

Wisconsin: How Act 10 hurt education, the economy

It has been more than a decade since the Wisconsin Legislature passed Act 10, the law that eliminated collective bargaining rights for most public-sector workers. The law and its associated budget cuts negatively impacted teaching, public education and the state economy, according to a report from the Center for American Progress.

According to the report, which uses data collected by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), since the passage of Act 10, teachers have received far lower compensation, turnover rates have increased, and teacher experience has dropped significantly.

The harms from Act 10 extend beyond public-sector workers to all Wisconsinites, as the report suggests that student outcomes could be negatively affected by the law as well. Rather than encouraging the best and brightest students to become teachers and to remain in the field throughout their career, the law appears to have had the opposite effect by devaluing teaching and driving many teachers out of Wisconsin's public schools.

Here's what happened after Act 10 passed in 2011:

- Teacher compensation plummeted. Median compensation for Wisconsin teachers dropped \$10,483—or 12.6 percent—within four years. Most of that came from hits to retirement and health insurance contributions.
- Employees started to pay half of their retirement contributions.
- School employees are covering much more of their insurance costs. They paid about 12 percent in 2018 compared to 5 percent in 2011.
- More teachers left the profession. About 10.5 percent left after the 2010-11 school year, up from 6.4 percent in the year before Act 10 was implemented.
- Wealthier school districts poached experienced teachers from poorer districts. Interdistrict moves more than doubled.



Act 10 and related tax cuts for the wealthiest and corporations did not spark the economic boon promised for all Wisconsinites by Gov. Walker.

- Wisconsin's private-sector employment grew by 9.4 percent from January 2011 to June 2017. Private-sector jobs in Minnesota and the nation grew by 12.2 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively, during that same time period.
- Wisconsin's median household saw a 6.8 percent increase in real income from 2010 to 2016, while the median Minnesota household saw its income grow by 7.5 percent.

Union membership also plummeted across the state.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 14.2 percent of Wisconsin workers were union members in 2010 compared to 11.9 percent in the national economy. By 2020, just 8.7 percent of Wisconsin workers were members of unions, compared to 10.8 percent nationally.

A Wisconsin Public Radio story on Feb. 11, 2021 summarized the effects well:

“There are fewer union members, they carry less political clout, and those who remain are limited in what they can bargain for.”