

Making Matters Worse: School Funding, Achievement Gaps and Poverty under Wisconsin Act 32

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May 4, 2012

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Introduction

Wisconsin is a national leader in providing quality public education. Wisconsin has the highest high school graduation rate (Balfanz et al., 2012), the third highest ACT scores (Wisconsin DPI, 2011, August 17), and the highest Advanced Placement success percentage of any Midwestern state (Wisconsin DPI, 2011, February 9). At the same time, Wisconsin struggles to address achievement gaps for poor and minority students, and to provide adequate funding for all school districts. This paper examines the impact of current state education expenditures on the state's longstanding commitment to providing a quality public education for all students in Wisconsin.

Specifically, this paper analyzes the impact of Wisconsin Act 32, the state biennial budget law for 2011-13, on education funding, teacher quality, student learning, and property taxpayers. We compare state funding reductions in high poverty school districts under Act 32 to reductions in low poverty school districts measured by student eligibility for free and reduced price lunches. The analysis has important educational, legal, economic, and social implications. The Wisconsin State Constitution guarantees school districts that are "as nearly uniform as practicable" (Wisconsin Constitution, Article X, Section 3). Dramatic differences in achievement for poor and minority students, reductions in education funding, and an increase in the numbers of poor, diverse, and special needs students put the state system at risk of fulfilling its commitment to provide a "basic" education for all children (Wisconsin State Statutes

121.01).¹ The analysis examines implications of reduced budgets and educational outcomes to this vision of educational opportunity for all children.

We find that Act 32 makes matters worse by increasing funding gaps for poor and minority students. The reality of budget cuts hits low-income students harder, as reductions in state revenue are more than twice as large in high poverty school districts as in low poverty school districts. These reductions in state aid decrease the number of educators, and the compensation and incentives for recruiting and retaining high quality teachers, especially in high need districts. They reduce program support for the students most in need, while increasing class sizes and property taxes in high poverty school districts.

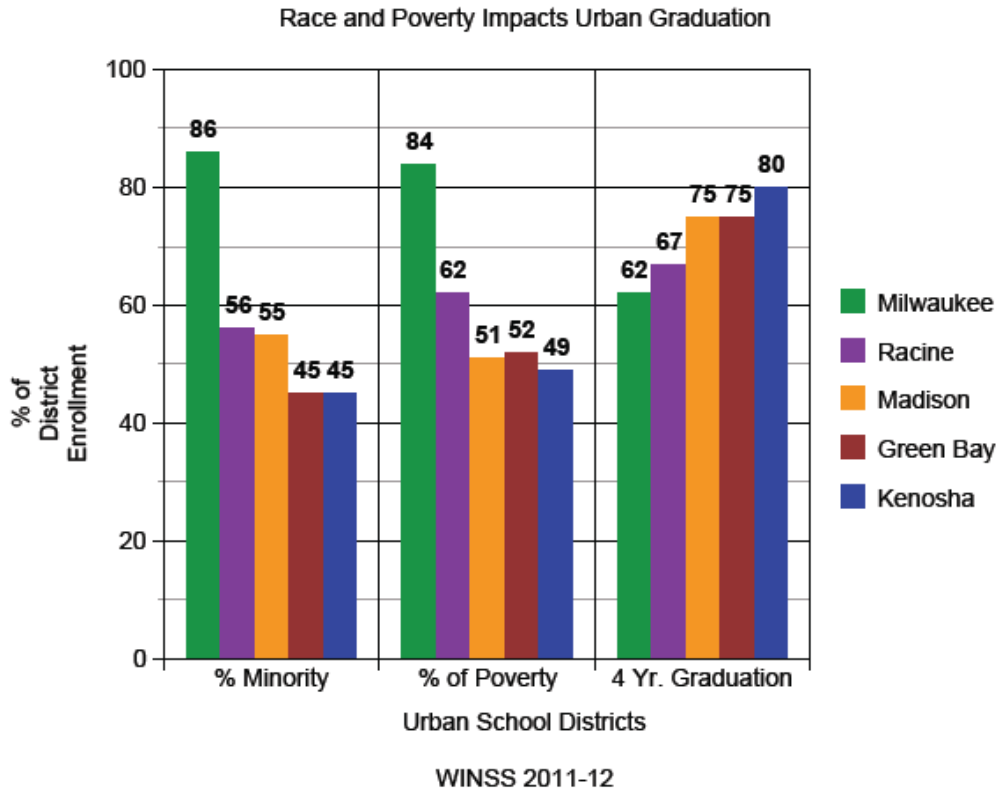
The Wisconsin Education Policy Context

In keeping with the constitutionally established vision of equal opportunity for all Wisconsin children, the state has used an equalization aid formula since the early 1970's. The general concept of the equalization formula is that property-poor school districts receive more equalization aid than property-rich school districts to equalize or level property tax rates across the state. The formula has been generally effective in that it has withstood legal challenges (Vincent vs. Voight) and the differences in tax rates and school spending between poor and rich districts have been less in Wisconsin than in many other states.

¹ The actual language in Wisconsin State Statute 121.01 reads: "It is declared to be the policy of this state that education is a state function and that some relief should be afforded from the local general property tax as a source of public school revenue where such tax is excessive, and that other sources of revenue should contribute a larger percentage of the total funds needed. It is further declared that in order to provide reasonable equality of educational opportunity for all the children of this state, the state must guarantee that a basic educational opportunity be available to each pupil, but that the state should be obligated to contribute to the educational program only if the school district provides a program which meets state standards. It is the purpose of the state aid formula set forth in this subchapter to cause the state to assume a greater proportion of the costs of public education and to relieve the general property of some of its tax burden."

The state school funding equalization formula is based on property wealth and shared costs for school districts without consideration for student need. For example, the formula is not weighted to account for greater student need in districts with high rates of poverty or educational need. Since the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, achievement gaps for poor and minority students have become a growing concern, particularly in Wisconsin, which leads all states in the achievement gap between white and black students in eighth grade math achievement on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In fourth grade mathematics and eighth grade reading achievement, Wisconsin is among the five worst states. In eighth grade reading, Wisconsin black students achieve at the same level as black students in Mississippi and Tennessee.

Wisconsin does better in addressing achievement gaps between poor students and non-poor students (as measured by eligibility for free and reduced price lunch), but the gap is still larger than the national average (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Since the 1970s and the initiation of the NAEP, achievement gaps for poor and minority children have been recognized as a national issue, and the stimulus for the NCLB. Similarly, among Wisconsin's five largest school districts, achievement as measured in the four-year graduation rate is negatively related to race and poverty: the higher the percentage of minority students, the lower the graduation rate; the higher the rate of student poverty, the lower the graduation rate.



The two major sources for funding public education in Wisconsin are state aid and local property taxes. Act 32 reduced state aid and lowered state-imposed revenue caps on property taxes by 5.5%. Revenue caps were established in 1993 to limit increases in local property taxes and were regularly increased in state budgets to adjust for inflation and increases in the cost of living until the passage of the current budget. For example, the revenue limit was increased by \$200 per student in the 2010-11 state budget. This first ever reduction in the revenue limit is a loss of \$1.6 billion in revenue authority for Wisconsin school districts (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, November 15, 2011). Because Act 32 is the first reduction in the state revenue caps and the largest cut in state funding for public education in Wisconsin history (Umhoefer, 2012), continued and extended analysis of the impact of funding reductions on educational outcomes and opportunity is essential.

Method

School district budget, demographic and achievement data are examined in sixty of Wisconsin's 424 school districts. The data set is limited to sixty districts to examine the impact of Act 32 on the highest and lowest poverty districts in the state. The best available financial data regarding the impact of Act 32 is currently found in the individual district budgets used in this study retrieved from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Financial Services website. The thirty districts with the highest percentage of students eligible for the federally-sponsored free and reduced lunch program (high poverty districts) and the thirty districts with the lowest percentage of eligible students (low poverty districts) were identified using publicly available demographic data from 2010-11 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WINSS website).

High poverty district enrollments range from fifty-three students in the Norris School District to almost ninety thousand in the Milwaukee Public Schools; and from 58.7% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch in the Necedah Area School District to 96.2% eligible in the Norris School District. Low poverty districts range in enrollment from one hundred eighty-two students in the Geneva Joint 4 Elementary School District to over seven thousand in the Elmbrook School District; and from 0% students eligible for free and reduced lunch in the Geneva Joint 4, Kohler, North Lake and Whitefish Bay school districts to 13.7% eligible in the Raymond # 14 School District. Additional information about data used in the analyses and data sources is available in Appendix A.

Impact on School Districts: Reductions in state revenue hit low-income districts hardest.

There is no doubt that the historic reduction in state funding for public education in the Wisconsin 2011-13 Biennial Budget has impacted schools. At the very least, most Wisconsin

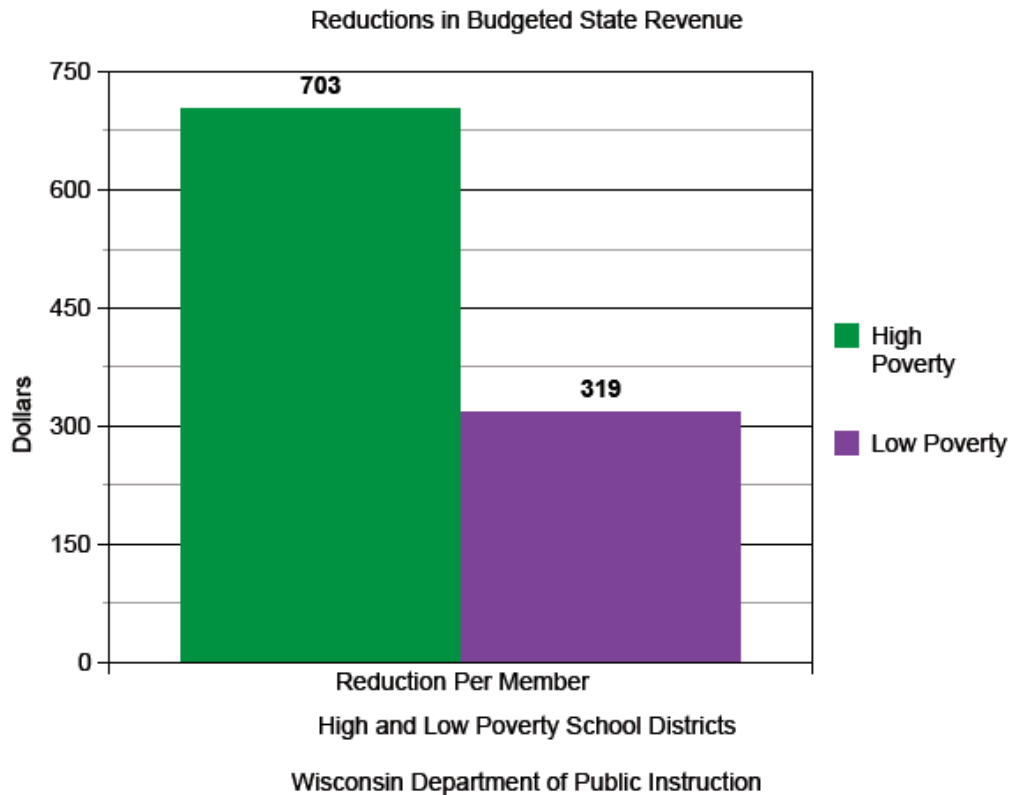
school districts reduced costs by reducing payments for employee retirement contributions and health care insurance premiums as mandated by provisions in the budget repair bill. At the worst, school districts cut educational programs and reduced the number of teachers and other school staff (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators Survey, 2011).

The Wisconsin 2011-13 Biennial State Budget or (Wisconsin Act 32) signed by Governor Walker on June 28, 2011 reduced total state aids to school districts by \$792 million. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2011) reports that 97% of the state's public school districts (411 of 424) will receive less school aid in the 2011-12 school year. In a recent study of education budget cuts in forty-six states, the per student cut of \$635 in Wisconsin is second only to the State of New Mexico (Oliff & Leachman, 2011). The current budget reduction follows a reduction of \$284 million contained in the 2009-11 biennial State budget enacted under then Governor Doyle. Over the past two Wisconsin biennial budgets state aid to public school districts has been reduced by more than a billion dollars.

In addition to the reduction in general aid, Act 32 also reduced the revenue limit in Wisconsin school districts by 5.5%. According to Reschovsky (2011) in a La Follette School of Public Affairs working paper describing the impact of reduced revenue limits, the lowered revenue cap requires that 241 of the state's 424 school districts reduce school property taxes. Given the \$792 million reduction in state revenue for Wisconsin school districts and the revenue limit loss of \$1.6 billion in property taxing authority, Act 32 has major educational policy implications that could impact the resources and quality of Wisconsin public education for years to come.

The thirty high poverty districts received average state revenue per member of \$7,237.55 in the 2010-11 budget year; the thirty low poverty districts received average state revenue per member of \$3,361.39. High poverty districts received more than twice the average state revenue per member than low poverty districts. The discrepancy in state revenue for local districts is the result of Wisconsin's long standing commitment to "equalize" school funding across property rich and property poor school districts to reduce inequity in the local property tax burden and levy rates across the state.

In the 2011-12 school budget year, high poverty school districts budgeted \$6,534.57 in state revenue per member; low poverty districts budgeted \$3,085.40 in state revenue per member. Compared with the 2010-11 budget year high poverty districts lost \$702.97 in average state revenue per member while low poverty districts lost \$318.70 in average state revenue per member. High poverty districts lost more than twice the average state revenue per member as low poverty districts.



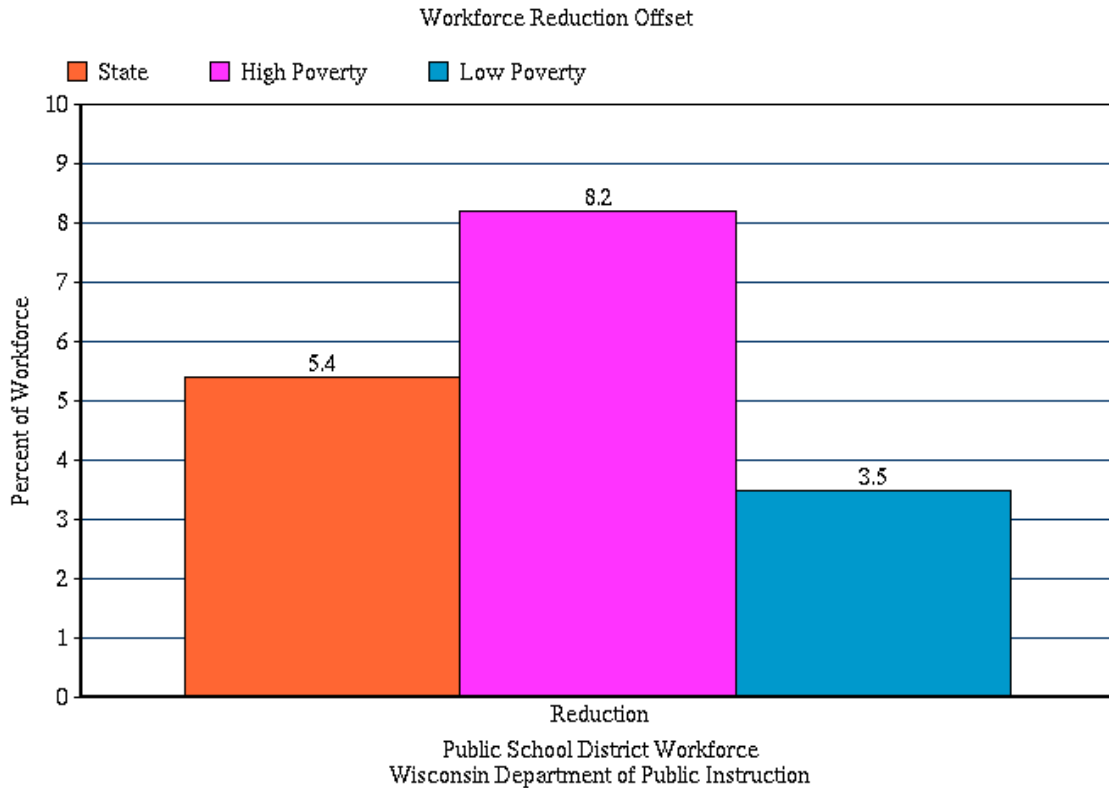
Because high poverty districts are larger, the resulting share of budget decrease for the 30 highest poverty districts was much higher than for low poverty districts. The 30 highest poverty districts lost a total of \$88,452,606 (\$702 per student times 127,842 students) compared to a loss of only \$20,299,915 (\$319 per student times 63,696 students) for the 30 lowest poverty districts.

Impact on Teachers: Reductions in the workforce and/or compensation are larger in high poverty districts than in low poverty districts,

Eighty to eighty-five percent of school district budgets are staff costs related to salary and benefits (Ellerson, 2011). Reductions in revenues must be offset by reductions in expenditures for staff which impact the size, compensation and quality of the public school workforce. We begin this analysis by examining what the impact of the Act 32 cuts would be if all of the reductions were taken in the form of reductions in the public school workforce. We also examine the impact of Act 32 cuts if all of the reductions were taken in the form of reductions in

compensation. Finally, we estimate reductions in the workforce and in employee compensation actually implemented in the 2011-12 public school budgets.

The first major policy implication from Act 32 is the possible reduction in the size of the education workforce. The state biennial budget reduces state aid by \$792 million, \$431 million in the first year of the budget and \$361 million in the second. Based on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction school staffing reports for 2010-11, average total compensation for teachers (\$50,627 average salary and \$27,052 average benefits) is estimated to be \$77,679. Using average teacher compensation as a proxy for average public school employee compensation and without considering the Act 10 mandated reductions in employee compensation, a reduction of 5.4% of the public school workforce or 5448 school employees would be needed to offset the \$431 million reduction in state aid for the 2011-12 school year. Because state revenue is reduced more in high poverty districts than in low poverty districts, the workforce must be reduced 8.2% in high poverty districts and only 3.5% in low poverty districts to make up the budget shortfalls.



Under Act 32 and Act 10 school districts have increased discretion to change employee workloads and reduce the number of district employees. For the past ten years the student to employee ratio in Wisconsin has averaged 8.3 and the student to teacher ratio averaged 12.8. Reducing the number of school employees or the number of teachers (the largest group of employees) to an employee ratio of 9 to 1 and a student teacher ratio above 13.1 would reduce the total workforce in school districts to staffing ratios not seen for many years.

Class size is inevitably impacted by a reduction in the school workforce since teachers comprise the largest category of school employees. Students in the early grades, minority and low income students show significant gains in achievement when class size are small and remain below eighteen students, and are most likely to be negatively impact by increases in class size

(Finn, J., 2002; Finn, D., & Achilles, M., 1999; Molnar, A., Smith, P., & Zahorik, J., 1999; Nye, B., Hedges, L. V., & Konstantopoulos, S., 2001, 2004; Nye, B. A., 2000).

A second major policy implication of Act 32 and Act 10 legislation is on the size and quality of the workforce in Wisconsin public schools. As it relates to public school districts, Act 10 limits collective bargaining, compensation and fringe benefits for teachers, administrators and other school employees. In effect Act 10 increases employee contributions to retirement and health insurance premiums and caps salary to reduce total employee compensation costs for local school districts.

By reducing employee compensation, most school districts without binding contracts can use the provisions of Act 10 to offset state revenue reductions and meet the legal requirement to annually balance school district budgets. Act 10 mandated reductions in employee benefits unless school districts had already negotiated labor contracts.

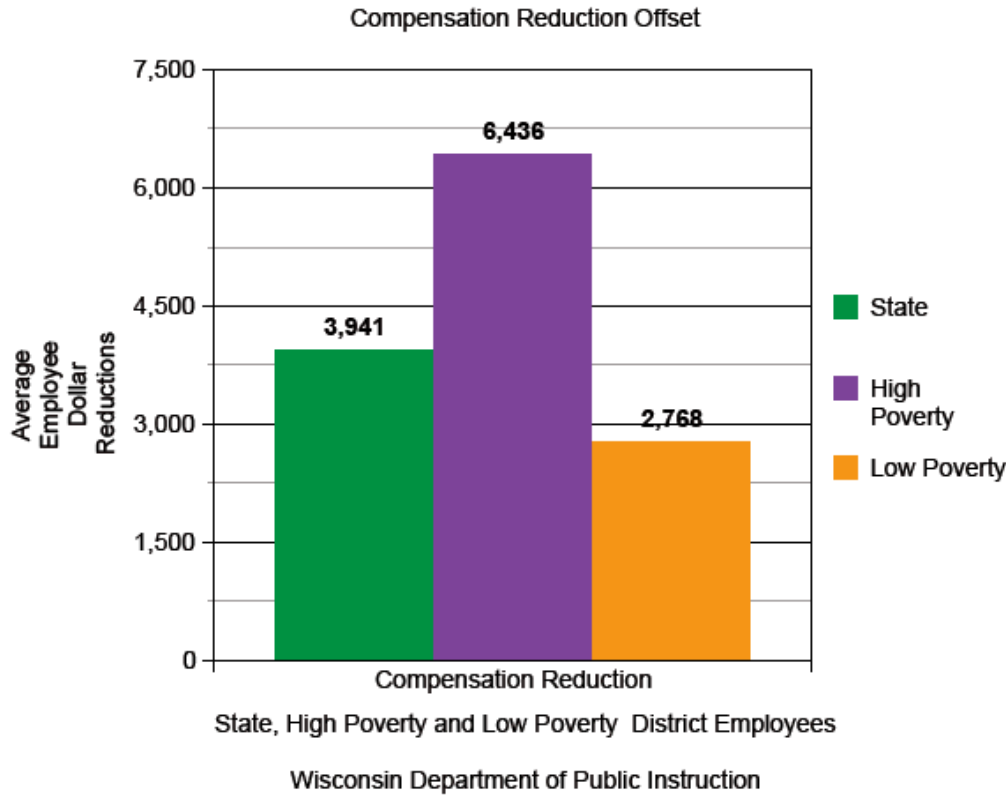
The Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates that Act 10 reduces the cost of employee retirement benefits for local school districts by \$284 million annually. Over the two years of the biennial budget retirement cost are reduced by an estimated \$568 million. Through Act 10 additional school budget savings are likely from increased employee contributions to health insurance premiums in those school districts where employees contribute less than 12% of the cost of the premium. It is more difficult to estimate savings in health care cost than savings in retirement costs. Some school districts may already require higher employee contributions, high deductibles, or are self-insured. Under Act 10 each of the 424 school districts can determine different types of health insurance carriers, benefits and employee contributions.

The Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau offers no estimate of health insurance premium savings. The governor's website estimates health insurance savings to be as much as \$190

million annually (Office of the Governor, April 9, 2012). The conservative-leaning MacIver Institute for Public Policy estimates the total savings for school districts from Act 10 provisions regarding employee retirement, health care and collective bargaining to be \$448 million (D'Andrea, 2011). Our own estimates based on data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction staffing reports suggest that health insurance premiums savings combined with retirement savings and increased deductibles for employee health insurance could be as high \$430 million annually. Based on these differing estimates, the range of school district savings from Act 10 provisions related to employee salary, retirement and health insurance range from \$350 to \$450 million state wide annually. Savings may vary widely depending on local health insurance provisions, costs and current employee contributions to health insurance premiums.

An estimated \$450 million dollar annual pay cut for public school employees balances the budget, but it has significant implications for the quality of public education.

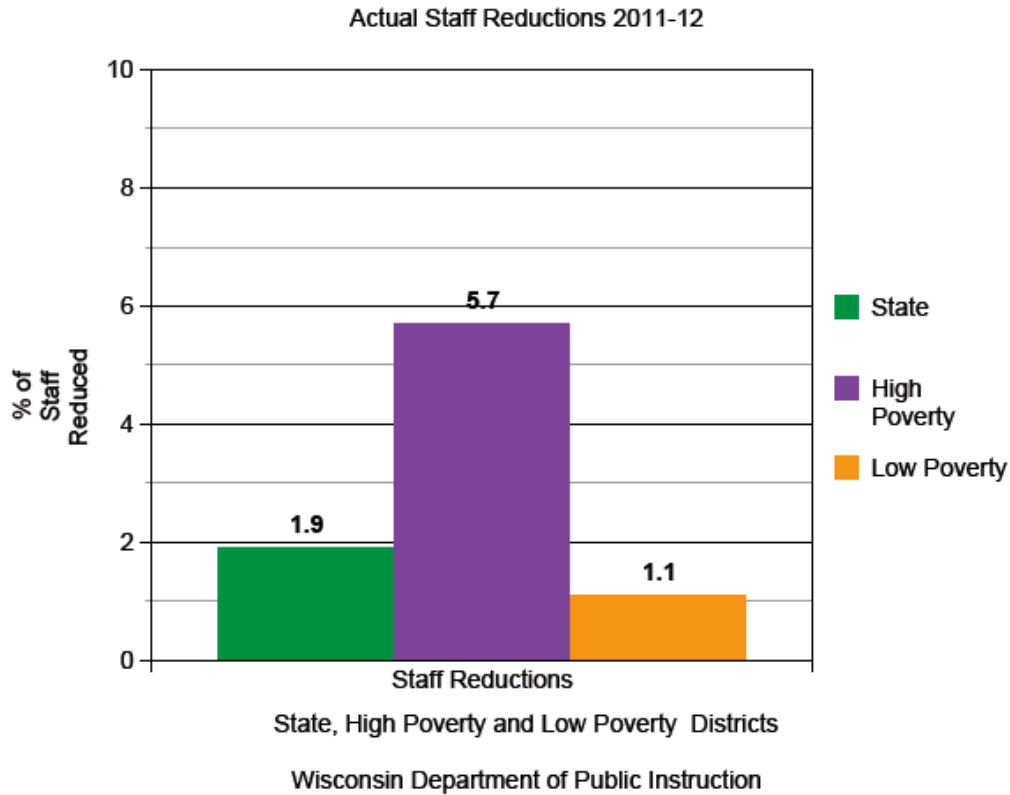
Act 32 reduces state aid to school districts by \$431 million in 2011-12 and \$361 million in 2012-13. Using the data on the WINSS website, there were 102,832.9 public school employees in 2010-11. To achieve the required \$431 million reduction in 2011-12 by compensation alone, annual compensation for each school employee would have to be reduced by \$3,941. If compensation remains the same for the 2012-13 year, the reduction in compensation will more than offset the budgeted \$361 million reduction in state aid. But because state revenue reductions are more than twice as large in high poverty districts, compensation reductions must also be more than twice as large, \$6436 per employee, compared to low poverty districts, \$2768, to offset reductions in revenues.



Both the workforce reductions and the compensation reductions discussed above are hypothetical. Actual reductions to state revenue are offset by changes in both the workforce and compensation at the local district level, and they vary by district depending on the amount of state reductions and other local conditions. For example, districts with existing contracts, like Milwaukee, did not reduce compensation, and instead took a large percentage of the cuts in terms of workforce and program reductions. In contrast, Racine Unified School District reduced compensation and the workforce. In the Webster School District, state aid, membership and staff all increased. Act 10 allows compensation and workforce reductions to offset state aid reductions. It does so by limiting collective bargaining and mandating reductions in retirement, and health insurance. Act 10 does not specifically address differences in local conditions, local control or the state responsibility to provide a uniform and basic educational opportunity to all children.

Actual costs for school district operations increase annually with increases in the cost of living related to transportation, utilities, building maintenance, insurance, and compensation. As a result, our analysis of the impact of the reduction in state revenue from Act 32 on local school districts significantly understates the difference between the annually anticipated increase state revenues in state revenue to cover increasing costs, and the actual \$792 million decrease in state revenue.

According to data released by the Department of Public Instruction (Annual 1202 School Staff Report) on April 18, 2012, the number of FTE public school total staff was reduced by 2312 or 1.9 %, including 1446 teaching positions or 2.4% of teaching positions for the 2011-12 school year. The number of FTE public school staff was reduced by 877 or 5.71% in the high poverty districts, but only 80.7 FTE or 1.13% in low poverty districts. On average, high poverty school districts lost five times the percentage of staff FTE's compared to low poverty districts. Because high poverty school districts lost more revenue and they also lost more staff and or compensation.



A third major policy implication is the impact of compensation reductions on teacher quality. Will decreased teacher compensation result in decreased teacher quality in some or all Wisconsin public districts and schools? Low socioeconomic, low-achieving and non-white students, particularly those in urban areas, often are taught by the least experience and skilled teachers. According to research conducted by the Education Trust (2006) “in Wisconsin, low-performing schools have approximately twice the percentage of novice teachers as high-performing schools.” Researchers at the Center for Education Policy Analysis (Boyd, et al., 2012) describe teacher labor market preferences as “for schools that are closer geographically, are suburban, have a smaller proportion of students in poverty and, for white teachers, have a smaller proportion of minority students.” To improve recruitment and retention of quality teachers in poor, diverse and urban schools both business and educational leaders have advocated strategic increases in teacher salaries to improve performance and teacher incentives and

portability of pensions to recruit high quality teachers to high need schools (Committee for Economic Development, 2009).

Relating teacher performance to compensation (pay for performance) and career ladders for novice, journey and master teachers are two of the most common policy initiatives suggested to meet the challenge of staffing public schools with high quality teachers. Other suggested teacher compensation reform policies to align teacher quality with student need and student achievement include providing salary incentives to attract high-quality, experienced teachers to work in schools that serve high concentrations of poor and minority students, and reforming teacher tenure based on demonstrated teacher effectiveness in producing student learning.

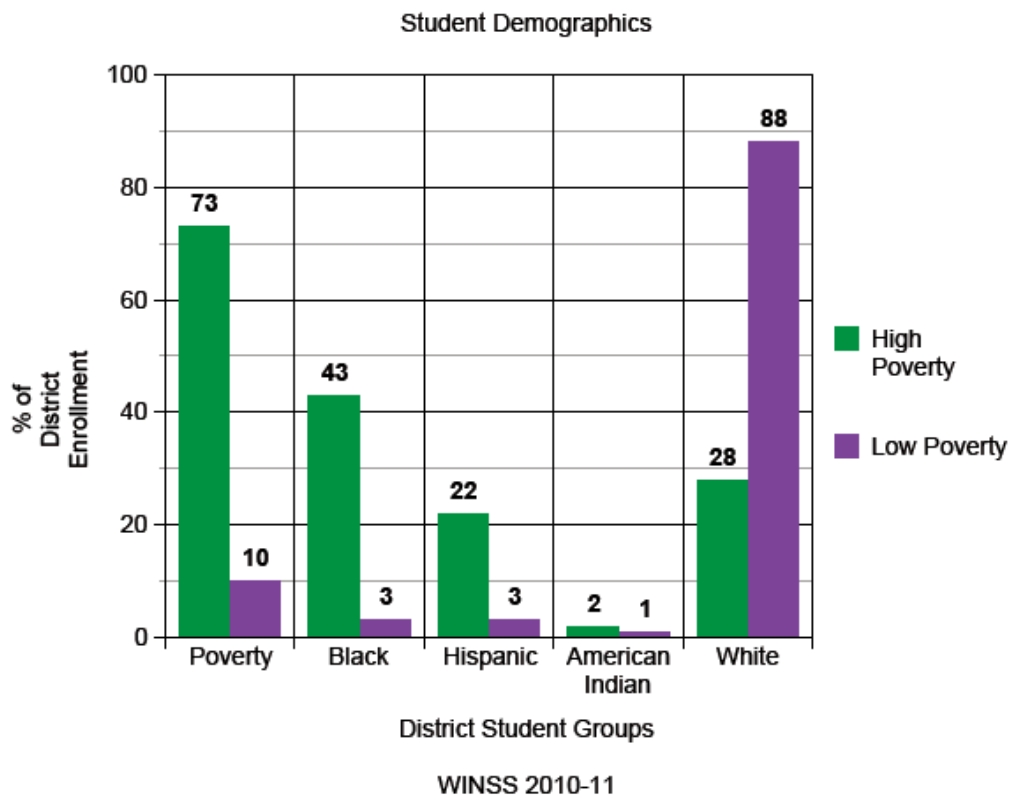
Reform of teacher salary and pension systems is a necessary strategy to realign scarce resources and quality teaching to better serve Wisconsin's neediest students. There is no research or other state examples of policy initiatives that suggest decreasing teacher salary and pensions as an effective strategy to improve teacher quality.

Impact on Students: High poverty districts serve a large percentage of the state's non-white students, and face larger achievement gaps than low poverty districts.

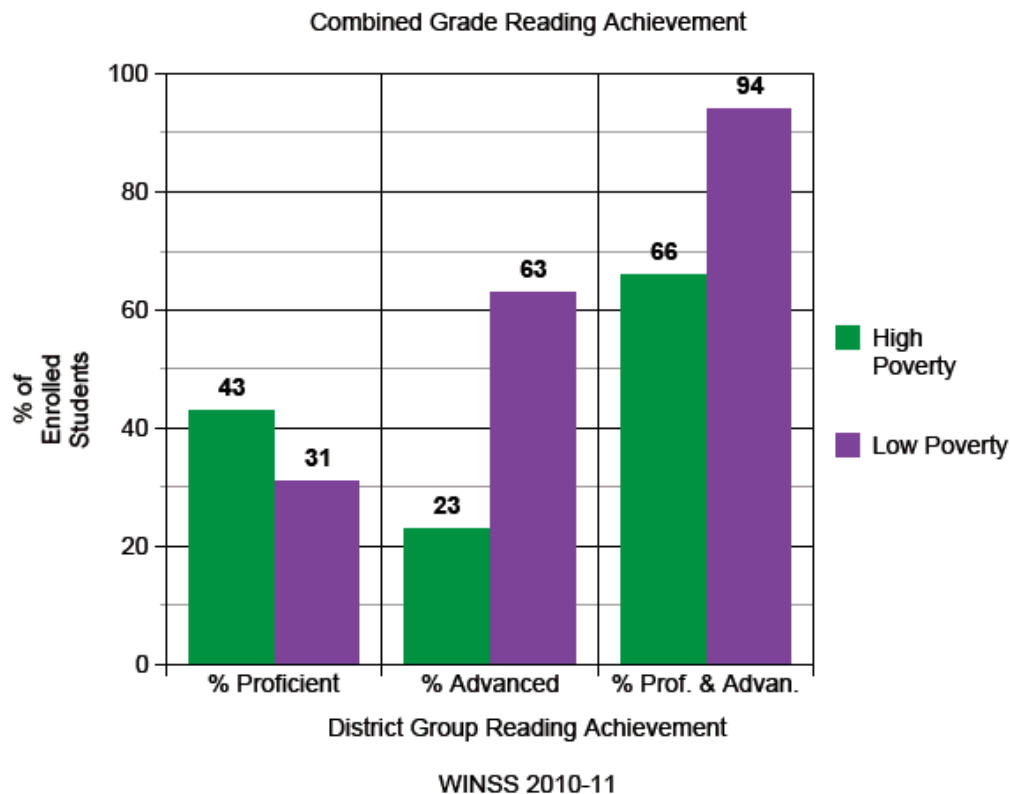
In order to understand the impact of Act 32 on educational opportunity in the state, it is essential to consider the characteristics and educational needs of students served by the public schools. The needs of students determine the character of instruction, and the programs necessary for every student to be successful. In this section, we examine the characteristics and educational needs of high poverty and low poverty students. The thirty high poverty districts serve a total of 123,195 students, 14.14% of all of Wisconsin's 871,550 enrolled students; the thirty low poverty districts serve 66,889 students, 7% of Wisconsin's 871,550 students.

The Wisconsin average poverty rate (FRL) for all students is 39%. The thirty high poverty districts have a 73% poverty rate compared to a 10% poverty rate for low poverty districts, or seven times more poverty. There are 89,738 FRL students in high poverty school districts, compared to 6,458 FRL students in the low poverty districts. The thirty high poverty districts serve 26% of all Wisconsin FRL students, or more than a quarter of all Wisconsin's poor public school children. The thirty low poverty districts serve 1.8% of all Wisconsin FRL students.

The thirty high poverty districts are majority minority districts with 28% of enrolled students identified as white and 72% as minority or non-white. The thirty low poverty districts are majority white, with 88% of students identified as white.



As measured by the 2011 Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) of Combined Grades Reading Achievement, students in low poverty districts are almost three times more likely to score at the advanced level than students in high poverty districts. In Wisconsin, student achievement is inversely related to poverty, and school districts with a high percentage of FRL students have a low percentage of advanced students.



Educational need as measured by combined grade reading achievement is much greater in high poverty districts than in low poverty districts. High poverty districts have fewer advanced students, fewer proficient and advanced students and many more minimal and basic students than in the low poverty districts.

Achievement in Wisconsin as in most states is closely tied to socioeconomic status and race. Achievement for poor and minority students largely concentrated in high poverty Wisconsin school districts is significantly below the achievement of students in low poverty school districts. Wisconsin's education vision established in the state constitution is equal opportunity and access to a basic education for all students regardless of socioeconomic status or race. Wisconsin's education challenge is the improvement of achievement for all students but especially for poor students and students of color.

Every state faces the challenge of achievement gaps. Some school districts and some schools in states throughout the nation are making progress and are demonstrating that it is possible to successfully educate all children, including students from low socioeconomic and diverse backgrounds (Bryk et al, 2010; Chenoweth, 2007; Kelley & Shaw, 2009; Zavardsky, 2009). Closing achievement gaps requires four critical elements: a shared belief that all children can learn at high levels, parental and community engagement with schools and districts, quality teachers committed to continuous learning and professional development, and the alignment of resources to student need.

Wisconsin's school funding system is an "equalized" system based on property wealth per student, not the education needs of students. State equalization aid is directed to property poor school districts which may or may not have high levels of student need. Under Act 32 state revenue is reduced to virtually all school districts, but larger reductions occur in high poverty school districts with higher needs students than in low poverty districts. Resources are not aligned in Wisconsin to address achievement gaps. Funding reductions under Act 32 increase the funding gap between resources available to low achieving students and resources available to high achieving students

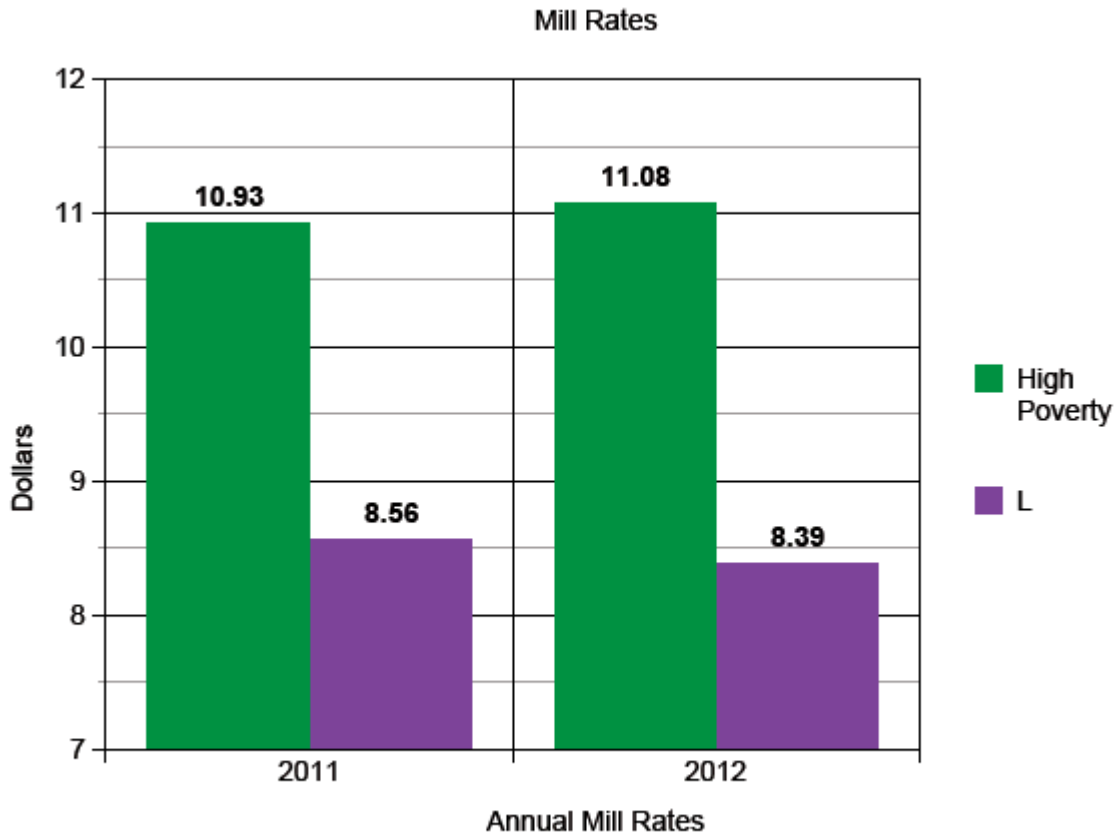
Impact on Taxpayers: High poverty districts have higher tax rates than low poverty districts and the inequity has increased with the passage of Act 32.

In 2009-10 the total equalized property value per member in high poverty districts was \$426,938. In low poverty districts the equalized property value per member was \$944,334. Low poverty districts have more than the twice the equalized property value or tax base per member than high poverty districts.

Property tax rates are significantly higher in high poverty districts than in low poverty districts, and the inequity in mill rates increased with passage of Wisconsin Act 32:

- Prior to the reductions in State revenue contained in the Wisconsin 2011-13 biennial budget, the average mill rate (\$10.94) for the 2010-11 school year budget in high poverty districts was 29% higher than in low poverty districts (\$8.56).
- After the passage of the Wisconsin State Budget and reductions in State revenue for school districts, the average 2011-12 mill rate (\$11.08) in high poverty districts is 32% higher than the average mill rate (\$8.39) in low poverty districts.
- The average mill rate increased 14 cents per thousand dollars of property value or 1.4% (\$10.94 to \$11.08) in high poverty school districts; and decreased 16 cents per thousand or 1.8% (\$8.56 to \$8.37) in low poverty school districts.

High poverty districts have less state revenue to support the needs of children, and taxpayers in high poverty districts pay taxes at increasingly higher rates.



Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

In most Wisconsin school districts federal aid is less than 10% of total revenue, state aid approximately 60% and local property approximately 30%. Federal revenue is based primarily on student poverty and fluctuates with the number of enrolled students who are eligible for the federally subsidized lunch program. State categorical aids are also tied to student need and fluctuate with the number of special needs students. State equalization aid fluctuates with property wealth (the more property wealth per student the less state aid is provided to local districts). State equalization aid is the lion’s share of state revenue for many school districts, but equalization aid is especially important to districts with low property value per member. Local property tax rates are approved by local school boards within prescribed revenue limits to fund

school operations not supported by federal and state aid or other local revenue such as student fees.

In 1993 Wisconsin implemented per student revenue caps based on state and local revenues to control increases in property taxes. While the school levy is usually the largest portion of the property tax burden, total local property levies are also a function of county, municipal and technical college tax levies. After the passage of Act 32 total statewide property tax levies were up 0.3% in 2012 following an increase of 2.7% in 2011. According to the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (Wistax, 2012) this year's increase is the smallest in 15 years, principally because the school levy dropped 1.0%. Municipal levies, county levies, and technical college levies all increased, but public school levies declined by more than \$46 million statewide. Tightened state-imposed revenue limits contained in Act 32 were the main cause of the decline in school district levies.

But not every taxpayer experienced an average 0.3% increase in general property taxes or a 1.0% decline in property taxes for schools. Because of lower property values the average mill rate for all Wisconsin school districts actually increased from \$9.76 to \$9.84 or .08%. The average mill rate for high poverty school districts increased 14 cents per thousand dollars of property value or a 1.4% increase in high poverty districts; and decreased 16 cents or a 1.8% decrease in low poverty school districts. Under Act 32 the state decreased revenue to school districts with high poverty and low achievement students by \$703 per member and \$319 per member in districts with low poverty and high achievement students. Under the revenue caps a larger portion of the cost for educating many Wisconsin high needs students is shifted from the state to the local taxpayer in high poverty school districts. Act 32 increases the school property

tax burden in high poverty school districts and decreases the property tax burden in low poverty school districts.

Summary

This study paints a grim picture of funding gaps in Wisconsin public education. The recent historic cuts in state revenue for public education fall heavily on the thirty high poverty school districts that educate more than a quarter of all Wisconsin's poor children, 61% of all black children, 34% of Hispanic children, and 25% of American Indian children. The percentage of academically advanced children in low poverty districts is almost three times higher than in high poverty districts. At the same time, taxpayers in high poverty districts have higher and increasing property tax rates compared to taxpayers in low poverty districts with lower and declining property tax rates. The reductions in state support for public education threaten to increase achievement gaps, and challenge Wisconsin's constitutional and long standing commitment to equal educational opportunity.

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Appendix A

The budgeted total state revenues for the school districts used in this analysis are taken directly from each of the sixty identified high poverty and low poverty general fund school district budgets. The Wisconsin Uniform Financial Accounting Requirements (WUFAR) is the financial and accounting structure required for public elementary and secondary schools in the state of Wisconsin. Total state revenue in the general fund for each school district is defined in the WUFAR revenue account 10R-000000-600. This analysis is limited to budgeted general fund state revenue. It does not include state revenue in the special projects, food service, or cooperative funds. These funds represent only a minor portion of state revenue to local districts and this revenue is categorically tied to the number of children eligible for state funded categorical programs.

Budget data for the 2011-12 school year is the most recent financial data available. School district budgets were developed after the passage of Act 32, approved by local school boards and submitted to the Department of Public Instruction in October, 2011. Audited data summaries regarding school district membership and revenues and expenditures from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for the 2011-12 school year will not be available until September, 2012 at the earliest.

In this study the financial data are based on revenue per member, the demographic and achievement data are based on student enrollment. The membership data for each of the sixty school districts is available on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction financial services website. The demographic and achievement data from the 2010-11 school year is the latest available on the WINNS website. Financial data is based on the concept of student membership which accounts for the amount of time a student participates in an educational program.

Demographic and achievement data are based on student enrollment or the total number of students enrolled in a particular program on a particular date. For example, part time preschool and summer school membership may be more or less than enrollment in a particular grade.

The reported measure of achievement in this study is limited to reading achievement combined scores on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) and Wisconsin Alternative Assessment (WAA). Reading achievement is used to estimate academic achievement because graduation rates do not apply to K-8 school districts and reading achievement generally conforms to patterns of achievement in other academic subjects.

Much of the data used in this study is summarized in eight spreadsheets, available from the authors: two describing and comparing total district state revenue for budget years 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 in high and low poverty districts, two describing and comparing district mill rates from 2008 to 2012, two describing and comparing student demographics in 2010-11, and two describing and comparing reading achievement in 2010-11.