**The seventh-annual Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools** **survey on teacher shortages across Illinois** for the 2023-2024 school year reveals a continuing dilemma for school leaders: they make encouraging progress in filling classrooms and ensuring students have the educational opportunities they need today to be successful, yet they need more help to close some persistent gaps in the workforce for tomorrow’s students.

Our committee of educational policy leaders and experts recommends continued focus on this challenge, breaking each down into two categories: today and tomorrow. More detailed explanations are included below.

**TODAY**

* **Increase state funding for K-12 schools**: More and stable dollars from Springfield allow schools to compete for teachers and leaders and fill openings
* **Trust the numbers**: More timely release of more data on the educator pipeline is critical to drive policy decisions, and strengthen existing systems to help hiring managers in school districts find good teaching candidates
* **Prepare teachers to be successful right away**: Help teachers succeed by preparing them to be “learner-ready” on Day One in the classroom, including strengthening the student teacher experience, and provide quality, frequent feedback to improve their work
* **Improve the hiring process:** Help schools find more teachers, especially more teachers of color, through best practices for hiring managers.
* **Fund new teacher and new principal mentoring:** Reinstate funding for New Teacher and New Principal Mentoring into the next state budget

**TOMORROW**

* **Address the educator pipeline as a continuum**: A systemic approach to our pipeline, starting with recruiting teachers in middle and high schools all the way through supporting the retention, leadership, and development of veteran teachers will provide many long-term benefits
* **Expand opportunities within classrooms for educator positions:** Support those paraprofessionals and teaching assistants interested in earning their license to be a teacher in high-need subject areas by paying for their tuition costs and providing them with the ability to retain current salary and benefits as they earn their new license
* **Invest in teacher and school leadership:** From high-quality mentoring for teachers and leaders to teacher leadership pathways, and funding for recruiting principals. Teacher success is directly tied to having strong leadership and support systems in place, in and out of the classroom
* **Create pathways for growth:** People who want to change careers, or who decide to go beyond a community college education for a teaching degree need our full support, not more obstacles, to eventually reach and succeed in the classroom
* **Focus on acute shortage needs in Special Education and English Learner teachers:** With thousands of special-education teachers licensed but not teaching in that subject area, identify root causes on why teachers with special education endorsement are not pursuing special education positions as well as strategies for retention. Prioritize strategies to recruit, place and retain English Learner teachers to meet the demands of new English Learners in Illinois schools.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS EXPLAINER:**

TODAY

**Increase state funding for K-12 schools**: More dollars from Springfield allow schools to compete for teachers and fill openings.

Initial investment in the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula has helped schools make important strides in educator recruitment and ongoing support. Still, more than half of the state’s students attend districts with less than 75 percent of the funding they need. At least the minimum funding level in EBF funding would ensure more districts can meet students and staff needs today, and make the necessary investments needed from steady, reliable funding for the educator pipeline over the long term.

**Trust the numbers**: More timely release of more data on the educator pipeline is critical to drive policy decisions, and strengthen existing systems to help hiring managers in school districts find good teaching candidates.

When agencies release more useful, timely, and accessible public information about the educator pipeline, policymakers and school leaders make stronger, more informed decisions – for today and tomorrow. The Illinois State Board of Education’s Illinois Educator Preparation Profile (IEPP) system needs to have more useful information for hiring managers and policymakers, and similar information for principal preparation programs will help districts find the right next leaders.

**Prepare teachers to be successful right away**: Help teachers succeed by preparing them to be “learner-ready” on Day One in the classroom, including strengthening the student teacher experience, and provide quality, frequent feedback to improve their work.

ISBE’s statewide system for teacher readiness should ensure content tests and performance-based assessments are unbiased and match best practices so all new teachers meet clear, objective standards showing they are ready to help students learn when they step in the classroom. Financial barriers in student teaching should be reduced for candidates with financial needs and those targeting high-need subject areas or schools. Stipends and high-quality training, and a streamlined candidate placement process will ensure student teaching is as effective as possible for candidates and schools.

**Improve the hiring process:** Help schools find more teachers, especially more teachers and leaders of color, through best practices for hiring managers.

Schools should share knowledge and guidance to help others develop effective human resources practices and policies for strong teacher hiring results. Encourage schools to promote best practices that help all draw in more talent, not create “winners versus losers” competition among districts.

**Fund new teacher and new principal mentoring programs:** Although ISBE requested state funding for New Teacher and New Principal Mentoring (previously funded through federal stimulus funding), this funding did not make it into the Governor’s proposed budget for next year. The Illinois General Assembly should add funding for New Teacher and New Principal Mentoring into the state’s Fiscal Year 25 budget.

TOMORROW

**Address the educator pipeline as a continuum**: A systemic PK-college effort to recruit and retain teachers will provide many long-term benefits

Illinois has no quick fix. We need a coherent, comprehensive and connected approach to strengthening and diversifying our education pipeline, with attention on school and district leaders who provide the environment for teachers to succeed.

Continued state investments in Educators Rising, future teachers clubs, and Dual Credit Educator Pathways at high schools that create pathways into college educator prep programs and a concerted effort to expose the tremendous benefits of a rewarding career in education to younger students considering their future should be part of the discussion.

Additionally, IBHE, ICCB and the Illinois Articulation Initiative should establish greater transferability of major coursework from community colleges into the state’s four-year universities for future educators seeking to teach in elementary and secondary settings.

**Expand opportunities within classrooms for educator positions:** Illinois has over 20k paraprofessionals and teaching assistants (TA) working in our schools, and over half have bachelor’s degrees. Support those interested in earning their license to be a teacher in high-need areas with funding and ability to retain current salary and benefits as they earn their new teaching license.

Investing in alternative teacher preparation routes for teachers’ assistants and paraprofessionals is a smart way to build the teacher pipeline. Allow TAs and paraprofessionals to work while obtaining their teaching license. Expand the number of school personnel entering teaching positions in high-need positions or geographies. Over time, more people with a real interest in our students’ educational success will be prepared and ready to step up and teach full-time. Track the results and participate in ISBE’s $6 million multimedia advertising and marketing campaign aimed at improving teacher recruitment across Illinois.

**Invest in teacher and school leadership:** From high-quality mentoring for teachers and leaders to teacher leadership pathways, and funding for recruiting principals. Teacher success is directly tied to having strong leadership and support systems in place, in and out of the classroom.

Prioritize teacher mentoring where it is needed most, with teaching categories (race, subject area, and location) with the greatest attrition rates. Increase state-funded mentoring programs. Extend the years teachers and principals can access mentoring services and consider opt-out options instead of opt-in. Develop more teacher leadership pathways across the state. Continue funding for principal recruitment grants and target programs for recruiting school leaders to those who mirror the student population, or come from districts with high rates of turnover or a lack of supply of candidates. Explore federal apprenticeship grants to create more opportunities for student teachers and aspiring principals, as strong school leaders make a critical difference in teacher performance and retention.

**Create pathways for growth:** People who want to change careers, or who decide to go beyond a community college education for a teaching degree need our full support, not more obstacles, to eventually reach and succeed in the classroom.

Would-be teachers, especially those from diverse backgrounds, need affordable preparation. Continue millions of dollars for MTI funding and supporting the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program. Invest in educator pipeline activities that generate results. Ensure the Illinois Articulation Initiative allows full transfer of community college education courses to four-year universities as called for in recent legislation.

**Focus on acute shortage needs:** With thousands of special-education teachers licensed but not teaching in that subject area, find more incentives to get SPED endorsed teachers into the classroom and to assist with other high-need teacher recruitment and retention.

More than 7,000 SPED teachers are licensed but not teaching SPED in Illinois, and we need to better understand why. Strengthen and expand affordability initiatives for teachers in SPED and high-needs areas. Research and learn from the Teacher Vacancy Grant. Engage more high school students who earn the Seal of Biliteracy to enter the profession to teach in ESL and bilingual programs.