districts over the last several years, and program staff in both EPPs expressed an increased interest among rural school districts who may use WIP to entice quality teacher candidates to step foot in their buildings.

New Teacher Recruitment & Hiring

New teacher recruitment and hiring is a crucial step in the educator pipeline, and 14/38 programs identified in the survey indicate this is a target section of the pipeline for their program activities. Often, the transition between obtaining licensure and officially teaching is the onus of the individual teacher-to-be and not in the purview of EPPs. At the same time, EPPs understand their own effectiveness by how many of their graduates find gainful employment in the field of education, and usually, in a school. Even pre-college programs, such as Educators Rising, may also consider whether their former chapter members eventually become licensed classroom teachers as a meaningful outcome of high school participation in the club. Grow Your Own Programs (Carl & Seelig, 2023), such as CESA 10's Career and Technical Education 10 program that partners with 35 districts in Western Wisconsin to support pathways for future CTE teachers, and CESA 2's education job fair, also envisions successful programming as tied to the hiring of new qualified teachers into classroom positions. Overall, 11 programs described in the survey data mention tracking post-graduation metrics, including traditional EPPs, CESAs, and online degree and licensure programs, including obtaining a teaching position, as a primary outcome of interest; however, the regularity and granularity of the data collected to track participants into teaching positions is unknown.

Professional Supports/Opportunities

The final phase of the educator pipeline is a vast category that encompasses professional learning opportunities for current teachers, including mentoring programs for new and/or

emergency-certified teachers as well as general supports for increasing current teachers' skills and knowledge base. Some professional learning programs are targeted to teachers in specific grades or subject areas, while others are for entire districts with a more flexible application. Our survey received nominations of 18 programs in this category that have a shared focus on retaining current teachers by providing professional supports and engagement, 7 of which can be considered explicitly rural.

One way in which these programs supported current rural teachers was through providing a network of peer teachers—colleagues from the same school or from different districts, early-career or veteran teachers, but overall, peers who understand personally the challenges and joys of teaching. For example, CESA 2's New Teacher Center trains mentors from rural districts in their region to mentor new rural teachers. St. Norbert College's new WEDC Rural Workforce Innovation Grant includes providing professional development to new teachers "who can be isolated in rural districts," as well as facilitate collaboration among administrators across their region's rural schools.

Project ACRES, a federal grant-funded program run by the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education at UW–Madison, has designed, revised, and tested a multi-component professional development intervention to address pressing needs of early-career and emergency-certified special educators working in rural schools. This grant supported approximately 75 rural special education teachers from districts around the state during its federal funding cycle, which ended in early 2025. One veteran rural teacher who participated in the program as a coach perceived that one positive outcome of participation for new teachers was access to "a non-judgmental person that they could talk to that had been in the trenches— had been in the classroom, experienced the same struggles, and might have some tricks up their sleeve... and if they didn't have tricks up their sleeves, at least some ideas of where to go for more support or a different way to handle a situation." Project ACRES program staff echoed this perspective, saying "it wasn't so much the content or the structure that we were providing that was distinctly rural, but it was the experiences that people are bringing that were distinctly rural...and it was important that the rural educators be in 'community of practice' sessions with other rural educators."

UWEC's WEDC grant also included funds for professional development activities for current rural teachers, with a specific focus on addressing the challenges of retaining rural teachers who are not originally from a rural community. To this end, professional development included virtual and in-person learning opportunities that were not only for current teachers but also open to community members, and included topics relevant to all attendees such as mental health. Program staff shared that they believed teachers new to rural contexts needed to "fall in love with the community, and maybe fall in love with people as friends, so that they have that circle of support." With this framing in mind, they designed professional development opportunities beyond the traditional presentation and instead opened up space for "people to just connect and to create those friendships" that might turn into the anchor the teachers needed to help them remain committed to teaching in their rural school.

Another unique approach to professional development is being offered to rural districts through the **Harju Center for Educational Opportunities at UWSP** in the form of district-wide \$10,000 grants. These grants are competitive but can be utilized at the district's discretion. Funds are awarded to four districts each year that present the strongest professional development plans aligned with the Center's evaluation criteria. Districts then have the year to carry out their proposed initiatives and, at the end of the cycle, report back to the Harju Center with a final report and video highlighting the outcomes of their work. . So far, there have been two cycles of awarded grants to a total of eight rural districts.

The Randolph School District used a portion of its Harju grant to collect climate survey data from staff and review the results of their annual student climate survey to determine what was needed to improve climate and culture within the district. One result was the creation of a mental health team in the district. Members of the team attended professional development sessions and conferences to learn about how best to address what their district needs, with the Harju grant allowing participating staff to earn a stipend for the extra work they were doing. Teachers and staff on the mental health team began working on plans for an after-school program for elementary-aged children, and possibly peer mediators and a special program for middle and high school students. In terms of sustaining the initiative post-grant, an administrator said, "The idea, because this grant is one year, is that the grant funds the professional development, some small stipends for the staff who give up their extra time. Then, at the end of the year this group of district staff will have the tools to continue to meet next year and advance this initiative on their own."

In the Adams–Friendship School district, a Harju grant was utilized to engage staff in professional development focused on social and emotional learning, including several book study groups for teachers to learn about how to better teach students in poverty, as well as racially or linguistically diverse students. One teacher who participated noted, "We don't necessarily have a lot of those resources so I think it was a good time for us to come together as a staff and discuss how can we educate ourselves? How can we educate our students on issues relating to skin color, issues relating to poverty? What can we do to better ourselves as educators? And then what can we do essentially to help our students who are experiencing some of the things that maybe we don't experience? What can we do to help our kids?"

While the professional learning opportunities in this section vary widely, all of these programs are supported through grant funding—federal, state, and philanthropic dollars. Given that the rural teacher shortage is not only about the *supply of new teachers* into rural schools, but also the *retention of current teachers*, these programs offer creative investments into the long-term sustainability of rural schools.

Expanding Intentionally Rural EPP Activities

In sum, the programs identified indicate a web of organizations in the state that collectively support the development of future teachers and the retention of current teachers. However, the qualitative data summarized in this section also points to the limited focus on recruitment and preparation of future teachers *for rural schools in particular*. Although the analysis in Part 1

pointed to certain EPPs generating the highest numbers of rural teachers in the state, there appears to be little coordination to specifically attend to the needs of rural schools and the challenges that rural teachers face. The programs that are most engaged in specific rural initiatives are grant-funded through state (e.g., WEDC), local (e.g., Harju), and federal (e.g., Project ACRES) investments that are operating on a finite timeline.

We therefore conclude this section with an additional question to consider: To what extent do current EPP programs/activities amplify the *assets* of rural teaching and address the *challenges* of rural teaching?

From an asset-based perspective, EPP programs should not only be providing skills and opportunities to current and future educators to support their recruitment, preparation, and retention in rural schools, but should do so by identifying, emphasizing, and validating why so many educators DO choose to work in rural Wisconsin schools. Our interviews with current rural educators, preservice teachers, and rural administrators revealed several motivations for choosing teaching as a career, and the benefits of working in a rural school in particular:

- Intergenerational families: knowing families and educating them over time.
- Being part of the rural community, seeing students and families outside school.
- Close connections with students made possible by small school and class sizes, high attendance, and seeing the same students year after year. As one rural administrator explained, “The physical proximity and emotional proximity to kids is really special...I don’t think you easily find that in a larger school.”
- Opportunity and encouragement to engage in roles outside of classroom teaching. For example, a veteran rural teacher said, “I think almost every one of our teachers advises something, or coaches a sport, or does something a little bit extra outside of their regular teaching duties. I truly believe our students see that, and they appreciate that. That allows educators and students to cultivate real relationships beyond just what we see in the classroom.”
- School-wide approach to teaching and learning can be coordinated, intentional, creative, thoughtful, and reflective across a school staff that is committed to each other and the school community.
- Teachers who share their students’ backgrounds can help students to succeed. As one rural educator explained, “Kids need to see that there’s other people like them and their life and their situation...They know the struggles that I had as a student and I hope I empower them not only with my story but encourage them that someone else needs to hear their story, because that’s how we change the world.”
- Ability to affect change and make a difference in a student’s life. One rural educator was confident that in this role “you can make a difference...Just talk to that one student, build that relationship, and they will come...and don’t give up, when you do that.”

These positive attributes of rural teaching stem from the possibility of close-knit relationships between educators and students, educators and their colleagues, and between

educators and the broader rural community (Seelig & McCabe, 2021). However, these relationships are not organic but must be intentionally cultivated—a practice that may be difficult for educators new to a rural community or new to the teaching profession. EPP programs have an opportunity to support preservice teachers who may take a future position in a rural school by strengthening their programmatic focus on assets of rural teaching via cultivating closer relationships with districts, designing intentional coursework, or crafting experiential learning opportunities that immerse students in rural schools over a longer period of time.

More broadly, how programs conceive of working in rural schools is essential to how they choose to incorporate rurality into their activities. For example, UWEC applied an asset-based perspective across all components of its five-year WEDC grant. With an intentional focus on increasing interest in rural teaching among preservice teachers NOT from a rural community, the grant coordinator explained their motivation as “thinking about...how do we help people fall in love?” Even though UWEC was not literally coordinating future romantic relationships for their preservice teachers, they were creative about enhancing the strength of connections between new teachers and their new rural communities through activities such as micro-immersion trips, setting up student housing options in rural communities for student teachers, and creating professional development opportunities that brought rural community members, current teachers, and preservice teachers together.

Although seemingly parallel or perhaps secondary to the needs of training future teachers in pedagogy and content expertise, the development of real connections with rural schools and communities also addresses an underlying root cause that affects the rural teacher pipeline—the lack of familiarity with rural people, places, and ways of being. UWEC’s WEDC grant also attempted to address some of the more tangible challenges for future rural teachers, such as the need for housing in rural communities, transportation subsidies to drive to and from rural schools at a distance from the university campus, and the financial barriers of the unpaid student teaching requirement. Ultimately, the EPPs may have varying intentional commitments to strengthening the rural teacher pipeline, but regardless of intentionality these programs must address the real challenges of teaching (rural and non-rural) in Wisconsin (and beyond).

Several teaching challenges were identified in our qualitative interviews that are well-documented in the research on teacher attrition, although some, such as low pay, are not in the purview of EPPs and therefore may be difficult to address through their programming. Furthermore, challenges for teachers such as time management, staffing vacancies, the national discourse on education, and the emotional labor of teaching are not place-specific, participants identified several other teaching challenges that are endemic for rural teachers. These include

- Professional isolation or being a “department of one.” Here we mean not only the loneliness that comes from being a “singleton teacher” in a subject or a grade level, but also the professional effort required to meet the standards of teaching in this type of role without a community of peers. As one rural administrator shared, “Some people go into education, and they don’t really want to build their own program. They want to fit into an existing system, and you can’t in rural education...You’re the only one in that school that teaches that.”

- In tandem with professional isolation is also the need to have more time with peer teachers for professional learning opportunities.
- The often-limited resources available for student services in rural districts as well as for families in the community outside of school sometimes results in teachers taking on the role of guidance counselor, mental health advocate, or nurse.

Though these challenges for rural teachers may appear daunting, many of these challenges can be prepared for through traditional and non-traditional teacher preparation and professional learning opportunities for current teachers. For example, mentoring or coaching programs, such as Project ACRES, are clearly focused on addressing the challenge of rural teacher professional isolation and providing increased opportunities for rural teachers to connect with their peers. Furthermore, courses and experiential learning activities often address time management as a core element of learning to be a teacher. The data collected in this study is not adequate to answer how each of the programs addresses these identified challenges, but it is integral that the programs do so in order to encourage more adults to choose rural teaching as a career.

Discussion: Defining Rurality

A key issue that arises from (but is definitely not new to) our work involves how to define rurality at different levels of the educator pipeline. At the *school district level*, NCES locale codes provide a useful way of defining rurality, which we utilized in defining “rural districts” as those with either Rural or Town locale codes from NCES. An added benefit of the NCES locale codes are the subtypes (Fringe, Distant, Remote), which we used in Part 1 of our work to make the case that rurality at the school district level is not a monolithic construct, with all school districts facing the same types of challenges in terms of attracting and retaining educators. Instead, key indicators such as growth in the number of teachers and students, and average distances from EPPs, provide evidence that Distant and Remote rural districts are likely facing additional challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers above and beyond what their counterparts (fringe districts) located closer to urban areas are dealing with. One very tangible example that surfaced in our work is access to student teachers, with several Wisconsin EPPs that we talked with (and likely more that we did not) having implemented policies that effectively limit student teaching placements close to their main campuses—which most likely has the unintentional effect of depriving more distant rural districts of this key step in the hiring pipeline.

At the *institutional level*, the question of how to define rurality, and what it means to have “rural-facing” and “intentionally rural” *programs* to help meet the staffing needs of rural school districts, emerged in Part 2 of our work as a more complex issue than how to define rural school districts. A quantitative measure of rurality for postsecondary institutions has been developed by the [Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges \(ARRC\)](#), in the form of an RSI (Rural-Serving Institution) Score derived from a formula that includes the following characteristics intended to (intentionally) account for factors beyond where the institution is physically located:

1. Percent of institution’s home county population classified as rural
2. Average percent of adjacent counties’ population classified as rural

3. Population size of institution's home county
4. Institution's home county adjacency to a metro area
5. Percent of institution's total awards conferred in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Parks Recreation (Koricich et al., 2022)

RSI scores range from 0-4, with any institution having a score above the national average (1.175) designated as an RSI and any with a score over 2.14 designated a "High RSI." As Table 14 illustrates, 20 of Wisconsin's EPPs are considered "rural-serving" based on their RSI score, including three (one which closed in 2025) that are "high RSI."

Table 14. RSI Scores for Wisconsin Postsecondary Institutions with Teacher Training Programs

Postsecondary Institution	RSI Score (* = RSI; ** = High RSI)
Alverno College	0.1679
Beloit College	1.1623
Carroll University	0.409
Carthage College	0.3712
College of Menominee Nation	3.64**
Concordia University	0.5841
Edgewood College	0.8993
Lakeland University	1.3991*
Lawrence University	1.3007*
Maranatha Baptist University	1.6401*
Marian University	1.4379*
Marquette University	0.1663
Mount Mary University	0.1663
<i>Northland College (closed 2025)</i>	<i>3.0995**</i>
Ripon College	1.434*
St. Norbert	0.974
UW–Eau Claire	1.6285*
UW–Green Bay	0.9862
UW–La Crosse	1.4553*
UW–Madison	0.9276
UW–Milwaukee	0.1791
UW–Oshkosh	1.2694*
UW–Parkside	0.3669
UW–Platteville	2.8**

UW–River Falls	1.193*
UW–Stevens Point	2.0909*
UW–Stout	2.5942**
UW–Superior	1.4759*
UW–Whitewater	1.5692*
Viterbo University	1.4113*
Wisconsin Lutheran College	0.191

RSI Scores provide a useful way to define rurality among institutions by using multiple Census Bureau indicators to quantify key measures typically associated with rurality, such as population density. **The fifth criterion in the RSI formula is interesting in that it prioritizes postsecondary institutions that offer degrees traditionally associated with rural lifestyles and economic opportunities (e.g., agriculture), although it *does not* include a measure of what percentage of an institution's students graduated from rural high schools. An additional critique of the RSI metric is that it does not account for other accessible and middle-income jobs often found in rural communities, such as nursing or teaching.** Schools are important to the economic vitality of rural communities (Sipple et al., 2019) and supply a variety of employment opportunities (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). Based on the findings in our study, we argue that omitting educational degrees in the calculation of rural-servingness is a disservice to both education career pathways (e.g., EPPs) and to the significant role that rural schools play in local community sustainability.

Our work broadens the discussion around how to define rurality at the institution level by asking Wisconsin institutions to characterize *themselves* on this key construct. Specifically, we included a question on our survey asking, “Would you consider your organization/institution to be a rural-serving institution?” Among the 33 total respondents (representing 22 different institutions, of which 17 were postsecondary institutions that train teachers) that responded to this question, only four said no. We recognize, however, that the way this question was presented (within a survey that was explicitly described as identifying programs that support the current and future educator workforce in Wisconsin) may have unintentionally encouraged respondents to answer this question with a yes.

We also included a follow-up question asking respondents who responded with a yes to the previous question (“Do you consider your institution to be rural-serving?”) to briefly explain *why* they answered yes. In Table 15, we summarize the responses provided by EPP program respondents only. When multiple respondents worked for the same organization, duplicative comments have been combined for clarity and brevity. Responses in the table are direct quotes from the survey and therefore represent only the perspective of the respondent; however, the point of sharing these responses is to illustrate how individual respondents understand the descriptor “rural-serving.” Where applicable, institutions that are classified as RSI in the previous table are noted below.

Table 15. EPP Program Survey Responses: Please explain why you would consider your institution (or organization) to be rural-serving.

Postsecondary Institution	Response
College of Menominee Nation (RSI)	We are a small Tribal College and University located in Keshena, WI and all of our students come from surrounding rural towns.
Ripon College (RSI)	We place most of our students in the rural districts near Ripon College.
St. Norbert	We have many rural students who attend SNC and we participate in the Rural Grant (RTTG) and enjoy having our students placed in rural schools
UW–Eau Claire (RSI)	We are located in Eau Claire (urban) but it is not a big city nor a school district large enough to host all of our education students for all their placement needs. We work with about 60 school districts within 70 miles of Eau Claire to varying degrees for placements. 24 of those districts have enrollments of more than 1,000 students. Of those 24 districts, only 7 have enrollments greater than 2,000 students. Many of our placements, even within 30 miles of Eau Claire are school districts of modest size and classified as rural.
UW–Green Bay	We regularly place our education students with rural qualifying districts for their field practicums and student teaching. Additionally, we work closely with these districts to address staffing needs.
UW–La Crosse (RSI)	To accommodate the number of placements needed each semester, we place many of our candidates in rural schools for field experiences and student teaching. We strive to place as many students as possible in rural schools because there is such a tremendous need for rural teachers.
UW–Madison	We work to engage with all parts of the state through reciprocity and partnerships. We have relationships and partnerships with a range of rural teachers, administrators, and districts.
UW–Oshkosh (RSI)	Many of our students are from rural areas. We also have several cohort programs that are with rural districts.
UW–Parkside	Our students do clinical placements in area school districts and the location of our college allows us to reach out and place students in these rural schools/districts
UW–Platteville (RSI)	The majority of the students in education programs come from rural school districts and most graduates who become teachers work in rural districts.
UW–River Falls (RSI)	Many of our preservice teachers come to us from rural districts and we place many student teachers into rural districts.
UW–Stevens Point (RSI)	I think school districts in our surrounding area would agree that our outreach and placement of preservice educators in their rural districts is a benefit to them and their long-term ability to recruit teachers. We also have a strong focus on rural programming.
UW–Stout (RSI)	Our campus is located in northwest Wisconsin which is primarily rural and the field experiences and clinical experiences our students have are mainly in the rural districts surrounding our campus.
UW–Superior (RSI)	We are the lone university in the Northwoods for the UW system. While our online programs engage students throughout the state, most of our students serve K–12 districts in the northern 1/3 of the state, which tend to be rural.

UW–Whitewater (RSI)	We are geographically located in a rural area of the state. We have the lowest tuition of any UW campus. Our admission requirements make us more accessible than other campuses and we have many online programs.
Viterbo University (RSI)	Viterbo University attracts many of its students from surrounding rural areas. Students are looking for a smaller school and a homey atmosphere that is also a top contender in providing cutting-edge education.

The survey responses allow us to expand the definition of rural-serving through the lens of EPP staff who oversee programs that cultivate both the current and future rural educator workforce. Interestingly, the descriptions provided by respondents for why they believe their institution or organization is rural-serving appear to be focused on several key categories, such as (a) who the program serves; (b) where the program (institution/organization) is located; and (c) whether the program connects with rural districts and/or communities. As Table 15 illustrates, several institutional respondents mention the bi-directionality of rural communities sending their children to these colleges and universities, and the reciprocal placement of preservice teachers in rural districts. Therefore, in addition to where an institution or organization is located, and what courses they offer (RSI metrics), at the program level, serving a rural population and having intentional relationships with rural schools or communities is what makes an institution/organization “rural-serving.”

Furthermore, qualitative interviews also pointed to this expansion of what is encompassed under the umbrella of “rural-serving.” Participants described the importance of **strategic development** in cultivating rural-serving programs, including considerations of how the program is conveyed (e.g., online, in-person, hybrid) and at what point rural administrators or other rural residents are involved. While many program staff shared that they are not exclusively rural, they also recognized the importance of attending to the needs of rural schools and communities. For example, graduate-level licensure and non-licensure programs at UWO are sometimes offered on-site in rural districts and utilize a cohort model of learning. Another example is the rural inter-district virtual coaching facilitated by Project ACRES staff, which promotes collegiality and knowledge-sharing across rural districts, thus limiting the isolation of rural special educators. Both programs were intentionally driven by accessibility concerns for rural educators, and solutions to these challenges were built into the program design. Additionally, some programs are designed with an explicit end goal, like the district-wide professional development scholarships offered by UWSP’s Harju Center for Educational Opportunities, which are rural-specific. Another example is the College for Rural Wisconsin, which hires rural college students to travel to rural high schools and share information about college access and success.

In sum, there is no single (or “best”) definition for a program or institution to be considered “rural-serving,” although we would argue that it is important for EPPs and other postsecondary institutions conduct their own scan of whether what they offer is “rural-focused,” “rural-specific,” or “intentionally rural.” We suggest this review process for EPPs to initiate an intentional and strategic approach to refining how their programming is helping to meet the current and future staffing needs of rural districts. To help identify this degree of rural positionality, questions to consider include:

1. Who are their partners? At what stage of development are the partners brought in?
2. How are the services being provided or conveyed?
3. Who are the intended audiences and how are they identified?
4. Where are they located, and are they accessible to rural communities?
5. What are the desired outcomes, and can these be disaggregated by geographic locale?

Implications & Policy Recommendations

In this section, we summarize four issues that emerged from our inquiry into how Wisconsin's EPPs and other organizations are helping to meet the current and/or future staffing needs of rural schools. We also offer potential policy recommendations associated with these issues, with an eye toward strengthening the teacher pipeline between the "supply" side (EPPs) and the "demand" side (rural school districts).

Issue 1: Defining rurality is complex and standardized definitions must be revised in context

At the *school district* level, we have used NCES locale codes in our work to operationalize a rural district as one classified as either Rural or Town, which includes nearly 80% of Wisconsin's 400+ local school districts. At the *institutional* level, Rural-Serving Institution (RSI) scores provide a similarly helpful starting point for quantifying the extent to which colleges and universities (including their programs that provide training to current and future educators) are serving rural communities.

However, our study reveals that for both school districts and postsecondary institutions, these definitions are static constructs that are limited in their ability to fully capture the diverse array of assets and challenges that characterize the staffing needs of rural schools and communities. For example, while all rural districts have faced challenges in attracting and retaining teachers, our use of locale subtypes (Fringe, Distant, and Remote) to disaggregate Rural and Town districts shows that rural districts located further from urban areas face particular challenges in attracting and retaining teachers. These include decreasing numbers of teachers (driven by stagnant or decreasing student enrollment) and being excluded from hosting student teachers by their longer average distances from EPPs.

Similarly, while the RSI score incorporates key indicators typically associated with rurality, such as population density, it does not account for some of the changing economic realities of many rural communities, which increasingly rely on healthcare, education, and service industries more than traditional agricultural and manufacturing. These traditional industries certainly continue to play a key role in the economy of Wisconsin's rural communities, but limiting the degree-granting component of the RSI metric to traditionally rural degrees such as agriculture likely oversimplifies efforts to define rurality at the postsecondary institution level.

Collectively, these points illustrate that there is no monolithic definition of rurality that describes the entirety of the rural experience, just as there is no model for who a rural college student is that can encompass the evolving demographics and economies of rural communities. Therefore, we argue that EPPs, at the programmatic level, are responsible for intentionally and

strategically preparing educators for rural schools that reflect the nuances of rural communities across the state.

Policy Recommendations for Issue 1:

Rural school districts in Wisconsin are not monolithic in terms of the ways in which they are experiencing teacher shortages, and their relationships with EPPs to attract and prepare new rural educators vary. Accordingly, several of the policy recommendations noted below in Issues 2–4, such as identifying innovative ways to help Distant and Remote rural districts access a pipeline of student teachers and create partnerships with EPPs to get emergency-certified (LWS) teachers fully licensed, would likely help rural districts located further away from urban areas (and most of the state's EPPs) attract and retain teachers. Furthermore, recognition of the importance of rural schools to their communities—economically, culturally, and educationally—undergirds the support of EPP expansion into more remote regions and the expansion of rural educator pathways to bolster both economic stability and educational achievement across the state.

Issue 2: Rural districts and EPPs must expand partnerships to broaden the pipeline of prospective new teachers

Among the key findings from our study is that many of Wisconsin's rural school districts do not have robust relationships with EPPs, which impacts their ability to cultivate stronger pipelines of prospective new teachers. Much of this challenge originates in the longer physical distances that divide most rural districts from EPPs, which both limits access on the part of rural high school students and their families to college degrees in general as well as opportunities for practicum and student teaching placements in rural districts.

In other words, longer physical distances from EPPs create numerous challenges for rural districts and prospective teachers from rural communities in terms of the educator pipeline, beginning with the fact that graduates of Wisconsin's rural high schools have fewer (if any) nearby options compared to their peers from larger communities when it comes to choosing a college. Furthermore, it appears that some EPPs place the large majority of their student teachers in districts close to their main campus (within 50 miles). This makes sense both for the student teachers themselves (shorter commuting times to their placement, staying close to campus to attend in-person classes, and having year-round housing leases they prefer not to break) as well as for field placement supervisors (manageable distances for observing student teachers). It also means, however, that a large number of rural districts across the state (particularly Rural Distant and Rural Remote) are much less likely to have access to a valuable opportunity to host student teachers, and that rural students who may wish to return home to teach are less able to complete student teaching in their home district.

Policy Recommendations for Issue 2:

Wisconsin's EPPs should be incentivized to expand the geographic range of their student teaching placements to provide more opportunities for rural districts to host student teachers. Several current programs and practices could serve as useful models for how to accomplish this goal, including expanding the number and size of Rural Teacher Talent Grants and having EPPs

establish (and perhaps share) larger networks of field placement supervisors (including retired teachers and CESA staff) who live in rural areas already and understand the dynamics of successful teaching careers in rural communities. UWSP, for example, uses student teaching supervisors who live in rural districts to conduct classroom observations, and UWEC used its recent WEDC grant to provide housing in Rice Lake for student teachers who wanted to fulfill this portion of their licensure requirement further away from the main campus. In addition, the Rural Teacher Talent Grant is a popular program for encouraging student teacher placements in rural districts that should be reviewed for effectiveness.

Issue 3: Student demographics in rural districts are changing, and their partnerships with EPPs must evolve to diversify the ranks of rural teachers

Definitions of rural districts and RSIs can be cumbersome and complex, yet the implications of classification are significant. How an institution is classified influences how it envisions its mission and priorities, thus expanding the definition of RSI also expands which college students are classified as rural, which shifts attention to the specific changing demographics of rural Wisconsin schools and communities. While Wisconsin's rural school districts have grown increasingly diverse over the past two decades, from nearly 92% white in 2006–07 to 83% white in 2023–24, rural teachers have remained overwhelmingly (more than 95%) white. The subsequent “diversity gap” between rural students and their teachers has implications for rural student behavioral and academic success, including student career and college aspirations. EPP programs must invest in partnerships with racially and linguistically diverse rural districts to strengthen opportunities for new generations of rural students to choose teaching careers as well as to better align EPP license and degree programs with the teacher shortages in these districts (which may include bilingual teachers in various grade levels and subject areas).

Policy Recommendations for Issue 3:

While challenges in diversifying the teacher workforce are clearly a statewide issue, this may have been viewed historically as a problem to be addressed mainly by urban (and to a lesser extent, suburban) districts, under the assumption that rural districts' student enrollment continued to be nearly all white. With trend data we have presented previously showing this to increasingly NOT be the case, however, a coordinated approach to increasing educator diversity in rural districts is needed, perhaps in the form of new partnerships between rural districts and EPPs to develop “grow your own” programs that recruit future teachers from within the growing diversity of rural student populations. Therefore, another recommendation is for EPPs to incorporate rural content and experiential learning opportunities into their curriculum on educational equity, alongside learning about and working with linguistically and racially diverse students.

Issue 4: Staffing challenges confronting rural districts must include a dedicated focus on retaining current teachers as well as attracting new ones

While Issues 2 and 3 speak to the need for rural districts and EPPs to partner to increase (and diversify) the pool of prospective *future* educators, we call attention in Issue 4 to the

increasing recognition that chronic teacher shortages facing rural districts cannot be addressed without also focusing on improving retention rates of *current* educators. One example that stands out from our work involves the increased reliance among rural districts on teachers with short-term credentials (known as License with Stipulations in Wisconsin) to fill vacant positions. These teachers must be enrolled in an approved EPP to obtain full licensure while also teaching, often full-time. Based on longer average distances from EPPs, LWS teachers working in rural districts (particularly Rural Distant and Rural Remote) are likely to face particular challenges getting fully licensed within the required three-year LWS period. If rural districts and EPPs can't develop successful partnerships to get this subset of the current rural educator pool fully licensed, however, retention efforts will be incomplete. Other program examples in our study that are worthy of further investment and expansion include mentoring and coaching opportunities for early-career teachers that have been offered historically by CESAs to their local districts or by grant-funded programs at EPPs (e.g., Project ACRES). The limited scope of service for these programs, as well as, in some cases, the dependence on finite grant funding, indicates the need for sustainable investments in new teacher retention efforts at scale, especially in the more remote regions of the state.

Policy Recommendations for Issue 4:

Several EPPs have recently developed programs specifically targeted toward LWS teachers, whose needs in terms of getting fully licensed are often somewhat different from typical undergraduate students. In particular, LWS teachers working full-time in rural districts often need flexible options for coursework, including virtual offerings that reduce the need to drive long distances in the evening after a full day of teaching. One example of an EPP we learned about in our work that are helping to meet the needs of the rapidly-growing cadre of rural LWS teachers include UW-Madison's Project ACRES, which is fully online.

Appendix A: Program Nominations by Survey Respondents

Table A-1. Thirty-One Single-Nominated Programs

Program Name	Nominating Organization	Rural-Specific?	Pipeline Phase(s) Addressed*	Target Audience(s)	Intended Outcome(s)
Accelerated Teacher Education Program	Edgewood College	No	During college	Graduate students	Student - rural field experience; Graduation and licensure; Teacher hired; Teacher hired rural school
Autism for Educators	Chippewa Valley Tech College	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Non-licensed adults	Professional development

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE IN WISCONSIN'S RURAL SCHOOLS

Career and Technical Education 10	CESA 10	No	Pre-college, during college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Precollege students, undergraduate students	Career interest; College access/enrollment; college persistence/retention
CESA #11 Principal Leadership Network	CESA 11	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	School/district administrators	Professional development
CESA #11 School Counselor Network	CESA 11	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Current classroom teachers or school counselors	Professional development
Children's Festival	UWSP	No	During college	Undergraduate students	Student - rural exposure
College for Rural Wisconsin	UW-Madison	Yes	Pre-college	Pre-college students	college access/enrollment
none/too generic to include	CESA 9	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	School/district administrators; classroom teachers	Professional development
Graduate Cohort Program Development, Student teacher placement	UW-Oshkosh	No	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring, professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Graduate students; school/district administrators; classroom teachers	Student - rural field experience; graduation and licensure
Harju Center for Equity in Education	UW-Stevens Point	Yes	Pre-College, During College, New Teacher Recruitment & Hiring	Pre-College students, Undergraduate students	College access/enrollment; college persistence/retention
Harju Equity in Education Fellowship	UW-Stevens Point	No	During College	Graduate students	OTHER - this one is an outlier because it funds graduate research
Job Fair	CESA 2	No	During College, New Teacher Recruitment and Hiring	Undergraduate students	Teacher hired
Literacy Lab	UWSP	No	During College	Undergraduate students	Students - rural exposure
My Choice Delivery	CESA 9	No	During College	(no response)	College access/enrollment; college persistence/retention

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE IN WISCONSIN'S RURAL SCHOOLS

Neale Fellowship	UWSP	No	During College	Undergraduate students	Student - rural exposure
New Teacher Center Mentors	CESA 2	Yes	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	School/district administrators; classroom teachers	Professional development
Online PE Post-Bac	UW–Superior	No	During College, Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Non-licensed adults	Graduation and licensure
Paid practicum partnership with Eau Claire Area School District	Chippewa Valley Tech College	No	During College, New Teacher Recruitment & Hiring	Undergraduate students	College persistence/retention; teacher hired
Peer Review Mentor Grant	CESA 7	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Classroom teachers	Professional development
Professional Development Grants for Rural Schools	UW–Stevens Point	Yes	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	School/district administrators; classroom teachers	Professional development
Project ACRES	UW–Madison	Yes	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	classroom teachers	Professional development
Reading Teacher and Reading Specialist Add-on Licensure	UWSP	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Classroom teachers	Graduation and licensure; professional development
Recruitment and Retention Coordinator	UW–Oshkosh	No	Pre-College, During College	Pre-college students; undergraduate students	Career interest; college access/enrollment; college persistence/retention
Rural Education Conference and Job Fair	UW–Platteville	Yes	During College, New Teacher Recruitment & Hiring, Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Undergraduate students; school/district administrators; classroom teachers	Student - rural exposure; student - rural field experience; teacher hired; teacher hired rural school
Rural Schools Consortium,	CESA 7	Yes	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	School/district administrators; classroom teachers	Professional development

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE IN WISCONSIN'S RURAL SCHOOLS

Scholarships for Rural Student Teachers through WEDC grant	UW–Eau Claire	Yes	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Undergraduate students	Student - rural field experience; graduation and licensure
School Counselor preparation in rural districts	UW–Superior	Yes	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Graduate students	College persistence/retention; student–rural field experience; graduation and licensure; teacher hired rural school
Science Fair judging at Riverside Elementary	UWSP	No	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Undergraduate students	Student–rural exposure
SPECED4U	UW–Superior	No	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Undergraduate students; non-licensed adults	Graduation and licensure
Special Education Transition to Teaching: SETT	UW–Eau Claire	No	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	non-licensed adults	Graduation and licensure
WEDC New Teacher Network	St. Norbert College	Yes	Pre-college, during college, professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Precollege students, undergrad students enrolled in education courses, school and/or district administrators, practicing classroom teachers	Matriculation of rural students into college, Exposure of student (any geography) to rural education, Successful job placement in rural school

Table A-2. Summary Table for Programs with Multiple Nominations

Program Name	Nominating Organization	Rural-Specific?	Pipeline Phase(s) Addressed*	Target Audience(s)	Intended Outcome(s)
Dual Credit	UW–Platteville; UW–Whitewater; Western Technical College	No	Pre-college	Pre-college students	Career interest; College access/enrollment; college persistence/retention
Educators Rising	Educators Rising; CESA 10; UWSP	No	Pre-college	Pre-college students	Career interest

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE IN WISCONSIN'S RURAL SCHOOLS

Excellence in Teaching Program	CESA 9 (3x)	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Classroom teachers; non-licensed adults	Graduation and licensure
Rural School Teacher Talent Grant	UW–Superior; St. Norbert College; CESA 11; UW–River Falls; UW–Stout; Ripon College; UWEC, Viterbo University; UW–La Crosse; CESA 5; College of Menominee Nation; UW-Stevens Point; UW–Superior	Yes	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Undergraduate students	Student - rural field experience; graduation and licensure
Special Education Teacher Induction Program	CESA 9; CESA 10	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Classroom teachers	Professional development
Student Teaching Placements	UW–Whitewater; UWSP; College of Menominee Nation; UW–Oshkosh; UW–Stevens Point	No	During college, new teacher recruitment & hiring	Undergraduate students	Teacher hired; teacher hired by rural school
Teacher Training/licensure	CESA 2; CESA 7	No	Professional support and/or opportunities for current educators	Graduate students; school/district administrators; classroom teachers	Graduation and licensure

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