

2021

ILLINOIS EDUCATOR SHORTAGE STUDY

MEDIA GUIDE



TOP RESULTS

In 2017, the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) established a partnership to take a critical look at an emerging problem in the classroom: a shortage of qualified educators.

Five years after the initial IARSS report, one point is clear: *Illinois' teacher shortage is immense, complex – and in some troubling ways, growing.*

The latest study details feedback from more than 660 school districts (78 percent of all districts) in Fall 2021 found:

88% of school say they have a teacher shortage problem

77% report the shortage is getting worse

86% percent of schools say they are seeing fewer applicants for positions than five years ago

93% percent of districts expect an ongoing teacher shortage problem in the 2023 and 2024 academic years

SUBSTITUTE SHORTAGES

Shortages in substitute teachers have been an acute problem for the five years of IARSS' study. The latest study shows they are at a crisis stage, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

96%

percent of schools report a shortage problem with substitutes, with **55 percent** saying it's a serious problem

90%

percent of schools say substitute teacher availability is worse than five years ago

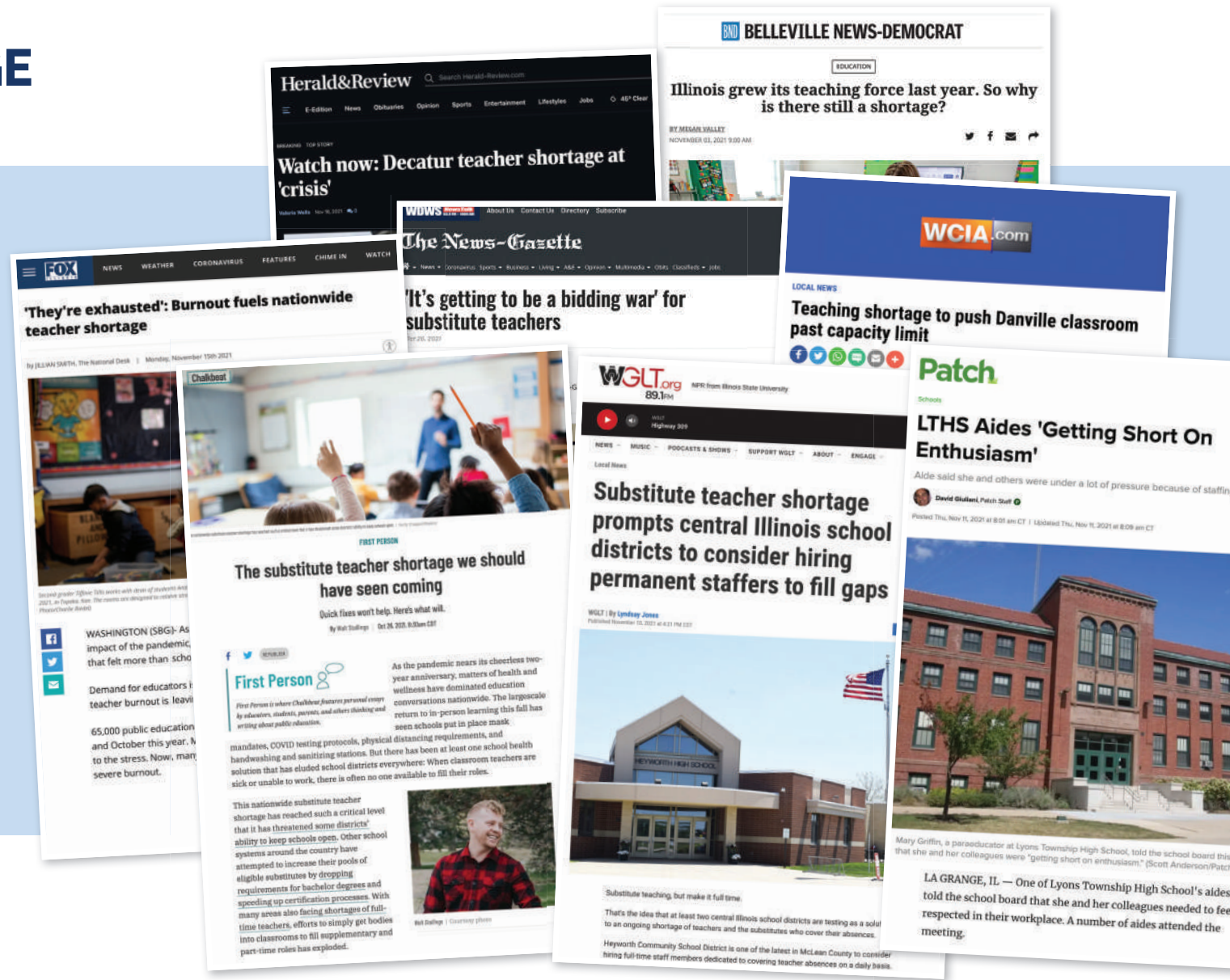
95%

percent of schools expect the substitute teacher shortage to be a problem in the 2023 and 2024 academic years



NEWS COVERAGE

Ever since students first walked through the door this fall, scores of schools have struggled with putting and keeping a team in place to meet their needs:



COVID-19

Much like how it affects each person differently, COVID-19 has created an assortment of difficulties for school districts.

- More than **70 percent** of schools say the pandemic has created budget or logistical challenges that have increased hiring needs
- Teachers and paraprofessionals are most in demand, with nearly **60 percent** of districts reporting increases in hiring from those categories during the pandemic

IARSS asked schools to offer their insight into how COVID-19 has affected staffing, and more than 180 administrators weighed in. The responses included:

“People are burnt out. This is not sustainable.”

“Overall stress on our staff is significantly greater and our people are more tired. We were in person for 175 days last year and our people were completely worn out.”

“We had the 2nd most retirees in the past 50 years due to Covid. We are also noticing a lack of candidates for support staff and specialized teaching positions.”

“Anyone “on the fence” about becoming or staying an educator is likely not going to be around. Potential candidates do not want to be endangered by members of the public who do not take covid seriously.”

“For the first time in my career, I have funds (through the federal grants) that have given me the financial resources I need to staff my buildings how I would like them staffed. Unfortunately, I have had to fill these positions with staff who I believe are not necessarily going to be successful, simply because they were the only candidate. We have smaller class sizes now, which is great, but if the person teaching those classes is less than qualified, I fear the educational outcomes will be no different than when we had very qualified people teaching larger classes.”

COVID-19

Existing teacher shortages have turned school leaders into strong improvisors. COVID-19 helped them earn a master's degree in playing it by ear:

425 classes were canceled and **385 moved online** because there were no qualified teachers for the subject matter

Schools have increased **class sizes**, used long-term **substitutes** and **retired** teachers, combined classes, asked teachers to take on a **heavier workload**, and more

Schools report more than **2,000 educator openings either left unfilled or filled by someone not qualified to fill the position** (substitute or interim teacher, a third-party vendor, etc.)

When schools don't have substitute teachers to turn to for filling gaps, they **move teachers** into other classrooms, ask **administrators** to teach, put students in **other classes** or convert classes to **study halls**



WHY ARE TEACHERS LEAVING?

An aging workforce – the **No. 1 reason** schools report for educator vacancies is retirement

Teachers resignation second-most often, followed by the school needing to fill a newly created position

Medical leave, promotion and termination round out the list

Schools report their geographic location as the biggest negative factor for recruiting teachers, followed by salary and benefits and pension. Only **7 percent** of school administrators believe their working conditions affect teacher recruitment.

Illinois' education system is working overtime to deal with both short-term shortage side effects and to improve the educator pipeline for the long term:

- Schools report **72 percent** of their educator workforce is from a traditional in-state college or university
- Schools are providing help to support teachers through: teacher mentoring, instructional coaches, professional development, orientation programs and more

ADMINISTRATOR SHORTAGE

Throughout the five-year history of the teacher shortage history, IARSS has uncovered schools have seen far fewer shortages with administrators than with classroom teachers. But that might be changing:

- **64 percent** of schools report little to no administrator shortage problem
- Administrator availability is the same or better at nearly **70 percent** of schools
- Retirement, promotion and resignation are top reasons for leadership openings in Illinois schools
- Geographic location, salary and benefits and community atmosphere are **top 3 reasons** schools report for administrators to leave
- A whopping **95 percent** of schools report they're seeing fewer administrative applicants
- Just **31 percent** of schools say new administrators in their districts are of good quality, and none are considered high quality. **36 percent** are considered poor quality
- **55 percent** of schools expect to see a shortage problem for administrators in the 2023 and 2024 academic years

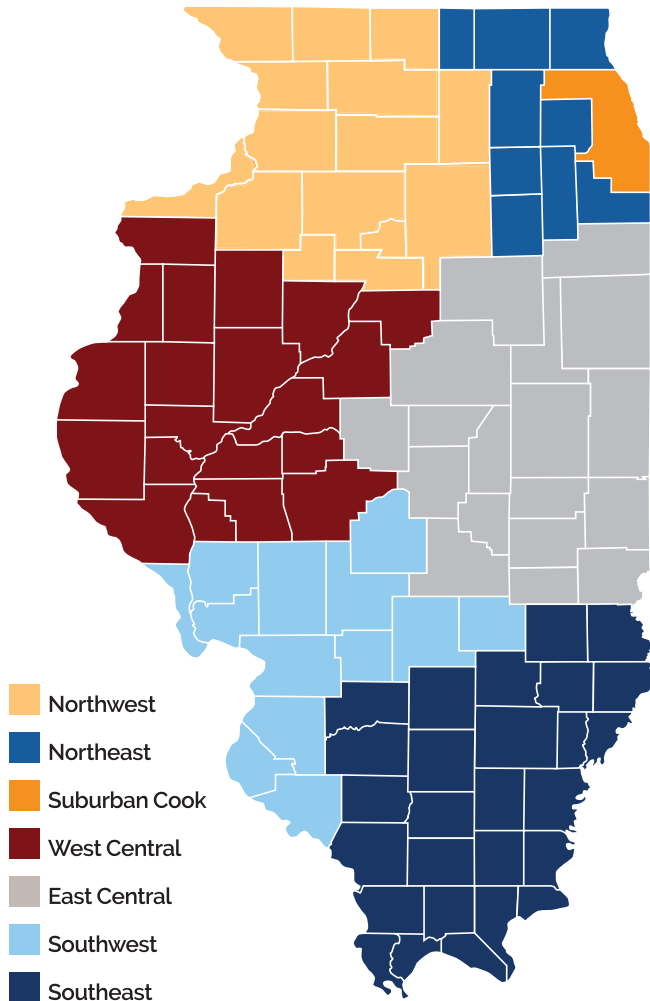


SCHOOL TYPE COMPARISON

IARSS understands the teacher shortage is not one-size-fits all problem. While schools universally around the state report major shortage problems as we have highlighted here, the problem does vary across the type of school district serving students:

- Teacher shortages are seen most acutely for unit districts (**92 percent**), and least at the high school level (**80 percent**)
- **86 percent** of non-traditional schools report the problem is getting worse, compared to the other end of **68 percent** at the high school level
- Between **84-89 percent** of schools of all types report they're seeing fewer teacher applicants than five years ago
- **95 percent** of unit districts expect a shortage problem in 2023 and 2024, while **85 percent** of non-traditional districts have the same expectation on the other end
- For substitutes, between **97-98 percent** of all districts report expected shortages in 2023 and 2024
 - Just **66 percent** of high schools report the substitute shortage is getting worse, compared to non-traditional (**84 percent**), unit (**82 percent**) and elementary (**80 percent**)
- Administrator shortages are as high as **50 percent** for non-traditional districts and as low as **35 percent** for elementary
 - **69 percent** of elementary schools expect an administrative shortage in 2023 and 2024, but **97 percent** of non-traditional districts see the same shortage then

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN



Once again, teacher shortages are being felt hardest in more rural parts of Illinois:

- Across Illinois, the extent of the teacher shortage problems is largely universal among rural (**89 percent**), suburban (**88 percent**) and urban (**85 percent**) districts
 - Shortages are seen least in and near Chicago (**67 percent CPS**, **79 percent Northeast**) and most downstate (**95 percent West Central**, **91 percent East Central**)
- There are differences in the future of the problem: **72 percent** of urban districts say it's getting worse, compared to **76 percent** of suburban and **82 percent** of rural districts
- Schools generally report fewer qualified candidates across all regions: **80 percent urban**, **87 percent suburban**, **90 percent rural**
- More than **90 percent** of districts regardless of location say the shortages will continue in 2023 and 2024
- **98 percent** of all districts across regions say the substitute teacher shortage will continue in 2023 and 2024
- Less than **40 percent** of all schools across regions say they have an administrator shortage today, but between **67 percent** (urban) and **77 percent** (suburban and rural) say they will face shortages in 2023 and 2024

REASONS FOR TEACHER SHORTAGE

School leaders report many reasons for why the teacher shortage problem is getting worse:

“It is not a flexible job like others and work load is tremendous.”

“Educators are no longer respected or held in a positive light.”

“Teaching is not as looked up to in today's time as it once was/a lot of negative and sometimes it is because our staff is not as professional in and outside of the schools.”

“The negativity and controversy targeting school districts could decrease quality candidates as they are drawn to other careers. Of course, there are many other careers craving talented individuals that could pull teachers out of the profession. The decrease in the quality of the pension also continues to be a problem.”

“No one wants to work.”

“Ridiculously difficult licensure standards in Illinois.”



REASONS FOR TEACHER SHORTAGE



Schools also report drawing teachers to their districts is increasingly difficult – in part, because *qualified educators know they're in demand*:

“Candidates are able to sign contracts and continue to shop themselves for other openings prior to school starting due to the shortage”

“We have hired teachers a year early than a known opening just to have them. We reduce class sizes during this time.”

“There are simply not enough candidates. We had ONE applicant for a late opening in Kindergarten. ONE! We have ZERO candidates for full time permanent sub positions – at full teacher pay. Too many “affluent” districts scooped up “extra” teachers for coaching, intervention, remote learning, etc – leaving the pool for the rest very dry.”

“Ten years ago we would have 50 applicants for any of our positions. This year we had ZERO applicants for two open positions.”

“With all the COVID drama in society, teachers are being treated harshly from different people for different reasons. They seem to be a scapegoat for people's anger, despite not having control over the guidelines and rules.”

REASONS FOR TEACHER SHORTAGE

Along with developing improvisation skills to keep classrooms running, the report reveals school leaders have had to become magicians of sorts to draw in more talented personnel:

Covering with retired teachers or TAs as subs, hiring long-term subs, overloading teachers, combining classes, paying teachers extra to cover classes, teletherapy, shared services with neighboring districts.

"I haven't employed more teachers/paras/subs because they aren't available. If I had applicants I would hire 2 more paras and have at least 5 more substitutes. My subs are now teachers, my sub drivers are driving regular routes."

"We are reaching out to universities to bring in more interns and student teachers. We have several in the Fall and will look to hire them for some of the positions that are still open in the Spring. We also partnered with Golden Apple, although at this point, have not had much success with new hires through this program. We have to rely on some contract agencies, which has been less than ideal. We hope to hire full time employees for these roles as soon as possible. Recruiting never stops and anytime we find a qualified candidate, we want to bring the into our district, so we will continue to keep open positions posted, even if we currently have them filled with contract employees."



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

IARSS continues to work with a number of education and legislative partners to attack the complex problem from every possible perspective. The latest policy recommendations include:

- 1** Invest in **all parts** of the Educator pipeline
- 2** Address **affordability** for aspiring Educators
 - Support an increase in educators of color in Illinois by Increasing funding for Minority Teachers of Illinois (MTI)
- 3** Expand **Early Pathways** into the Teaching Profession
- 4** Prioritize strategies that **support** current educator labor market to prevent attrition.
 - Increase funding for New Teacher and New Principal Mentoring programs and make this an annual allocation through state appropriations.
 - Invest in school leaders, who play a pivotal role with school working conditions that impact teacher recruitment and retention.
 - Address the principal workload and working conditions in schools that are causing many leaders to leave their school and/or the profession.
 - Re-envision the role of the school principal.
- 5** Consider **short-term strategies** for filling the educator pipeline in the immediate future
 - Advocate for state creation of a robust online teacher recruitment system.
 - The state should determine how to more tightly align its performance based capstone assessment with its PERA teacher evaluation framework.

