

## Trends in the Use of Emergency Credentials in Wisconsin Public Schools

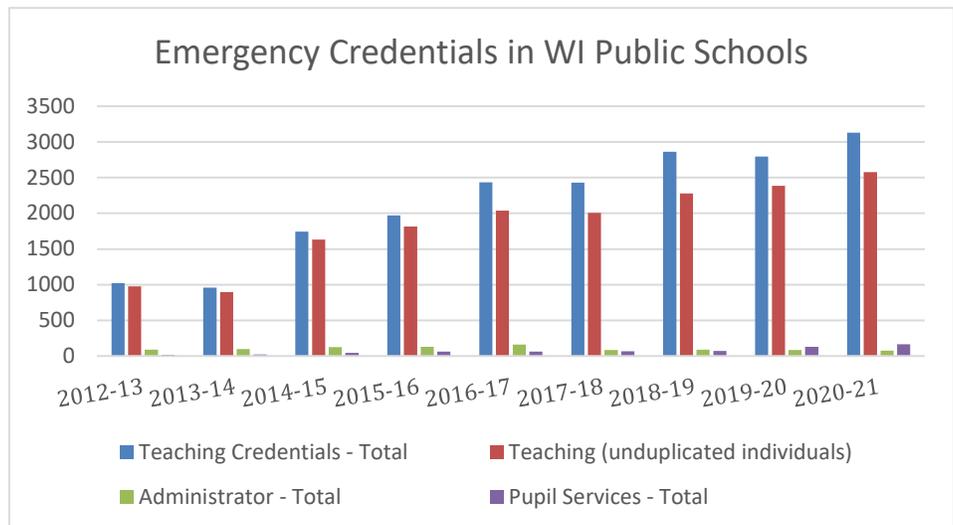
The goal of this brief is to summarize key trends in the use of emergency credentials within Wisconsin’s public schools between 2012-13 and 2020-21. This topic is of significance because increased reliance by Wisconsin school districts on emergency credentialing as a strategy for filling vacant positions could serve as an indicator of worsening educator shortages. To the extent that districts serving more students of color and from lower-income families are relying more on emergency-certified educators than other districts, there are also potential equity-related policy implications associated with the use of emergency credentials. The four key topics addressed the topics in this brief are as follows:

### Key Topics

- 1. Trends in emergency credential use in WI public schools
- 1. Frequency of extended use of emergency credentials
- 1. Use of emergency credentials by region and locality
- Characteristics of districts locale/poverty using emergency credentials

#### Question 1: How has the overall use of emergency credentials in Wisconsin public schools changed in recent years, and for which specific types of positions?

Between 2012-13 and 2020-21, Wisconsin districts’ use of emergency credentialing steadily increased for teaching and pupil services credentials (see graph below). Teaching emergency credentials increased by 206.5%, while pupil services emergency credentials increased by 864.7%. Special Education emergency credential increases were greatest in number (+305.8%). While smaller in numerical terms, several other emergency teaching credential area also saw large percentage increases including, Math (270.4%), Bilingual-Bicultural (72.9%), Science (89.7%), and Foreign Language (67.3%). Within the Pupil Services category, significant increases in emergency credentials have been observed for all three sub-categories (500.0% for School Counselors, 2666.7% for School Psychologists, and 428.6% for School Social Workers).



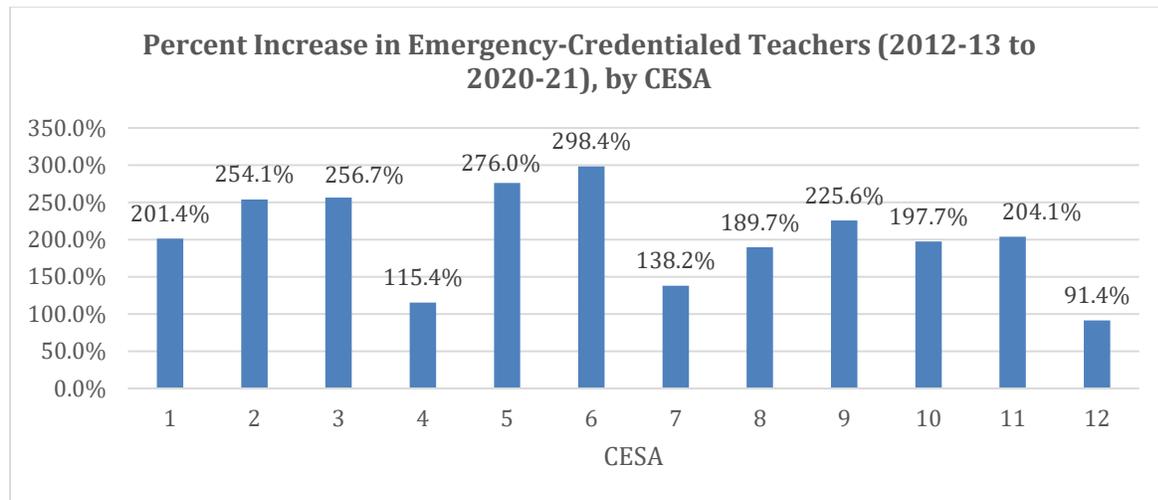
**Question 2: How frequently are educators who are working under emergency credentials “extending their stay” (working past the intended one-year period) and “doing double duty” (working concurrently during the same school year under emergency certification, either in multiple districts or multiple roles within the same district)?**

For teacher, administrator, and pupil service emergency licenses, the percentage of individual educators who have “extended their stay” by working in the same district and role under emergency credentials beyond the intended one-year period has increased considerably. Among teachers working under emergency credentials, nearly half (43.3%, excluding those working under three-year license with stipulations) were still working in the same district and role the following year.

**Question 3: How widespread is the use of emergency credentials (particularly for teaching) across Wisconsin school districts (at a statewide, regional, and local level, and among the state’s largest districts), and how has this changed over time?**

The percentage of Wisconsin’s local school districts and independent charter schools employing at least one emergency-certified teacher increased from 52.4% in 2012-13 to 86.5% in 2020-21. Reliance on emergency-credentialed teachers has particularly increased among the state’s rural school districts. While less than half (44.2%) of Wisconsin’s rural districts had at least one emergency-certified teacher in 2012-13, more than three-fourths (81.8%) did in 2020-21.

Additionally, nearly all of Wisconsin’s 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) had more than a 100% increase in teaching emergency credentials between 2012-13 and 2020-21, and 7 of the 12 CESAs had increases of more than 200%. CESA 1 and CESA 2 had the highest reliance on emergency-credentialed teachers, both in an absolute sense (the total number of emergency-certified teachers in 2020-21) and as a percentage of all teachers.

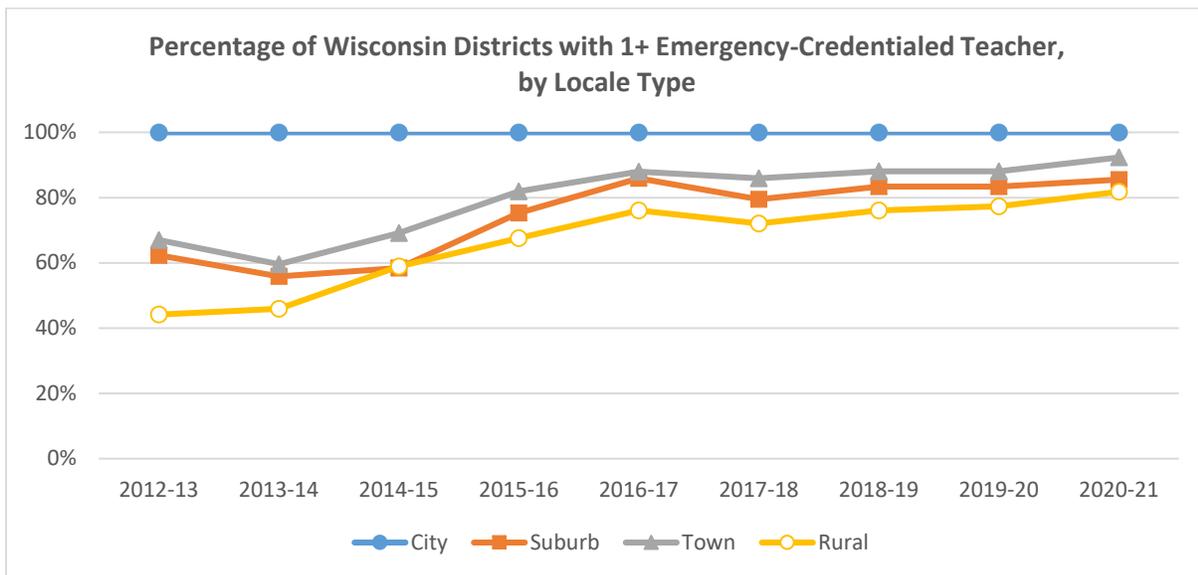


**Question 4: To what extent is the use of emergency teaching credentials associated with selected district characteristics, such as geographic locale type (city, suburb, town, rural) and poverty rate?**

Collectively, the five largest districts in Wisconsin (in descending order of enrollment: Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, Kenosha, and Racine) employed 1017 emergency-credentialed teachers in 2020-21, compared to 323 in 2012-13. This represented an increase of 214.9%. In 2020-21, emergency-credentialed teachers represented 9.3% of all teachers working in Wisconsin’s five largest districts combined. This percentage was

up considerably from just 3.0% of all teachers in these same districts in 2012-13 (and nearly twice as high as the 5.3% of all teachers statewide working under emergency credentials in 2020-21).

These five Wisconsin school districts have the highest poverty rates and maintain the highest percentages of all teachers working under emergency certification every year, a trend which highlights the equity implications inherent in having students with the highest level of need taught more frequently by emergency-credentialed instructors. It is important to track not only how often this strategy is used overall, but for which types of positions and by districts of which demographics. Increased reliance on emergency-certified teachers raises important questions about equity, to the extent that some districts (most notably, the largest in Wisconsin, and those enrolling higher shares of students from lower-income families) are using teachers with emergency credentials more frequently than other districts.



### Conclusions

Monitoring trends in the use of emergency teaching credentials within Wisconsin public schools is a useful exercise for at least two reasons. First, the emergency certification data provide one important signal of educator shortages and where those shortages are most pronounced. To the extent that Wisconsin districts are increasingly relying on emergency-credentialed teachers to fill vacant teaching positions, there is support for the notion that demand is exceeding supply. At the same time, a more nuanced review of the data suggests that demand for teachers is more of a challenge for some types of teaching positions (Special Education, Math/Science, etc.) than for others and for some districts more than others. Second, the state’s five largest districts, which enroll a disproportionate share of students of color, students with disabilities, English Learners, and students from lower-income families, and districts with the highest rates of poverty, appear to use emergency-certified teachers at higher rates than districts enrolling lower numbers of these student subgroups. The reliance of Wisconsin districts on emergency-certified teachers will be an important trend to watch in the future, especially in relation to the provision of equitable educational opportunities.

Note: This policy brief, produced by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as part of the Region 10 Comprehensive Center, is one in a series examining selected topics related to Wisconsin’s educator workforce.