

Teachers, the QEO and Market Forces

by Steven R. Pigeon

Throughout the years I have had the opportunity work, date, and interact with a number of young new public school teachers in the State of Wisconsin. Frequently our conversations would turn teacher pay, and how unfair it is to the teachers, and how Wisconsin's Qualified Economic Offer (QEO) should be lifted.

Recent grumblings in Madison indicate that this may actually happen, but will it benefit teachers? The answer surely is yes because of the influence of the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) and its success in insulating teachers from free market forces and ensuring near 100% job security and pay increases. This all occurs regardless of the actual abilities or performance of the teachers. As one would imagine these types of statements and ideas were met with much hostility from my teacher friends.

For the sake of discussion let us create a hypothetical world and lift the QEO. This would then result in exposing Wisconsin public school teachers to free market forces. Furthermore let us treat public school teachers as professionals and not union members. What would happen? Let us first look at their job prospects

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) report on the *Supply and Demand of Educational Personnel in Wisconsin Public Schools, 2004*¹ the following job outlook exists for teachers with these licensures.

Outlook Well Below Average

Principal
Health Education
English
Speech
Theater
Journalism
Physical Education
Social Studies
Elementary
Early Childhood/Kindergarten

Outlook Well Above or Above Average

Deaf/Hear Impairment
ESL/Bilingual
Drivers Education
Emotional Behavioral Disability
Physical/Occupational Therapist
Visual Impairment
Early Childhood Special Education
School Nurse
Speech/Language Pathologist
Family/Consumer Education
Foreign Language
Technology Education

In reviewing the two lists it becomes apparent that teachers capable and willing to work with more challenging students and students with physical and mental problems, are in great demand. I feel comfortable in saying that, overall, teaching positions in the table that have an "Above" or "Well Above" job outlook are more challenging and require a greater set of skills to be successful at than the positions in the table that have a "Well Below Average" job outlook.

Currently, in accordance to the QEO and lack of free market forces, the teachers in these two lists are treated the same way. This is despite the bruises and black eyes that come with the teaching positions on the right side of the table. I have witnessed this first hand.

If our hypothetical world was created, teachers that take the initiative and take more challenging teaching positions would be better compensated for their efforts and sacrifices. This would occur while salaries would remain stagnant or even decrease in the licensure areas that have lower demand. This is what occurs in other industries especially among those in professional fields.

These adjustments would occur partly based on the assumption that teachers are currently not being paid current market rates, is this truly the case? A previous work by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute concludes: "Teachers are among some of the most highly compensated employees in the state."² This conclusion was based on an analysis that adjusted for time worked and compared teachers to other unionized state employees.

Leaving our hypothetical world and returning to reality in Wisconsin; lifting the QEO would likely be a windfall financially for public school teachers, some more deserving than the others. Consequently taxpayers will see their tax bills increase.

The reason for this is, is the clout that WEAC possesses politically and their ability to market their message to voters and taxpayers. The losers of this clout are the great teachers and teachers willing to teach challenging students and increase their skills to allow them to do it successfully. The final losers are the students themselves who are not even mentioned in the Council's mission statement, but are definitely impacted by it.³

¹ Supply and Demand of Educational Personnel in Wisconsin Public Schools 2004
Authors: Thomas Fischer Ph.D University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and Wayne Swager Ph.D
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

² Niederjohn, M. Scott, "Are Wisconsin Public School Teachers Really Underpaid?" *Wisconsin Interest* Fall 2002

³ The Wisconsin Education Association Council is: To fulfill the promise of a democratic society, the mission of the Wisconsin Education Association Council is to promote respect and support for quality public education and to provide the professional and personal growth and economic welfare of members.