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**IARSS Survey: Teacher Shortages Persist in Illinois with Disparities, Many Solutions Showing Progress**

**SPRINGFIELD –** Seven years after its debut, Illinois’ popular and comprehensive study shows persistent teacher shortages statewide with concerning disparities across the state. Schools also are showing a variety of solutions at the local and state levels are helping them ease the strain on classroom instruction.

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 for a fall 2023 survey of more than 750 school districts statewide on the key questions around the depth and consequences of Illinois’ teacher shortage crisis.

IARSS leaders say these latest results show school leaders and policymakers are determined to work tirelessly and creatively to address the many causes of teacher shortages, even as some problems prove challenging to overcome.

“Our annual study has become a tremendous resource for educators, legislators and state officials to understand the depth of this persistent problem and the ways we all are working to make progress in solving it,” said Gary Tipsord, IARSS Executive Director.

“As we have said year after year, our shortages are the result of generations of factors that we cannot resolve immediately. But as this latest study shows, we have challenges ahead to address concerning disparities in how this problem is affecting our schools and many dedicated people who devote effort every day to addressing the problem in creative ways while providing the best education possible for every child who steps inside a classroom in Illinois.

**TOP RESULTS**

Illinois school districts report the teacher shortage problem persists and forces schools to be more creative to address it:

* More than 90 percent of schools say they have a serious or very serious teacher shortage problem
* 93 percent of schools say they struggle to fill substitute teacher openings
* 88 percent of school leaders report having fewer than five – and sometimes zero – applicants for open teaching positions
* Teacher shortages are seen as most severe in special education and career technical education
* School psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and nurses create the most prominent school support personnel shortages
* Teacher shortages are the most severe in city districts, in vocational centers, and in more rural parts of Illinois such as west-central, southwest and east-central Illinois
* 73 percent of school leaders say half or less of their teacher candidates have the proper credentials for the position they are seeking

**DEEPER INSIDE THE SHORTAGE TRENDS**

Each year, the IARSS-Goshen survey asks school leaders to provide detailed insight into the educator shortages they are experiencing, how their shortages are impacting the education they provide their students, and the various ways they are pursuing solutions to adjust to their reality and prepare for a better tomorrow.

The latest results reveal while there are broader trends that all schools are seeing, there are many differences across districts for both the problems and effective solutions. For example, nearly 70 percent of all schools report serious or very serious problems with shortages, but that number drops to as little as 20 percent of schools in some more affluent counties.

The leading causes of teacher shortages vary greatly across the state. Collectively, schools report they mostly see shortages from employee burnout and increased responsibilities, with teachers leaving for better pay in another career. Their open positions are often from resignations by educators to teach at other districts or resignations for a different profession – underscoring the competitive nature of school districts all grappling with similar shortage challenges.

School leaders report a number of solutions are helping improve educator recruitment and retention:

* Improved working conditions
* Placing student teachers in their districts
* Supporting paraprofessional support staff to go through proper licensing through financial support
* Offering additional pay or benefits to keep educators

At the state level, school leaders report teacher shortage issues have eased by changes from the Illinois State Board of Education and state legislators such as increasing the number of days retired educators and substitute teachers can be in classrooms, and providing additional state funding that allowed them to hire more help. They recommend improving pensions, providing more loan forgiveness, and supporting teacher prep candidates in chronic shortage areas as new ways policymakers can further relieve the shortage stresses.

Looking back at previous IARSS shortage studies, the reported severity of teacher shortages overall is steady from 2023, but still increased from what was reported in 2018. Schools are filling positions with alternative licensing and other measures much more frequently now.

**WHAT’S NEXT**

Each year, IARSS and its survey partners re-evaluate the major challenges still driving the shortage crisis and how best to address it – both in the short term and for the long run. Some policy recommendations in the 2023-2024 include:

* Continue to increase state funding for K-12 schools
* Release more data more quickly on the evolving educator pipeline to drive strong policy decisions and help school hiring managers find good teaching candidates
* Invest in teacher and school leadership
* Help create new opportunities for school support staff to become classroom teachers
* Focus on acute shortage needs with mentoring and administrative support, and financial incentives

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