



# DUEY STROEBEL

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

## Testimony on SB 335

*September 26, 2023*

Good morning Chairman Jagler and members of the Senate Committee on Education. Thank you for holding a public hearing today on Senate Bill 335, 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.

SB 335 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 SB 335, and I hope we can count on your support for this bill.



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# ROBERT WITTKE

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

Senate Bill 335

Senate Committee on Education

September 26, 2023

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Committee Chair Jagler and Members:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 335 (SB 335) relating to allowing school boards to employ a school district administrator who is not licensed by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). 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 moved 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. Senate Bill 335 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 community – SB 335 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 to serve as district administrator. 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.

SB 335 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 SB 335.



September 26, 2023

**Senate Committee on Education**

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Testimony  
2023 Senate Bill 335**

Thank you, Chairperson Jagler 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 Senate 335 (SB 335).

SB 335 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.



**School of Education**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**September 26, 2023**

Chairman Jagler and members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Barbara Sramek, and I am here on behalf of the UW–Madison School of Education. I have worked in Wisconsin schools for 35 years and served as superintendent of Marshall Public Schools for 13 years. I currently lead the UW–Madison School of Education’s K-12 Education Leadership master’s degree program and serve as the Director of the Wisconsin Idea Executive PhD Cohort Program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for information only on Senate Bill 335, which would eliminate the licensure requirement for K-12 superintendents in Wisconsin.

Our K-12 school systems in Wisconsin are vital to our state and the success of future generations. We hear how districts across the state are experiencing challenges and turnover — from bus drivers to teachers to counselors — all the way to school leadership and superintendents.

While we understand the intent of policymakers is to remove barriers for people to pursue careers in K-12 education administration, licensure — and the in-depth education behind it — is necessary to ensure our students and their families are served by qualified and prepared professionals.

We must consider the problem this bill is trying to solve: perceived vacancies of superintendents. According to the Wisconsin Policy Forum, 16.2% of districts in Wisconsin changed superintendents each year on average between 2009 and 2021. Turnover is happening, and that number, according to recent data from the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, has increased significantly from 2017 to 2022. This is thought to be due to a growing number of leaders who are retiring as well as career changes exacerbated by the pandemic. It should also be noted that the average tenure of a superintendent in the state is around three years, which is on par with other states.

The good news is that when there are vacancies, there are licensed professionals to fill these jobs. Currently, all the superintendent positions in the state are filled. There is not a shortage of people to serve as superintendents in this state and there are no vacancies without interim leaders at this time, as confirmed this week by the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators.

**School of Education Office of the Dean**

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In addition, we contend that licensure is worth preserving. Superintendents must possess a range of skills to do their jobs well. They not only need to know the fundamentals of teaching and human development, but they also must manage complex public institutions that serve everyone. There is no other institution with such importance to our youth — and it would be ill-advised to remove the standards through licensure that best serve children and their families.

Licensure provides training and education that is critical for anyone working with children and young adults to know. Through such training and education, superintendents learn how to lead complex institutions while explicitly promoting positive learning outcomes and the success of their students. They also learn about the laws that keep students safe emotionally, physically, and psychologically during their learning; they become knowledgeable about the latest research on educational policy; they learn skills on how to work productively with educators, staff, families, and governing bodies; and they learn about the complicated systems involved in school finance that are unique to education and absent in private businesses or nonprofits.

At UW–Madison, there are multiple tracks and programs by which people can pursue certification as K-12 administrators. These programs explicitly build the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential for leaders to support learning for all students. The students also become well-versed in the 11 state administrator standards with a strong instructional leadership focus. They receive training in resource allocation, instructional and cultural leadership, professional development and evaluation, working with locally elected school boards, legal aspects of administrative practice, and community engagement.

In a time when our schools are facing workforce shortages across the board, it is necessary to redouble our efforts to support the education and preparation of school administrators to ensure that they have the coursework and hands-on experiences to best position them to engage in the complex and important work of being a school superintendent. University-based superintendent preparation programs provide an indispensable foundation in organizational theory, resource allocation, and data-informed decision making. Once students complete the degree requirements, coursework, and field experiences, they are eligible for a license.

Leadership matters at all levels. Communities across Wisconsin expect leadership from the superintendents in their districts, and the children of each district need and deserve leaders who are knowledgeable, well-prepared, and invested in their success in every locale.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact this legislation could have on K-12 education in Wisconsin. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the Dean of the UW–Madison School of Education, Diana Hess, at [dhess@wisc.edu](mailto:dhess@wisc.edu).