

REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION TO IMPLEMENT A
**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE EDUCATION
AT UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE
PREPARED BY UW-MILWAUKEE**

ABSTRACT

The University of Wisconsin (UW)-Milwaukee (UWM) proposes to establish a reduced credit Bachelor of Science (BS) in Elementary and Middle Education. The fully online program, referred to as K-9 Online, is designed to help address Wisconsin's ongoing need for licensed teachers in kindergarten through ninth grade (K-9) classrooms, particularly in urban schools in southeastern Wisconsin.

The proposed program is intended to serve post-traditional students interested in teaching, including individuals who are currently employed in school districts as paraprofessionals, career changers with experience in educational settings, and/or students currently enrolled in the Foundations of Teacher Education (FoTE) offered through Wisconsin Technical Colleges who cannot access traditional campus-based pathways to teacher licensure. The program will provide a pathway to meet bachelor's degree and professional preparation requirements for Wisconsin teacher licensure. Upon successful completion of the program, UW-Milwaukee will endorse candidates for licensure (grades K-9) through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Graduates may also pursue advanced degrees, certifications, or licenses in specialty areas and school administration after completing the K-9 Online program. An ongoing Wisconsin teacher shortage, which has been officially recognized by DPI, has been exacerbated by a retention crisis. The need for emergency licensed teachers in WI, which in 2023 has increased by 24%, also confirms the immediate need for licensed teachers.

Tuition for the program will be established in accordance with *Universities of Wisconsin Administrative Policy 805 Appendix C: Principles for Pricing Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs*. UW-Milwaukee proposes a program pricing model at \$325 per credit, which is intended to remain competitive within the Milwaukee region and among online educator preparation programs, while supporting access and affordability to the teaching profession. No additional fees will be charged for the program. Program costs and enrollment projections will be reviewed annually to ensure continued alignment with program needs, market conditions, and financial sustainability. No new facilities are required. The program will leverage UW Milwaukee's existing infrastructure and resources for online education.

PROGRAM IDENTIFICATION

University Name

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Title of Proposed Academic Program

Elementary and Middle Education: K-9 Online

Degree Designation(s)

Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Elementary and Middle Education

Proposed Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code

13.1202 – Code Descriptions

Mode of Delivery

Single university; Online

Department or Functional Equivalent

Department of Teaching and Learning

College, School, or Functional Equivalent

School of Education, College of Community Engagement and Professions

Proposed Date of Implementation

Summer 2027

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Overview of the Program

The proposed reduced-credit B.S. in Elementary and Middle Education (K-9 Online) is designed to meet the needs of non-traditional students interested in becoming K-9 teachers in Wisconsin schools. This 94-97 credit online program is designed to allow students to progress at a manageable pace through coursework and clinical experiences with the support of faculty, a community of peers, campus professionals and advisors to make continuous progress to degree while maintaining other demands in their lives.

The K-9 Online program will require 94-97 credits, including 30 credits of Core General Education Requirements (CGER) and 64-67 credits in professional sequence coursework, including 40 credits in content method areas (which include practicum hours), 9 credits in clinical experiences, 9 credits in seminars, and 6-9 credits student teaching. The proposed program retains most of the existing program requirements for UWM's existing BS Elementary and Middle program; however, it does not require a concentration (which is supported by the Wisconsin DPI). Additionally, there are 3 fewer credits in Math, Literacy, and Science methods (for a total of 9) in the K-9 Online program. The program still exceeds the minimum requirements in all content areas established by DPI.

K-9 Online students will have 6 credits of field experience during the academic school year. There will be 2 seminar courses that occur before student teaching. Each seminar course will align with pre-student teaching field experiences. Additionally, field supervisors will not only serve as evaluators, but as mentors and instructional coaches as well. This offers an extension of support that considers the professional and academic needs of post-traditional students who are working full time in schools. Mentors will offer professional, pedagogical, and personal support for induction into the profession.

Finally, to support the teacher candidates in their first year of teaching, the K-9 Online completers will be offered mentors and professional experiences through an online community during their first-year post-graduation. This support is designed to combat the current statistic of 20 percent of first year teachers not returning to a teaching position after their first year of practice in Wisconsin.

Projected Enrollments and Graduates by Year Five

Table 1 represents enrollment and graduation projections for students entering the program over the next five years. Enrollment projections were set considering factors such as being the only online reduced credit K-9 program in the state, the number of teachers on emergency licenses in Wisconsin, and the enrollments in UWM's current service-based pricing program for school district partnerships. We anticipate minimal impact on other majors/programs at the University. The K-9 Online program will target a different student population than the current traditional B.S. in Education with an emphasis in Elementary and Middle Childhood (EME).

Enrollment projections include an initial cohort of 25 students, and an increase to a cohort of 30 students annually after year one. A yearly retention rate of 75% was used in Years 1, 2, & 3 and a 90% retention rate in Year 3 to graduation; this retention rate is based on current retention rates in the School of Education.

By the end of Year 5, a total of 145 students will have enrolled in the program, and 43 students are projected to have graduated.

Table 1: Five-Year Enrollment and Completion Projections by Headcount

Students/Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
New Students	25	30	30	30	30
Continuing Students	0	19	37	40	40
Total Enrollment	25	49	67	70	70
Graduating Students	0	0	13	15	15

Tuition Structure

Tuition for the K-9 Online program will be established in accordance with the Universities of Wisconsin Administrative Policy 805 Appendix C: Principles for Pricing Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs. This policy allows programs that are provided exclusively by distance education to take advantage of market and access opportunities.

The program will charge \$325 per credit with no difference in resident versus non-resident tuition. Students will not be assessed segregated fees, or distance education fees. The program will strive to use low-cost textbooks and/or Open Educational Resources as much as possible to keep additional costs to a minimum for students.

Student Learning Outcomes and Program Objectives

In the reduced-credit K-9 Online program, high-impact practices for asynchronous online learners will be implemented. For example, Canvas sites will be uniform; students will have consistent experiences on Canvas across classes. Also, there will be many opportunities for reflection and application, either in the college classes, K-9 classrooms, or alternative classroom settings. K-9 Online students will be prepared to pass the WI Foundations of Reading Exam (FORT) through literacy methods instruction aligned to Science of Reading principles, as well as all other state and DPI requirements for licensure.

The K-9 Online program is designed to help students meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Creates engaging standards-based lessons and assessments for K-9 students that consider the academic needs of all students
2. Promotes social and emotional intelligence for K-9 students
3. Demonstrates an understanding of the unique characteristics of urban contexts
4. Use research-based methods that promote significant learning outcomes
5. Understand how the arts and technology can help K-9 students experience deeper learning and apply each as a pedagogical approach

6. Exhibit content and pedagogical knowledge in social studies, science, math, and literacy
7. Explore effective literacy teaching strategies, particularly ones established in ACT 20

Program Requirements and Curriculum

Table 2: Bachelor of Science in Elementary and Middle Education Program Curriculum

General education courses required for graduation: 30 CR, 6 areas of GERs	
Civics and Perspectives	6 credit(s)
Communications and Literacy	6 credit(s)
Humanities and the Arts	6 credit(s)
Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning	3 credit(s)
Natural Science and Wellness	6 credit(s)
Social and Behavioral Science	3 credit(s)
Academic degree program or major course requirements:	
Mathematics Methods	6 credit(s)
Literacy Methods	6 credit(s)
WIFORT Prep	1 credit(s)
Social Studies Methods	3 credit(s)
Science Methods	3 credit(s)
ESL Methods	3 credit(s)
ESL Topics: Language and Power	3 credit(s)
Introduction to Disciplinary Learning	3 credit(s)
Interdisciplinary Final Project	3 credit(s)
Exceptional Education Methods	3 credit(s)
Introduction to Learning and Development	3 credit(s)
Seminar 1: Grades 4-9	3 credit(s)
Seminar 2: Grades K-3	3 credit(s)
Community work and Asynchronous Online Learning	3 credit(s)
Community Work Practicum	3 credit(s)
Student Teaching Seminar	3 credit(s)
Student Teaching	6-9 credit(s)
Clinical Experience 1: Grades 4-9	3 credit(s)
Clinical Experience 1: Grades K-3	3 credit(s)
Total Credits	94-97 credit(s)

Collaborative Nature of the Program

The curriculum in the K-9 Online program will include active and interactive content not only through studying literacy, social studies, math and science methods, but interdisciplinary learning and teaching strategies that include the arts, technology, and social/emotional learning. Students in the K-9 Online program will have two field experiences and one student teaching experience, plus practicum hours where they will work with students in alternative settings such as after school and summer programs and cultural centers (i.e., United Community Center in Milwaukee).

For field experiences, the K-9 Online program staff will collaborate with Milwaukee Public Schools and other regional school districts in providing field and student teaching experiences for students in the Milwaukee County area.

Projected Time to Degree

Students starting the K-9 Online program with no prior credits could complete the entire program (including GERS) in three years. Summers and Winterims would need to be utilized and students will be provided information about the associated costs with adding summer terms and Winterims; students can also choose a slower route that will not require summer or Winterim terms if financial aid funding is a concern.

Accreditation

Approval from the Department of Public Instruction is required, along with approvals from the Higher Learning Commission.

PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION

Rationale

UW-Milwaukee proposes to establish a reduced-credit B.S. in Elementary and Middle Education (K-9 Online) to expand access to teacher preparation and respond to Wisconsin's need for licensed elementary and middle educators. The proposed 94-97 credit degree program is designed to prepare candidates for Wisconsin licensure to teach in kindergarten through ninth grade classrooms while providing a more flexible and efficient pathway for students who may not be able to pursue traditional teacher education programs.

UW-Milwaukee currently offers a traditional B.S. in Education with an emphasis in Elementary and Middle (EME), which is designed for traditional undergraduate students and is offered in person during the day and/or evening. While the current program will continue to serve students seeking a traditional undergraduate experience, there is an

increasing number of prospective students who do not fit the traditional undergraduate profile and for whom the current program does not meet their scheduling needs, such as school paraprofessionals and emergency credentialed educators. The proposed online, asynchronous degree program is designed to be more accessible to these prospective students while maintaining the academic quality, clinical experiences, and professional standards required for teacher licensure.

The proposed reduced-credit K-9 Online program aligns directly with the UW-Milwaukee's mission as a major urban university serving the diverse educational, social, and economic needs of Wisconsin's largest metropolitan region. UW-Milwaukee's mission calls for high-quality undergraduate and continuing education programs, expanded academic and professional opportunities, and productive relationships with public partners. The proposed program is especially responsive to the needs of regional student populations. Many prospective teacher candidates in the Milwaukee region are transfer students, adult learners, paraprofessionals, and/or working students with financial or family obligations that make extended time-to-degree a significant barrier. Additionally, the proposed program meets the stated needs of area school districts who are facing teacher shortages by encouraging pathways to license emergency credentialed educators and paraprofessionals.

A reduced-credit structure reduces the time and expense associated with additional credit accumulation while preserving the professional preparation required for licensure. This format also supports UW-Milwaukee's access mission by creating a pathway for students who may already have substantial college credit, professional experience in schools, and a clear commitment to serving children and families in the region. By reducing excess credits and clarifying the path to licensure, the program can improve persistence, shorten time to completion, lower student cost, and make the teaching profession more attainable for students from communities that are underrepresented in the educator workforce. It can also support emergency-licensed educators who have a limited amount of time to finish a licensure degree pathway due to state requirements.

The K-9 Online program will also be designed to meet the needs of a population of students completing the WTCs Foundation of Teacher Education (FoTE). This program does not allow the completers to be licensed K-9 teachers. Our program will provide the necessary components of a bachelor's degree that can lead to licensure. We plan to work closely with advisors and faculty in these programs to ensure smooth transitions for students who have completed the FoTE pathway who are currently working in schools.

Institution and University of Wisconsin System Program Array

The K-9 Online program fits well into UWM's program array as it fills a gap that currently exists in the School of Education's offerings. The only way a student can earn a

degree leading to elementary middle licensure is through our traditional pathways that require in person attendance. As noted above, this precludes many who are interested in teaching as a career, especially those already working full-time in schools as paraprofessionals and school staff.

Ten of the 13 campuses in the Universities of Wisconsin offer a pathway to an elementary teaching license. UWM is the only campus located in a southeast Wisconsin urban setting. The current program and our new reduced credit online offering meet the unique needs of an urban environment and educational settings. The program also addresses the Universities of Wisconsin's and institution's objective to offer a reduced-credit bachelor's degree in high-need areas. This program will meet that objective and also has the potential to engage underrepresented populations in the field.

Need as Suggested by Student Demand

Current teacher shortages indicate that existing programs are not able to attract and retain a sufficient number of education majors to meet the growing need for teachers, especially in urban settings. Again, the K-9 Online program intends to add to the number of certified teachers that graduate from UWM. As an urban institution, UWM's student body is diverse in many ways including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, linguistic assets, and age. These identities only begin to capture the lived experience of working parents who want to improve the lives of their families through education. Studying to become a teacher is a dream deferred for many by the constraints of traditional college class schedules and fee structures.

The need for elementary teachers is evident across Wisconsin. Although there have been modest improvements post-pandemic, Wisconsin's stability in retaining teachers is far from guaranteed, especially in elementary education ([Urban Milwaukee](#)). In the 2022-23 school year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction issued over 3,300 temporary licenses to educators, reflecting a 24% increase compared to previous years and highlighting increasing difficulties in filling teaching roles with qualified candidates ([JSOnline](#)). Milwaukee Public Schools currently has over 200 teachers who are emergency licensed ([WI Policy Forum](#)). These points underscore both the ongoing challenges Wisconsin faces in recruiting and retaining elementary educators, and the projected continued demand for qualified teachers. Such data and official recognition provide a robust argument for launching a new elementary education teacher preparation program, designed to meet local labor market needs and improve educational outcomes for Wisconsin's elementary schools ([WI Policy Forum](#)).

The reduced-credit K-9 Online program will meet the needs of the following diverse populations: paraprofessionals, post-baccalaureate degree holders working in schools, and Foundations of Teacher Education (associate degree holders from a technical college). The

accessibility of an online asynchronous program will allow them the ability to make it fit into their schedules while receiving a high-quality education. Further, clinical experiences can be developed that allow them to retain their current jobs and complete program requirements simultaneously. Encouraging paraprofessionals to become educators also helps meet state and national needs to diversify the teacher workforce as paraprofessionals are often culturally and linguistically more diverse than the current teacher workforce.

Additionally, there is a population of degree holders who are currently employed in other professions but who have backgrounds working in education who are seeking alternatives to traditional education programs because of the time constraints of such a program, such as people in business and sales, engineering and technology, human resources, healthcare, and social services. These career changers often need to stay employed full time while attending school and cannot attend in-person classes; the design of the K-9 Online program will more closely meet their needs for a flexible educational schedule.

The goal of the reduced-credit K-9 Online program is not to replace the current B.S. in Education with an emphasis in Elementary and Middle Education; instead, it aims to add students who want to pursue educator licensure who cannot access the current in-person, daytime route to licensure offered at UW-Milwaukee. The admissions requirements for the K-9 Online program will include application, screening, and interviewing questions that best match students to the K-9 Online program.

Need as Suggested by Market Demand

The teacher shortage in Wisconsin is and has been an issue. As a state, Wisconsin faces persistent vacancies for licensed educators in elementary classrooms. For the 2024-25 academic year, the US Department of Education officially recognized an elementary teacher shortage in Wisconsin. ([WI DPI](#)). That means Wisconsin is in the highest quartile nationally for relative teacher shortage (vacancies per 10,000 students). Out of approximately 60,000 positions across the state, there are about 2,400 vacancies and roughly 4,500 individuals not certified for the positions they hold. ([Learning Policy Institute](#)). While those figures represent teaching shortages across all areas, elementary teachers make up the bulk of teaching positions in the state. Additional analysis by Teachers of Tomorrow identified elementary education as one of Wisconsin's "biggest teaching needs" ([Teachers of Tomorrow](#)). Currently, positions without licensed teachers are being filled by individuals who are teaching out of their licensure area or are on an emergency license from the state. These individuals are well intentioned but do not have the formal educational preparation or pedagogical experience needed to teach in K-9 classrooms.

The teacher shortage is exacerbated by a retention crisis. The Wisconsin DPI's most recent report on Educator Preparation and Workforce Analysis shows that after one year, just under 22% of first year teachers are no longer employed in a Wisconsin school. By year seven, only 55.6% of teachers initially employed in Wisconsin schools remain. Again, acknowledging these are statistics for all licensure areas; elementary education is the largest piece of the K-12 system ([WI DPI](#)). Research in teacher education suggests that teacher efficacy and retention are higher in those educators prepared in university-based educational preparation programs. The K-9 online program is designed to acknowledge the need for building teaching resilience that leads to retention and includes additional mentoring supports.

Labor market projections indicate a steady demand for elementary teachers. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development projected an 8.7% increase in Southeast Wisconsin over ten years, 2020-30 ([WI DPI](#)). DPI's 2023 Report on Educator Preparation Programs and Workforce Analysis calls for new ways to increase enrollment in teacher education programs.

The K-9 Online program will help address the shortage that Wisconsin is facing. The program will expand the pool of qualified teachers. It will do this in less time than the traditional four-year program offered by other programs in the state and augment the work on the UWM campus. It will provide non-traditional students with a cost-effective path that can be completed in less time due to its reduced credit structure. The mentorship in the first year of the graduates' careers will help sustain and supplement their work in the classroom. The program will support the state's and UWM's goals to stabilize our education workforce.

The reduced-credit K-9 Online program is a timely response to documented regional and statewide workforce demand for qualified elementary teachers. Wisconsin continues to experience challenges in recruiting, preparing, and retaining educators, and elementary education has been identified as a shortage area in state and national workforce discussions. Evidence summarized in the program justification indicates persistent vacancies, increased use of temporary or emergency licenses, and continued demand for elementary teachers driven by retirements, attrition, transfers, and replacement needs.

The workforce challenge is not simply one of job growth, but also a pipeline and retention challenge. Wisconsin schools need a steady supply of well-prepared teachers to replace educators who retire, leave the profession, move between districts, or enter other fields. Labor-market projections indicate continued annual openings for elementary teachers across Wisconsin, while DPI workforce analyses point to the need to increase enrollment in educator preparation programs and stabilize the teacher pipeline. The reduced-credit structure is particularly well aligned with workforce needs because it

removes barriers that can delay or prevent entry into teaching. For students with prior college credit, transfer students, paraprofessionals, and working adults, excess credit requirements can increase debt, extend completion timelines, and reduce the likelihood that students will finish a licensure program. A streamlined, competency-aligned degree allows UWM to prepare candidates efficiently while maintaining the rigor, field experiences, and professional standards expected of licensed elementary educators.