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# ROBERT WITTKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 62<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 342  
Assembly Committee on Education  
September 28, 2023

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Committee Chair Kitchens and Members:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 342 (AB 342) relating to allowing school boards to employ a school district administrator who is not licensed by the Department of Public Instruction. Turnover in school district administrators since 2020 is greater than it has been in decades and schools seeing the vast majority of turnover are those serving our most vulnerable students. In my area of the state, we've seen school district administrators walk into one school district for a year or two and then out to another – some have move three times since I was elected to the state assembly. Is this helpful to school staff, families, and most importantly students?

In the early 1990's Milwaukee Public Schools were exempted from the requirement to have every administrator hold a license issued by the DPI. Assembly Bill 342 would afford all Wisconsin school district boards more hiring control for their school district administrator positions by removing the required licensure by the DPI. It is an option for school districts, not a mandate.

Wisconsin rural schools have greater challenges attracting administrators to their communities – AB 342 would offer an option for an area manager such as a CEO, CFO or perhaps an academic professional to apply for consideration by the local school board. Administrators by definition oversee all the departments and schools within the district. They may hire and supervise teachers, certainly they would create and manage budgets, and provide the oversight of educational programs and curriculum as current law requires. In general, school district administrators are not classroom instructors they are managers of the people and the program/business functions of the school district.

AB 342 would allow much needed flexibility for hiring school district administrators. It is a simple change that I believe would provide long-term stability to schools facing the revolving door of educational leadership. I hope you agree and will support recommending passage of this bill.

Thank you again for holding a public hearing on AB 342.



# DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

## Testimony on AB 342

*September 28th, 2023*

Good morning Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Education. Thank you for holding a public hearing today on Assembly Bill 342, which I have authored alongside Rep. Wittke to help address the growing turnover rates amongst school superintendents and district administrators in Wisconsin.

At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, just over 25% of Wisconsin's public school districts had a different superintendent than the year before, up from 15% the previous school year. Going into the 2020-2021 school year, 17.7% of Wisconsin superintendents either switched districts or left the role entirely. School districts serving our most vulnerable students are the experiencing the greatest level of instability at the administrative level, with both urban and rural districts seeing a turnover rate above 18% in recent years. Often, districts will fill their administrative vacancies by hiring another district's superintendent, leaving them to compete for a limited number of applicants in a thin talent pool.

AB 342 aims to remedy this problem by expanding the pool of applicants for school district administrator positions and opening them up to qualified individuals who may not have a license from the Department of Public Instruction. Under current law, school boards can only hire a superintendent that holds a license issued to them by DPI, with Milwaukee Public Schools being the only district in the state that is exempt from this requirement. Our bill creates a similar exemption for the other 420 public school districts across Wisconsin.

By lifting this requirement, we will give more control to local school boards when conducting their superintendent search and making hiring decisions. This allows school districts to consider candidates with diverse backgrounds and life experiences for the position while also expanding the applicant pool to include individuals who are already connected to the community. This will be especially helpful for rural school districts who are currently seeing a greater challenge when it comes to recruitment and retention.

We have seen time and time again that the one-size-fits-all approach to education does not work. If we are willing to admit that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work within our classroom walls, we should also acknowledge that it does not always work in our district offices as well. In a time where we are seeing higher levels of turnover amongst administrators, it is important that we expand the pool of applicants and provide school districts with the tools and options they need to make the best hire for their community.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 342, and I hope we can count on your support for this bill.



September 28, 2023

**Assembly Committee on Education**

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Testimony  
2023 Assembly Bill 342**

Thank you, Chairperson Kitchens and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Jennifer Kammerud and I am the director of the Licensing, Educator Advancement and Development Team at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). DPI is here today to oppose 2023 Assembly Bill 342 (AB 342).

AB 342 would eliminate any requirement for licensure to be hired as and perform all the duties of a school district administrator. Practically, this means the state is saying no specific training, knowledge, skills, or abilities are important enough to be required in law to lead a school district. This is harmful to our students, educators, and public schools in the state. How do school districts improve student outcomes; support strategies to better serve various populations of students; evaluate educators for effective teaching practices; make decisions on liability matters; advise the board on policies related to student nondiscrimination, school discipline, mandatory reporting, seclusion and restraint, special education services, grading practices, student transportation, food services, adoption of effective curricular materials; and hire appropriately licensed teachers if the school district administrator has no required experience, skills, or knowledge in these areas?

While the department understands that school boards will look to hire the best most qualified individual, this bill breaks the state's promise to the public that individuals in these positions possess a certain set of experiences, knowledge, skills, dispositions, and abilities to serve the public and oversee the schools students are entrusted to every day.

Current law requires that to be eligible for the district administrator license an applicant must meet the following qualifications:

- Hold, or be eligible to hold, a Tier II, III, or IV teaching license or pupil services license.
- Hold a principal license.
- Completed at least six semesters of teaching experience or six semesters of pupil services experience, including 540 hours of classroom teaching experience.
- Completed an approved educator preparation program culminating in an education specialist degree, its equivalent, or a doctoral degree.

Not having this preparation and experience would impact small and rural schools most. It is in those schools that district administrators must wear many hats. Most of our school districts are small with our smallest districts having under 100 students. As you can imagine, school district administrators in small schools are doing everything from special education to business services to principal to curriculum and instruction, to human resources, to teacher. They are responsible for

the implementation of all state and federal laws. The district administrator is allowed to carry out all these functions and responsibilities. Even in larger schools, however, where you have multiple licensed administrators with specific knowledge and expertise, it is important for a district administrator to have the knowledge to understand the district-wide implications of decisions and policies as well as the ability to step in and perform those functions.

If this bill were to go into effect, there would be some work that an unlicensed individual would be unable to do. For instance, under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act only licensed individuals are allowed to carry out special education responsibilities in schools. Additionally, there may be liabilities associated with an untrained and unlicensed individual performing certain work such as evaluating educators when employment actions based on those evaluations must be taken.

In removing licensure requirements, there is the very practical risk to the number one responsibility we all share - student safety. In applying for a license applicants complete state and federal background checks, but the DPI also requires a separate criminal and competency report and does a review to determine if the applicant has had disciplinary action taken by any of the other 50 state education agencies or the District of Columbia through a database that is only available to state education agencies. Conversely, the DPI also participates in this database to register official action the department has taken on licenses should educators move and apply for licenses in one of those jurisdictions.

The department understands that the hiring situation is increasingly difficult across the state. At the same time, the acquisition of experience and preparation matters. There are options already available under the law to address these needs.

One option is the Tier I one-year administrator license. Tier I licenses are licenses where an applicant has not yet met the full requirements for a license. Under Administrative Code PI 34.035 any educator who has six semesters of teaching experience and holds a principal license is eligible for a Tier I one-year district administrator license as long as they are admitted into a preparation program leading to licensure in the administrative position, the employing board requests the license, and there is a plan to complete the licensure program within two years. This license is renewable for an additional year.

Another option is one that occurs occasionally when a school board hires a licensed business manager to lead the district. When this occurs, the department works with the hired individual to ensure that responsibilities that lie outside of the scope of the business manager license are covered by others in the district who have the appropriate licensure to carry out duties such as special education and direction of curriculum and instruction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

If you would like additional information, please contact Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison, at [kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov) or (608) 264-6716.

September 27, 2023

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education:

I am writing you today in support of Assembly Bill 342 as a means to alleviate hiring challenges, particularly in rural Districts across our state. This bill empowers citizens and their elected school boards to select, hire and retain the talent that is right for their unique set of challenges and opportunities.

As a parent, school board member and business professional, I am concerned with the plummeting performance of so many of our State's public schools. We need leadership, not licensing and red tape; talent, not titles; and respect for the leadership of our elected, local school boards. After all, if we are entrusted to choose a state level superintendent via general election to head the DPI, how are we unqualified to choose a superintendent for our singular school district via the leadership of our elected school board members?

In considering this bill, I urge you ask yourself the following three questions:

- 1.) **Is the current approach logical?** How does requiring all but one school district to tick the licensure box when searching for the right person to lead the day-to-day operations of a school district make sense? Milwaukee's schools face a lot of challenges and by all measurements I have seen, they are failing students on many fronts. Would requiring Milwaukee Public Schools to license superintendents change their statistics? If not, then not only is the current approach not logical, it is useless. If yes, then I would again say that the current approach is both illogical and useless.
- 2.) **Is the current approach sustainable?** It certainly isn't for the rural districts facing an ever-shrinking pool of DPI-blessed candidates. Furthermore, how does licensure proactively support the challenges facing rural communities and rural students or their academic outcomes? Perhaps recruiting from within or selecting a proven leader from elsewhere in the community would lengthen the term superintendents serve, particularly in rural schools which face intense competition from the draw of larger districts.
- 3.) **Is the current approach fair?** The DPI's stated mission is to, "...advance equitable, transformative and sustainable educational experiences that develop learners, schools, libraries and communities in Wisconsin." As the current law stands, it is certainly not fair or "equitable" since Milwaukee has an exemption. This bill is simply requiring a level recruitment playing field. Secondly, I assert that it is a real stretch to say the DPI's involvement in demanding licensing of a locally selected Superintendent is aligned with its stated mission.

Perhaps the most important question of all is, "DOES THE CURRENT LAW ALLEVIATE AND HELP FULFILL LEADERSHIP GAPS IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS?" Notice I did not say academic professional gaps or talent gaps. I believe leadership is what is lacking at every level of our society and our children desperately need leaders at the helm. Leadership skills transcend position and area of expertise. Leaders know how to build, empower and inspire effective teams. They relish in seeing those below their paygrade thrive and grow because they understand how the entire ship rises with the tide. They believe in nurturing talent, delegating but also digging in and doing whatever needs to be done. And they absolutely understand the necessity of delivering results.

Many Wisconsin schools are not delivering results for their students. It's necessary and urgent that we don't stick to "how it's done, just because". If you are unable to resoundingly say "YES" in answer to the questions above, then I anticipate that as leaders in your own right, you will do away with this ineffective licensing law and support AB 342.

After all, voters don't require you to be licensed by a government department to lead and you likely have very different background experiences and areas of expertise. Therefore, neither should you require it of those selected locally by school boards to lead the day-to-day operations of their district.

Sincerely,  
Amy Richards  
Kettle Moraine School Board Clerk and Concerned Citizen

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding Assembly Bill 342, a proposal that seeks to eliminate the licensing requirement for district administrators/superintendents of schools. With over 28 years of experience in public education, I bring a wealth of knowledge and insight to this matter. While I acknowledge the challenges faced by school districts in finding qualified candidates, I strongly advocate for the retention of rigorous standards for individuals aspiring to hold the highest positions within our public school districts.

My extensive experience in public education has taught me the importance of accountability, and adherence to state and federal education laws, and financial regulations, all while aligning with the Wisconsin Administrator Standards. Reducing these requirements would only serve to erode the quality of education our students receive. Therefore, I implore you to oppose Senate Bill 335.

I am more than willing to engage in further discussions with any of you to explore ways in which we can guarantee that Wisconsin's school districts are led by educators and leaders who truly merit the public trust that is vital for these positions.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Melissa J. Bonds*

**Melissa J. Bonds, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor, Education

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[Meet with Me](#)

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Ronett Jacobs, and I have dedicated nearly three decades to the noble cause of education. In my journey from a classroom teacher to my current role in a post-secondary institution, I have witnessed the intricacies of our education system. Moreover, as the wife of a dedicated district-level administrator with a Director License, Admin License, and Superintendent License, I've seen the leadership side of our schools firsthand.

The matter of Assembly Bill 342 has deeply concerned me. Similar to SB 225, this bill aims to remove the licensing requirement for district administrators/superintendents. I understand that we are in an era of reform and flexibility, but I firmly believe that specific benchmarks, such as licensure, are not merely red tape; they ensure a quality standard.

The role of a superintendent isn't just about administration; it's about vision, strategy, and understanding the pedagogical landscape. The Superintendent's License isn't merely a certificate; it represents a comprehensive grasp of our educational ecosystem. It ensures that the person at the helm understands teachers, students, and communities' challenges, needs, and aspirations.

By eliminating this requirement, we risk placing our districts under the guidance of individuals who may not be adequately prepared for the nuances and complexities of our education system. This could inadvertently erode the quality of education our students receive and dilute the public's trust in our school leadership.

While I recognize the difficulty in finding qualified candidates, there are better answers than diluting our standards. Instead, we should be focused on nurturing and elevating our potential educational leaders, ensuring they meet the rigorous criteria that a role of such importance demands. I request that you reconsider the implications of AB 342 and SB 225. I am always open to engaging in further discussions on this matter, and together, we can find a solution that upholds the integrity of our education system while addressing the challenges at hand.

Thank you for being so dedicated to Wisconsin's education. I trust in your wisdom and commitment to making decisions in the best interest of our students and educators.

best,

*Joyful Educator*

ronett d. jacobs B.S.Ed. '98, M.Ed. '04, Ed.D. '21  
Professional Studies, Education Division, Assistant Professor  
Innovation and Design Director of Leaders Advancing Character and Culture in Schools  
(LACCS pronounced "laces")

Zoom Link for Virtual Meetings <https://alverno.zoom.us/j/4915523746>

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."

~Dr. MLK, Jr.

Dear Education Committee Representatives,

I am concerned about AB 342, which would remove/lessen the requirement for licensure for district administrators/ superintendents of schools. I understand the difficulty with districts finding qualified applicants, but I hope you to maintain high standards for those who will potentially serve in the highest levels for our public school districts. The current licensing requirements help ensure we keep high caliber candidates that are properly educated in state and federal education law, financial requirements, and are aligned to the Wisconsin Administrator Standards. Lowering these requirements is a recipe for further degradation of quality schooling for students, especially in areas that have the biggest needs and challenges. Please reject SB 335.

Sincerely,

Thor A. Stolen, Ph.D.

Thor A. Stolen, PhD  
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Dear Education Committee Representatives,

I am writing to express my concern about AB 342, which would remove the requirement for licensure for district administrators/ superintendents of schools. While I understand and appreciate the challenges around districts finding qualified applicants, I strongly urge you to maintain high standards for those who would seek to serve in the highest levels for our public school districts. Current licensing requirements ensure oversight, fidelity to state and federal education law and financial requirements, and are aligned to the Wisconsin Administrator Standards. Lowering these requirements is a recipe for further degradation of quality schooling for students. I urge you to reject SB 335. I am happy to connect with any of you to further discuss how we can ensure that Wisconsin districts are led by educators and leaders worthy of the public trust critical for those positions,

Sincerely,

Desiree Pointer Mace, Ph.D.

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*Note: apart from email, I can be reached via phone at 414.382.6345 (it will ring through to my mobile if I am off campus), and office hours can be arranged by appointment in my Zoom Personal Meeting room. My regular office hours are 7am-8am on Tuesday mornings, Central time.*

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