Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and I am honored to be here. My name is Tim Vedra and I am a fourth grade teacher at Aldrich Intermediate School in Beloit, WI.

Wisconsin has been ground zero in the attack on teachers since 2011. For nearly 50 years Wisconsin enjoyed labor peace in public education, some of the highest test scores on the ACT in the country, and competitive wages and benefits that provided a quality standard of living for those in the education profession. Wisconsin's public education system was the envy of much of the country.

It is no surprise that the attack on professional educators with Act 10 in 2011 is causing a shortage of qualified, caring, and committed teachers in Wisconsin. District Administrators across the state are reporting that the number of qualified applicants for teaching positions is declining at an alarming rate. The DC Everest School District reported that a few years ago an elementary education job posting would receive over 150 applications and today that number is about 40 applicants. This year with two weeks to go before the start of the school year the Janesville School District reported more than two dozen open teaching positions. This is alarming as inservice meetings, curriculum preparation, and classroom set up all take place during this time period and having to scramble to hire this late in the game will impact that educator's ability to be ready when the school doors open.

This trend is very likely to continue as Education Department enrollment at state universities continues to decline. The University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education has seen more than a 52% decline in applications between the 2010-11 and the 2014-15 school years. In 2010, there were 329 applicants to the School of Education, and for 2014-15 there were 155 applicants. Edgewood College, a small liberal arts school with enrollment of about 2,800 students in Madison has seen their applications to the education department drop by 1/3 since Act 10. This decline in enrollment comes at a time when 22% of Wisconsin's teacher base is age 55 or older and nearing retirement.

The attack on public education in Wisconsin has left professional educators feeling demoralized. Without collective bargaining, educators have little input into school decisions that impact students and little stability in what their pay and working conditions are. Due to this instability, students are facing a revolving door of teachers in our schools as professional educators choose to retire, move to another district that is wealthier and can afford higher salaries for its employees, or leave the profession altogether for another career. Our students are the ones who suffer with this turnover as they deserve to have the best and brightest in their classrooms year after year.

Since Act 10 and the abolishment of collective bargaining rights, a market system has been created. Teachers in high demand areas (math, science, tech ed, school psychologists, etc) shop around for the best deal and those districts that are wealthy enough, pay top dollar for those teachers. If this continues, a two tier system may develop where specialized teachers earn a higher salary while general classroom teachers earn less because they are easier to find to fill positions. That is not fair to our students as we need the best and brightest teachers during those critical developmental years at the elementary level where students are learning to read, write, and build the foundation for math. All teachers deserve a fair and equal
compensation system as no professional educator's job is more important than the next in the development of a child.

Act 10 was the start in the attack on the education profession in Wisconsin that has made the education profession less attractive. There have been further attacks that have seen funding for public education slashed year after year, an increase in vouchers for charter schools that siphon money from already strapped districts to allow students to attend private schools that do not have to meet state and federal standards for education. And just this year, a bill in Wisconsin was defeated that would have allowed anyone with a Bachelor's degree to be hired and licensed to teach sixth-12th grade English, Math, Social Studies, or Science and would have allowed any person with relevant experience- even a high school dropout - to teach in any other non-core academic subject area in those grades. This type of thinking on the part of lawmakers is wrong and it further devalues the profession. We need highly trained and skilled teachers, not only in the subject matter, but also the pedagogy in front of our students and do away with the notion that just anyone can do this job. School decisions are being made by those with no experience in the classroom or with children; the professionals--we teachers--are being shut out of decisions that affect our students.

My district in Beloit has faced multi-million dollar budget cuts over the past several years. These budget cuts have made it difficult on our staff as there has been a loss of vital preparation time for teachers, an increase in class sizes, and teachers taking over more supervision time of students before and after school. I am pleased to report that our union has been able to maintain a positive relationship with the District and we meet and confer regularly to address issues that arise with our employee handbook, etc. However, this is not the norm in our state and more than once, we have been faced with the harsh reality that the employee handbook is not a collectively bargained document and the District is free to change its policy at will.

Collective bargaining brought stability to the teaching profession. Educators felt valued and rewarded as they had a say in their working conditions, professional development opportunities, and were provided wages and benefits that kept up with inflation. The impacts of Act 10 and the subsequent reductions in state funding have been devastating to districts across Wisconsin. It does not have to be this way and the work to repair the system starts with families and communities working with educators to promote their neighborhood schools and demand that politicians and district administrators embrace fair pay and policies and respect for the role of educators in our children's future. We teach and know the children and we should have a voice in decisions that affect their learning conditions, which are our working conditions.