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**IARSS Survey: Five Years of Data Show Teacher Shortage Problem Worsening, Future More Challenging**

**SPRINGFIELD –** Five years after its debut, Illinois’ pre-eminent study finds the statewide teacher shortage problem continues to grow – accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – and school districts overwhelmingly expect it to get even worse in the near future.

The Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS), representing the leaders of Regional Offices of Education and Intermediate Service Centers in all 102 Illinois counties, again partnered with Goshen Education Consulting and Illinois for a fall 2021 survey of more than 660 school districts statewide on the key questions around the depth and consequences of Illinois’ teacher shortage crisis.

IARSS leaders say the latest survey confirms the sobering reality playing out in classrooms statewide: the shortage crisis is immense, complex and growing, despite many ongoing policy and practical efforts at all levels of education to take it head on.

“Our schools need help, now more than ever,” said Mark Klaisner, IARSS President and Executive Director of the West40 ISC west of Chicago. “For five years of our study, we have shown how schools are struggling to find qualified teachers and are under tremendous stress to provide the best education possible while understaffed and overwhelmed. COVID-19 has only made those challenges worse.

“We hope these new results will emphasize the urgency we all feel to find more dedicated educators who see the wonderful value of helping our children learn and grow, and to take on this difficult and multi-faceted problem with a renewed focus and passion. Every child in Illinois deserves a high-quality education and teachers who will help put them on their path to lifelong success.”

**TOP RESULTS**

Illinois school districts report the teacher shortage problem has worsened from last year in virtually all major areas:

* 88 percent of schools say they have a teacher shortage problem, and 77 percent report the shortage is getting worse
* 93 percent of districts expect the shortage will worsen over the 2023 and 2024 academic years
* More than 2,000 positions are either not filled or filled by someone not qualified to teach there – more than double the amount reported from the last school year
* 96 percent of schools report a substitute teacher shortage problem
* More than 400 classes were canceled, and nearly that many sent online because schools simply had no one to teach them in person
* While administrator shortages are much less severe, schools report they’re having a harder time finding qualified candidates amid retirements and are more and more concerned those struggles will grow over time

**COVID-19 EFFECT**

As students returned to classrooms, schools have struggled to fill needed gaps in educator availability during the pandemic. More than 70 percent say the pandemic has created budget or logistical challenges increasing hiring needs. Nearly 60 percent of districts report increased hiring of teachers and paraprofessionals during the pandemic.

But the actual effects of COVID-19 on day-to-day school instruction goes much deeper. Administrators report their teachers and staff are burned out, their substitute teacher pools are bare as more educators choose to retire or not return to the classroom, and very public battles over mask and other education mandates are taking a heavy toll.

“Anyone ‘on the fence’ about becoming or staying an educator is likely not going to be around,” reported one elementary school leader in northwest Illinois.

**AROUND THE STATE**

While shortage problems are evident in all parts of Illinois, rural school districts report the most significant problems and the worst outlook ahead. The most severe shortage problems are found in west central and east central Illinois – each region has more than 90 percent of schools reporting shortages. Shortages are also most extreme in unit districts.

**WHERE WE’VE BEEN**

IARSS debuted its statewide shortage study in 2017, when 77 percent of schools reported a shortage problem and 95 percent say they struggled to find substitute teachers. But the survey has proven to be an important tool for helping education leaders and policymakers identify cracks throughout the educator pipeline and develop a series of short-term and long-term solutions. Various legislative proposals have made it easier for retired teachers to dedicate more time in a return to the classroom, increased scholarships for those who want to teach in subject areas that have the largest shortages, improved mentoring programs and licensure processes, and increased benefits.

**WHAT’S NEXT**

IARSS and its survey partners have worked to identify both the major challenges behind the shortage crisis, and a menu of ways to turn around its growing momentum.

Policy recommendations included in the 2021 study include:

* Increased funding throughout the teacher pipeline: enticing more young people to go into the field and better supporting those who start but can be tempted to leave
* Streamlining restrictive requirements to get into teaching and substitute teaching
* Expanding programs that recruit and support minorities and those who teach in high-need subject areas
* Helping schools find more candidates to meet short-term educator shortage needs

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