

2020 ILLINOIS EDUCATOR SHORTAGE SURVEY

Is the Educator Shortage Getting Worse?

Putting Results in Context

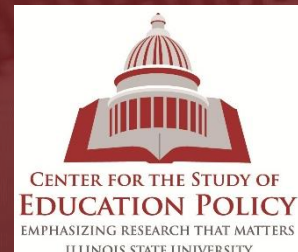
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IS THE EDUCATOR SHORTAGE GETTING WORSE?

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ABSTRACT

The Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) has conducted a series of surveys over the past four years to track perceptions of the educator supply pipeline.¹ This year's survey continues to indicate that superintendents perceive a severe shortage of teachers and substitutes across the state. The repeated measures allow an examination of changes to superintendents' perceptions regarding educator supply over time. This white paper presents a longitudinal overview of educator shortage data and places them in context to examine teacher supply and demand in Illinois. Comparing the four years of survey results suggest the educator shortage bottomed out in 2019 before improving this year. However, this year's results are still less than desirable, and the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant mitigating factor in this year's results. This paper addresses the factors that influence educator shortages and present findings from this year's IARSS survey in the context of previous years' results and other relevant data.

CONTEXT

Teachers have large and lasting effect on student learning and student outcomes. Chetty (2014) found that high-quality teachers have positive effects on students' educational attainment, employment, future earnings, and can help reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes such as criminal activity.² Successful principals play an important role in improving school culture and working conditions, and can serve as powerful multipliers of effective teaching in schools.^{3,4,5} **It is vital for schools to have an adequate supply of high-quality educators, both quantity and quality.**

"Recruiting new teachers is very difficult for us. With the increased need for small class sizes due to Social Distancing, we have hired retired teachers, permanent substitutes and have every administrator teaching at least two classes per day." – 2020 IARSS Survey: Superintendent in Rural West Central IL

The educator shortage in Illinois is a challenge that the state has been dealing with for several years. The Learning Policy Institute attributed teacher shortages in general to four main factors: decline in teacher preparation enrollments, district efforts to return to pre-recession pupil-teacher ratios, increasing student enrollment, and high teacher attrition.⁶ In Illinois, enrollments in teacher preparation programs have fallen substantially over the past decade. The Center for American Progress found that between 2010 and 2018, Illinois' teacher preparation programs saw a 60% decline in enrollments and a greater than 50% decline in completions, ranking amongst the worst in the

nation.⁷ With enrollments in higher education down ever further during the COVID pandemic, policy makers are worried that these downward trends will continue.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Illinois Report Card, teacher retention rate has stayed consistent around 85% over the last five years.⁸ But great uncertainty lies in how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact attrition among teachers. The difficulty that districts are having with finding teachers to replace those that leave has escalated the need to improve the teacher retention rate. High attrition rates among school leaders pose a greater need for an expanded leadership pipeline of candidates. According to the 2019 Illinois Report Card data, Illinois has had an average of 2 principals at the same school over the past 6 years, consistent with national that “nearly half of new principals leave their schools after three years, and nearly 20 percent leave every year”.⁹ High principal attrition can have a profound impact on working conditions in schools, which influence teachers’ decisions to stay in or leave their school or the profession.¹⁰

In Illinois, student-teacher ratios have remained constant over that last 10 years according to ISBE’s Illinois Report Card.¹¹ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, student enrollments in Illinois are expected to decline by 5% or more by 2028.¹² But the Illinois Supply and Demand report predicts a slight increase in enrollment for 2021.¹³ Also, ISBE’s analysis of teachers’ age does not predict a large wave of retirees in the near future.

The educator shortage in Illinois cannot be attributed to one cause but rather a collection of multiple factors affecting higher education and local districts. This series of white papers unpacks the IARSS surveys to draw insights on the educator shortage in Illinois. This first white paper will provide an overview of the issue of educator shortage and insight on 2020 survey results. Future white papers in this series will highlight specific areas of this issue including hard to staff positions, hard to staff schools, and recruitment/policy recommendations.

2020 SURVEY RESULTS

The findings from the 2020 IARSS survey are consistent with prior years and show the educator shortage continues to be a serious problem:

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| 77% | Only 9% | 86% | 65% | 17% |
| reported a teacher shortage problem. | reported no problem with teacher shortages. | expect shortages will be an issue in the coming years. | said the teacher shortage is getting worse. | positions remained unfilled or filled by unqualified professional. |

Districts also reported significant problems recruiting substitute teachers. Only 1% said they had no problems recruiting subs, whereas 93% of schools reported they had a problem finding substitute teachers. Most districts do not see this problem getting better any time soon, with 71% predicting “serious” or “major” problems with teacher shortages over the next 2-3 academic years. While difficulty finding substitute teachers during a pandemic is not surprising, **the shortage of substitute teachers has been a long-standing trend** in Illinois according to the data collected through the survey.

Although districts reported having relatively fewer problems with administrator staffing and recruitment, this area is not without issues of its own. In 42% of districts, at least some problem with administrator shortages was reported. Almost a quarter (23%) reported lower administrator availability than five years ago, compared with only 8% that felt it had improved. Also, 37% said they received fewer administrative applicants than in previous years, compared to only 4% who said they received more.



LONGITUDINAL RESULTS

While the 2020 IARSS survey shows that education shortage is a serious problem, comparing the results over time hints at a reduction in the educator shortage. The proportion of districts reporting the educator shortage was a problem declined from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 1), and the proportion of teacher openings left unfilled or filled by unqualified individuals has declined since 2017 (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Severity of Teacher Shortage

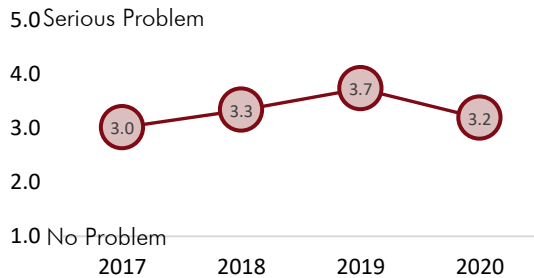
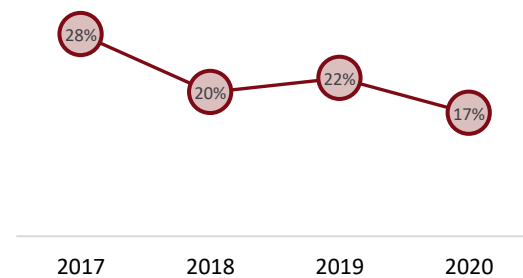


Figure 2: Percent Teacher Openings Unfilled



In addition, the proportion of districts who believed the educator shortage was getting worse decreased from 78% in 2019 to 65% in 2020. Moreover, these improvements all come at a time when many districts reported hiring more teachers to meet students' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic: 37% of districts responded they increased the number of teachers due to COVID, compared to 24% that decreased their teacher hiring.

However, this year's survey results may be confounded by the many changes forced upon districts by the COVID-19 pandemic. District superintendents responded to the survey in early October 2020,

when most Illinois schools were conducting remote learning and their responses reflect that unique time. The qualitative analysis of superintendents' comments on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that superintendents were more focused on support staff and funding than current shortages. Furthermore, several comments indicated superintendents utilized the emergency nature of the pandemic to retain teachers by repurposing them in areas outside their certification.

Although the shortage of administrators is not as severe as it is for teachers, longitudinal data suggest that supply and demand trends for administrators mirror our findings regarding

teachers. That is, the surveys indicate administrative shortages increased through 2019, before improving slightly in 2020.

There has been little change in the proportion of districts experiencing substitute teacher shortages or their perceptions of substitute teacher availability. Further, the survey data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has led districts to decrease their reliance on substitute teachers, including 29% reporting that they "greatly decreased" their utilization of substitutes. However, as districts begin to return to hybrid and in person instruction, there is some evidence that the need for substitute teachers willing to teach in-person is becoming more acute.^{14,15}

"In my opinion, I believe the stress from COVID-19 will have a huge negative impact on retaining all educators, especially administration." – 2020 IARSS Survey: Superintendent in Suburban East Central IL

ANALYSIS

The IARSS survey data do not paint the rosiest picture of educator supply and demand in Illinois. However, as Behrstock-Sherratt (2016) notes, there is no single best indicator of teacher shortage and multiple measure should be taken into consideration.¹⁶ Data from ISBE's Educator Supply and Demand report support superintendent perceptions of the shortage.¹⁷ Figure 3 shows that, for the top ten areas of need, **the total number of unfilled positions has steadily increased over the past three years.** Statewide educator preparation data for Illinois (figure 4) tend to mirror the IARSS surveys results.¹⁸ Figure 4 shows that enrollment appears to have bottomed out in 2017. Since completion data generally lag enrollment data by two years, it would be reasonable to expect an increase in newly certified teachers over the next few years.

Figure 3: Unfilled Positions from Illinois Supply and Demand Report 2020

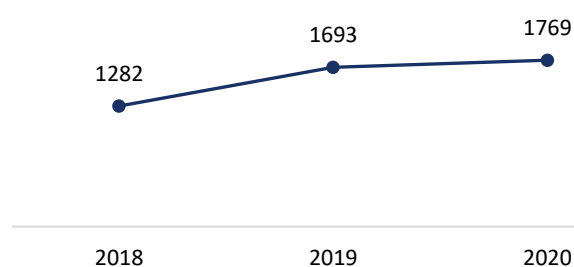
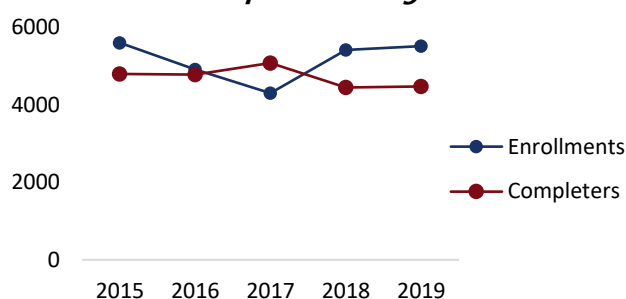


Figure 4: Enrollment and Completions in Illinois Teacher Preparation Programs



Although a diminished supply of educators does not necessarily mean there is an educator shortage, it can lead to problems in the absence of changes to other factors. Two particularly relevant factors to consider in this discussion are supply capture (the proportion of educator preparation program completers who obtain certification) and placement rate (the rate at which completers transition to employment in public schools). Aldeman (2016) points to these remaining swaths of individuals who are qualified, yet not working in schools, as an important “reserve pool” that can be tapped for educator positions in times of need.¹⁹ In recent years, Illinois has improved both its supply capture and its placement rate.²⁰ While this sounds positive on the surface, it has slashed the size of the reserve pool of educators and suggests that there is little wiggle room to eke out more efficiency from the pipeline.²¹

In addition, it is important to note that **simply comparing numbers of completions to numbers of vacancies fails to tell the whole story.** That is, even if there is a sufficient supply of educators statewide, they might not be certified in the subjects or located in the communities where they are needed most. Subsequent white papers in this series will dive more deeply into these topics, but data for the first four years of the IARSS survey indicate that neither jobs nor candidates are distributed equally across the state.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking across all four years, the **IARSS survey respondents are unequivocal in their assessment of the urgency of improving the teacher and leadership pipeline.** While this year's survey data and teacher preparation enrollments hint that Illinois may have survived the worst of the state's educator shortage, the qualitative analysis of superintendents' comments and the supply and demand report suggest this interpretation is not quite so straightforward.

Finally, it is important to remember that educator labor markets are very local, so statewide data on educator supply and demand have little bearing on superintendents' perceptions of educator supply and demand. **Not all educators are a good fit for all schools.** For this reason, the IARSS surveys provide a valuable tool for assessing the health of the local educator pipeline and helping policymakers understand how educator supply and demand is playing out on the ground in schools.

Further analysis is required to pinpoint exactly how and where the links between state and local pipelines are breaking down, and to identify the specific types of educators and districts that are leading to a disconnect. Future white papers in this series will explore additional data from the IARSS survey in more depth and attempt to lend some evidence to discussions of how Illinois might be able to attack this problem in a more targeted fashion in the future.

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- ²⁰ In Illinois, supply capture increased by 20% from 2015 to 2017. As a result, even though preparation program completions decreased, the number of certificates issued actually increased during this time period. Research has found that the national placement rate for teacher is only about 50% in a typical year, while an Illinois study found that only 46% of new certificants transitioned to teaching in Illinois public schools within the first few years after certification. However, a more recent analysis found that nearly three quarters of teacher preparation program graduates began working full-time in Illinois public schools within two years of completion.
- ²¹ Though it’s important to remember that portions of the past years’ reserve pools still remain, it’s also important to note that educator licenses must be renewed every five years and research has found that a non-negligible proportion of this remainder ends up working in education in other important capacities, such as substitute teaching, teacher’s aides, or private school teachers.