

# ARE TEACHERS' UNIONS HURTING AMERICAN EDUCATION?

## A State-by-State Analysis of the Impact of Collective Bargaining Among Teachers on Student Performance

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During this 1996 electoral season, public schools and teachers' unions have been repeatedly attacked by Republican candidates as the cause of intellectual and moral decline among American youth. These largely undocumented assertions are situated in the context of a campaign to provide vouchers for privatized education and create a dual educational system in which more children are in private schools.

To evaluate these claims, the Institute for Wisconsin's Future initiated an updated review of the impact of collective bargaining among teachers on the performance levels of school children. This study examines the impact of collective bargaining along with that of region, family income, race, school spending and levels of private school attendance. The focus of the study is the relationship between high, medium and low levels of unionization among teachers and student test scores on the SAT College Entrance exams and the NAEP fourth grade reading tests in a state-by-state comparison.

The results of this study demonstrate clearly that student performance on the tests is significantly better in states with high levels of unionization with all other variables held constant. Average student scores on the SAT exams are 43 points higher in states where over 90% of teachers are unionized than in states where less than 50% of the teachers are covered by collective bargaining or meet-and-confer agreements. Furthermore, when collective bargaining is removed from the analysis, scores drop in **all states**. Those factors found to be significantly related to poor performance are: low household income, race (which is correlated with other measures of socio-economic deprivation), large class size, high absenteeism, and higher rates of private school attendance.

Our findings accord with numerous earlier research studies which show that collective bargaining among teachers does not harm student school performance. In the last ten years, school performance among all children has been improving. Differences in performance occur more **between** states than over time periods. In fact, report after report demonstrates that unionization is associated with more stable, productive school environments with higher test scores. The underlying causes of poor performance among children are primarily socio-economic factors in children's lives and the lack of adequate educational resources.