

# **2020 ILLINOIS EDUCATOR SHORTAGE SURVEY**

## **How Can Illinois Alleviate the Teacher Shortage?**

### **Seven Targeted Strategies**

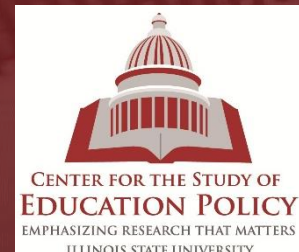
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# HOW CAN ILLINOIS ALLEVIATE THE TEACHER SHORTAGE?

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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.<sup>1</sup> This white paper presents seven strategies that school districts, institutions of higher education, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and legislatures can act on to reduce teacher shortage in Illinois as well as lessen the impact of this issue. Based on the findings presented in the previous white papers, stakeholders in Illinois public education systems should:<sup>2</sup>

- 1) improve compensation for educators.
- 2) increase flexibility in certification.
- 3) market the profession.
- 4) improve retention.
- 5) share resources.
- 6) capitalize on innovative technologies.
- 7) partner with higher education.

These strategies will require care in implementation so that they are targeted at specific areas and do not diminish the quality of the education workforce.

## INTRODUCTION

The first three white papers in this series illustrated Illinois' teacher shortage, exploring potential causes of the mismatch between supply and demand at the local level and highlighting the subject areas and types of districts where this shortage is most acute. This analysis found that even if there is an adequate supply of educators statewide, these resources – like many others – are not distributed equitably and districts do not benefit equally.<sup>3</sup> The evidence suggests that special education teachers, in particular, are both in high demand and difficult to staff, and that districts serving larger proportions of non-White students, districts with lower teacher salaries, districts that are farther from educator preparation programs, and districts in the West Central region of the state all experience greater difficulties in filling vacancies with qualified staff.<sup>4,5</sup> This paper explores several interventions to policy and practice that the state, school districts, and educator preparation programs can use to address these issues.

The IARSS surveys provide some ideas about steps that districts are already taking to attract certified teachers. As shown in Table 1, at least three quarters of districts actively recruited teachers from their local universities, and about half of districts increased starting teacher salaries, recruited at job fairs, hosted student teachers, utilized full-time substitutes, and proactively hired replacement teachers to help solve staffing problems. Smaller, but still noteworthy, proportions of districts increased benefits for new teachers, paid tuition for paraprofessionals who wished to be certified, and offered signing bonuses.

**Table 1: Strategies Used by Districts to Attract Teachers<sup>a</sup>**

Strategy	2018	2019	2020
Actively recruit new graduates from local universities	80%	83%	75%
Recruit student teachers	--	--	55%
Increase base salary for starting teachers	47%	57%	51%
Job fairs	--	50%	47%
Use full-time substitutes	--	--	46%
Hiring a replacement teacher BEFORE retiring teacher retires	47%	46%	38%
Increase benefit package for starting teachers	13%	14%	14%
Pay tuition for paraprofessionals who wish to be certified teachers and return to district	9%	15%	18%
Signing bonuses	8%	9%	10%

<sup>a</sup>Not all strategies were included as survey items in all years.

Although the survey items were not exhaustive and the district sample was not the same every year, it does not appear that there were any substantial changes in districts’ recruiting practices over this time. Resources permitting, a starting point for addressing shortage issues could lie in increasing the utilization of these basic recruitment tools, which have proven feasible in at least some districts in the current context. While these approaches have proven successful other potential interventions should be explored to alleviate this complex issue.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Improve Compensation

Educators, like other professionals, are sensitive to changes in pay. Increased salaries can attract more qualified candidates to the field and increase retention of those already in schools.<sup>6</sup> As illustrated in Table 1 above, some Illinois districts are already experimenting with increased based salaries, benefits, and signing bonuses for new teachers. Districts should consider increasing substitute teacher pay as a means of increasing the pool of interested substitute teachers and explore school-business partnerships for covering portions of this cost.

Because some teaching roles and some schools are more difficult to staff than others, districts should also consider targeted incentives for these positions. Though not widely used in public education, such innovations have been shown to help attract and retain qualified candidates.<sup>7</sup> These incentives could take the form of increased compensation or a state-sponsored loan forgiveness program for teachers and leaders that work in the most hard-to-staff schools and positions in the state.

Improved pensions are another component of compensation reform that could be used to help improve educator supply in Illinois. IARSS survey respondents were particularly concerned that the state’s **Tier II retirement system, which requires teachers work until age 67 before receiving retirement benefits, is a disincentive for teachers to work in Illinois.** The legislature could consider reducing the age of retirement eligibility to 55 at reduced rates, while districts could develop strategies to encourage educators who retired early as result of pandemic to return the profession.

### Increase Flexibility

There are two areas where increased flexibility might help alleviate educator shortages while maintaining high quality: endorsement waivers and additional routes to certification. ISBE, the Illinois



Community College Board (ICCB), and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) should **conduct an audit of waivers issued during the COVID-19 pandemic to determine if there are any unnecessary restrictions on schools** that would provide relief for districts and schools experiencing severe shortages. ISBE should also **grant or continue waivers for licensure grade spans if the school can demonstrate that it is a better option to hire a licensed teacher** for a grade that they are not licensed rather than hiring a full-time substitute teacher or fulfilling the position with other options. This option should be used as a temporary option to get schools through the pandemic.

As a long-term strategy, ISBE and IBHE should examine current enrollments in higher education endorsements to determine if they are on the track to meet the current and future demand of teacher areas that are hardest to staff. In areas where they are not, we recommend the issuance of funding to universities to increase enrollment in certain endorsement areas (e.g., special ed, bi-lingual, middle school, etc.) and also for funding for targeted 'grow your own' partnerships between regional districts and universities in areas of the state with the largest shortage challenges (e.g., west central Illinois).

To expand the supply of qualified teachers, multiple and varied routes to certification should be explored. In addition to the traditional teacher preparation programs, pathways like 'grow your own' and Master's of Arts and Teaching need to be supported. Through multiple entry points as well as parallel career ladders, potential candidates from other fields can gain access to high quality training to pursue certification. While enrollments in traditional teacher preparation programs have been declining over the past decade, enrollments in non-traditional certification programs based at colleges and universities have decreased substantially less and enrollments in non-traditional certification programs not based at higher education institutions have actually increased.<sup>8</sup> Further, a prior study of Illinois found that teachers emerging from these non-traditional pathways tended to be more diverse and more academically qualified.<sup>9</sup>

## **Market the Profession**

A broader public relations effort could help represent education as a viable and valuable occupation, promote the rigor of profession, and convey the supports to help students become successful educators. For example, Illinois State University uses the motto, **"Educators Prepare All Other Professions,"** because they recognize that the quality of all future cohorts of college students at Illinois institutions will be largely dependent on the quality of educators in P-12 schools, most of whom are prepared at Illinois colleges and universities. Because this relationship is interdependent, IBHE should emphasize goals tied to investments in educator preparation at the state level and to incentivize universities and colleges to continue to invest in education preparation programs at their local campuses.

Further, preparation programs and professional organizations should broaden their recruitment efforts to include students of color and men, who have been historically under-represented in the profession. A diverse educator pipeline could build upon the P-20 Illinois Pathways Initiative to cultivate effective talent pipelines, and involve partnerships among school districts, higher education institutions, and community organizations. One source of support for this is the Illinois Minority Teacher Incentive (MTI) Scholarship program, open to Illinois residents who meet academic qualifications and who are from either Black, Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American origin who have expressed an interest in becoming teachers. Through the passage of Education Omnibus

Bill, the MTI scholarship now prioritizes funding for Black men by increasing the set aside for male candidates to 35% and dedicating potentially unused funds to recruiting more Black teachers. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) budget requests an **additional \$4.2M in funding** for the MTI scholarship that would increase the Minority Teachers (MTI) scholarship caps from the **\$5,000 to \$7,500 per candidate** and **expand funding to target bilingual teacher candidates of color** - a severe shortage area inequitably impacting bilingual students. Also, because students who aspire to teach while in high school become teachers at nearly seven times the rate as those who did not express similar aspirations, these educator recruitment efforts should begin at least as early as high school.<sup>10</sup> However, they must continue into college, because more than half of the state’s teachers do not develop an interest in teaching until after high school. Further, the state of Illinois should provide incentives to convince students who enrolled at out-of-state colleges to return to teach in Illinois public schools or create programs to retain these students in Illinois for postsecondary education from the outset, because students with higher academic qualifications, and especially minority students, tend to be overrepresented among those who initially enroll out-of-state.

## Improve Retention

Schools with persistent unfilled vacancies also tend to have high educator turnover rates.<sup>11</sup> So, while attracting high quality educators is only the first step, this needs to be accompanied to concerted efforts to keep them in the profession and in the schools that need them most. The IARSS survey results displayed in Table 2 show some of the strategies that districts use to support their educators and improve retention. The vast majority of districts responding to the survey reported using professional development and mentoring to support the growth of new educators. Many other districts already use induction or orientation programs and instructional coaches.

**Table 2: District Programs to Support New Teachers (IARSS Survey)<sup>a</sup>**

Program	2019	2020
Professional development to support growth	93%	85%
Teacher mentor or induction programs	89%	--
Teacher mentor	--	84%
Induction or orientation programs	--	62%
Instructional coaches	--	45%
Support culturally responsive teaching	29%	16%

<sup>a</sup>Not all strategies were included as survey items in all years.

These efforts are important for beginning teachers, and districts should continue to foster professional development throughout opportunities throughout educators’ careers. **Districts can also create teacher leadership roles and career ladders with more professional autonomy that allow teachers to continue their development while also helping to make principals’ jobs more manageable.** Collaborative school climates and good working conditions can also support educator retention and make the profession more attractive.

As another example, mentoring and induction programs can be a useful strategy that connects educators at multiple stages throughout their growth. Mentoring should not just be targeted to teachers but also to principals. According to a 2019 Education Week article, nationally “nearly half of new principals leave their schools after three years, and nearly 20 percent leave every year”.<sup>12</sup>

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. Principal leadership and support are among the most important factors in teachers' decision to stay in their school or in the profession. Research has found that improvements in school leadership were strongly related to reductions in teacher turnover.<sup>13</sup> The Governor's budget this year includes a request for \$6 million in new teacher mentoring and induction and \$1.2 million in new principal mentoring.

## Share Resources

Districts should examine opportunities to work with Regional Offices of Education (ROE) and Intermediate Service Centers (ISC), other districts or regional consortia for shared services to address educator shortages in hard-to-staff areas and allow for access or cost savings for services (e.g., bookkeeping, human resources, maintenance, technology, legal supports) that might otherwise not be available. State education leaders should work to reduce barriers to shared service agreements and eliminate disincentives to these collaborative opportunities.

Additionally, districts could consider evidence-based models such as full-service community school programs to bring community-based social service agencies into schools to help address social worker shortages and to help deal with mental health and societal issues resulting, such as those resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>14</sup> Districts can fund community school programming through Title I funding through American Rescue Act, Title IV funding, state 21st Century Schools grant program, and federal Full-Service Community School grant programs.

ISBE should also examine and share lessons learned from districts participating in the Competency-Based High School Graduation Requirements Pilot Program and districts that have implemented standards-based grading systems to determine effective strategies that might be utilized from these models to address educator shortages.

Districts can also utilize the LEAD hubs located in six ROEs across the state to work with state administrative and teacher to develop robust principal pipeline programs.<sup>15</sup> For leader shortages, local education agencies can develop a district-based residency model with coaching support that taps educators in the district or region that have a General Administrative endorsement who are not working in an administrative position but would consider doing so.<sup>16</sup>

ROEs/ ISCs should continue to assist districts with recruiting and licensing substitute teachers, including prioritizing the continued development of a cadre of retired teachers or other educators who may have left the field but still want to remain involved in teaching.

## Capitalize on Innovative Technologies

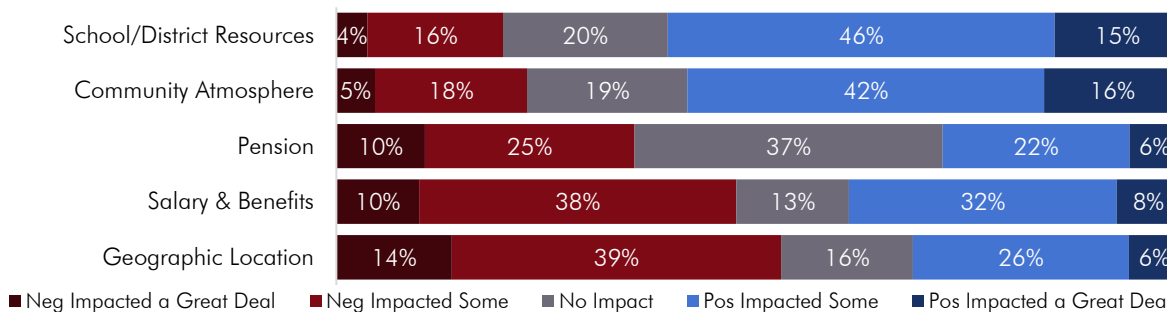
The Governor's Office and ISBE should continue to invest state and federal funding in remote learning and technology to provide students with access to teachers for hard-to-staff classes, as well as a way for districts to provide accelerated learning options such as advanced placement and dual credit classes that they might otherwise be unable to offer. Districts should also examine ways that ROEs and ISCs, alternative schools, and the Illinois Virtual School can assist with online course delivery systems and help meet instructional needs, especially those related to cancelled courses, credit recovery needs, and staffing limitations. Districts could also scale digital learning partnerships with other content providers, such as College Board AP, Khan Academy, or Edgenuity to provide access to supplemental learning materials and tutoring, or consider using federal stimulus funding

towards technology, broadband access, or open education resources to compensate for teacher shortages.

## Partner with Higher Education

Districts located in so-called “higher education desserts” are particularly difficult to staff. Previous analysis in this series of white papers demonstrated that the number of unfilled educator vacancies increases along with distance to the nearest educator preparation program, and that districts in the West Central region of Illinois experienced a disproportionate number of unfilled vacancies.<sup>17</sup> The IARSS survey data also show that districts believe their geographic location is their greatest hindrance to recruiting both teachers and administrators (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Factors That Impact Teacher Recruitment (IARSS 2020 Educator Shortage Survey)**



To address these issues, ISBE should identify where the most severe higher education deserts are in the state and partner with IBHE, ICCB, and IARSS to develop satellite campuses that bring licensure programs to these areas of the state. They should also promote 2+2 teacher preparation programs that work with local community colleges in underserved regions of the state. Districts can also work with colleges and universities to develop strategies for utilizing student teacher placements to address shortage issues. According to the most recent IARSS survey, only 55% of districts report using student teaching as a tool to attract qualified candidates.

ISBE and IBHE should award development grants to university teacher preparation programs to develop stackable credentials that allow educators to receive their license in hard-to-staff content areas. Done well, such programs can help students acquire credentials more quickly and efficiently. And universities should consider developing programs such as ISU’s Superintendent Endorsement Program, which grants a School Business Official certificate along with the Superintendent Endorsement to help districts with shortages among school business officials. ISBE, IBHE, and educator preparation programs should also provide incentives for candidates to pursue certification in high-demand areas such as special education and bilingual education, rather than areas with less demand such as elementary and ELA. ISBE’s “Partnership for Educator Preparation” (PEP) program, which holds preparation programs accountable for the share of their graduates serving in high-need positions, is a step in the right direction.

In Illinois, nearly two-thirds of teachers began teaching within 20 miles of the high school from which they graduated, nearly half began teaching in the same county as their prior high school, and more than one fifth returned to the same school district from which they graduated (or a feeder district).<sup>18</sup> Because the labor market for new teachers is quite small geographically, effective “grow your own” teacher and leader programs, including district-based programs, such as ISU/CPS Teach Chicago Tomorrow program and Rockford/NIU Principal Residency Program, should be replicated in areas

with most severe educator shortages. According to the IARSS surveys, more than half (55%) of districts reported using the “grow your own” approach to attract qualified administrators, while substantial additional proportions using variations on this approach such as encouraging teachers to pursue administrative endorsements (39%), utilizing succession planning (34%), and recruiting teacher leaders (25%). However, a much smaller proportion of districts (10-15%) utilized a similar approach for teacher recruitment, perhaps out of concerns around academic quality and low success rates in previous iterations of this approach.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

These seven strategies – improve compensation, increase flexibility, market the profession, improve retention, share resources, capitalize on innovative technologies, and partner with higher education—represent a broad array of approaches that can be utilized to address teacher shortages in Illinois. Given the scale and importance of this issue, state education leaders should consider each as a viable tool they can utilize to help solve this problem. However, the most efficient and effective strategies are those that target the schools and positions that are the most difficult to staff. This approach is also the most progressive, in that it **ensures that the most benefit goes to those who need it the most**, rather than spreading limited resources thinly across the board.<sup>20</sup>

To do this, the state needs to maintain the strong data infrastructure that can identify and target these highest-need shortage areas. The IARSS educator shortage surveys are one standout example of such data collection efforts. The PEP program also provides valuable information about the state’s educator preparation programs and a framework for holding them to account for the quality and quantity of their graduates. ISBE’s triennial Educator Supply and Demand reports are also viewed as a model for the Midwest region. Data such as these are vital for pinpointing areas where supply is not meeting demand and which positions are being under- or over-produced and can be used to promote the preparation of educators with high-need skills and backgrounds. These data can also be used to predict potential shortages to certain subjects or regions, and target interventions to prevent them before they occur.

Finally, while policymakers focus on providing an adequate supply of educators, they must not lose sight of the quality of the education workforce. While some “quick fix” strategies may increase production of teachers and administrators in the short term, they run the risk of doing so at the expense of rigorous preparation and high standards. It is important for policymakers to remember that approaches that cut these corners ultimately end up being the most detrimental for precisely the students and schools who need help them the most.

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<sup>2</sup> This series of white papers can be accessed at <https://iarss.org/2020-educator-shortage>.



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