**Statewide Surveys: Illinois Educator Shortage Crisis Eases, Challenges Remain for School Districts**

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**SPRINGFIELD** – New results from two statewide surveys show Illinois’ educator shortage crisis is easing. The Illinois State Board of Education attributes the progress to comprehensive statewide efforts to address teacher shortages, which include the largest-ever state investment in addressing teacher vacancies. The state’s Teacher Vacancy Grants provided $45 million per year in FY 2024 and FY 2025 to the 170 districts with the greatest numbers of unfilled teaching positions.

Grantee districts have utilized the funds to implement evidence-based strategies to address local challenges to teacher recruitment and retention. [Early results](https://www.isbe.net/Lists/News/NewsDisplay.aspx?ID=1510) have shown improved recruitment and retention in the state's most understaffed school districts, including the hiring of nearly 5,400 new teachers, the retention of approximately 11,000 additional educators, and support for approximately 1,500 non-certified staff to pursue licensure and 450 certified staff to pursue further endorsements.

Both the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools’ 2024-2025 Educator Shortage Survey and the ISBE 2024-2025 Unfilled Positions Data Collection also confirm teacher vacancies remain a serious challenge for school districts across the state, speaking to the necessity of continued attention to and investment in solutions. Hundreds of school districts last fall responded to the surveys, which seek a variety of data points to drive state resources and policy changes for increasing the talent pool to lead classrooms in all 102 counties.

**UNFILLED POSITIONS TOP RESULTS**

The ISBE results found:

* A 5.6 percent decrease in the total number of unfilled teaching positions from the 2023-2024 school year, while the total number of filled positions continued to increase, by 1.4 percent.
* Increases in filled positions and decreases in unfilled positions for school support personnel and paraprofessionals. Administrators’ filled positions and unfilled positions both increased.
* 3,864 teaching positions were unfilled as of Oct. 1, 2024, along with 996 school support personnel, 2,415 paraprofessionals, and 189 administrator positions.

“We are proud to see the educator shortage ease for the first time in years, with both an increase in filled positions and a decrease in unfilled positions,” **said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders.** “The state has recognized the severity and urgency of this crisis and has made investments that have made a difference – from Teacher Vacancy Grants awarded to the most understaffed school districts to a successful statewide teacher recruitment marketing campaign. However, our highest need schools are still experiencing critical educator shortages, so we must keep building on the progress we see today.”

**IARSS SURVEY TOP RESULTS**

For the eighth year, IARSS – representing leaders of Regional Offices of Education and Intermediate Service Centers in every Illinois county – asked school districts key questions around the depth and consequences of Illinois’ teacher shortage crisis. Goshen Consulting again administered the survey. They found the teacher shortage problem persists, while schools work to be creative and effective in addressing it. Out of the more than 750 districts that responded to the survey:

* 87 percent of schools say they have a teacher shortage problem.
* 91 percent of schools say they struggle to fill substitute teacher openings.
* 91 percent of school leaders report having fewer than five – and sometimes zero – applicants for open teaching positions.
* 65 percent of school leaders say half or less of their teacher candidates have the proper credentials for the position they are seeking.
* 71 percent of school leaders report their teacher position needs have increased since the last school year, and 80 percent expect those needs will grow over the next five years.

IARSS says this latest study confirms schools are making progress to fill open positions and provide the critical instruction students need, yet many challenges in the educator staffing pipeline continue.

“The latest report should again draw the attention across Illinois of educators, legislators and state officials on the progress we have been making to identify and rectify our shortage crisis, and the work we need to build on to help produce more qualified candidates to lead students in our classrooms,” said **Gary Tipsord, IARSS Executive Director.**

“In classrooms and buildings across the state, we have innovative leaders working tirelessly to meet children’s needs. Their hard work should be recognized. These problems have built up for generations. We must redouble our efforts to expand the entire teacher pipeline and provide the resources and support our schools need to continue to step up to the challenges of the teacher shortage crisis.”

**NEW INSIGHTS**

Both surveys confirm: the teacher shortage impacts each school district and region differently.

In the ISBE Unfilled Positions report, shortages occurred in roughly half of education entities (615 of 1,120), while 37 percent (414) reported zero unfilled positions in any position category. Further, the data shows that disadvantaged students disproportionately bore the brunt of these shortages. The education entities serving higher percentages of low-income students reported higher vacancy rates.

For the first time in the IARSS survey, school leaders were asked to offer more insight into what’s causing shortages and the impacts shortages are having in their classrooms, and how they are working to address those challenges. A limited pool of applicants, salary and benefit issues, and poor working conditions lead the shortage drivers, while improved teacher recruiting and incentives, and support at the state, federal and district level most help fill the gaps.

Schools report state policy changes, such as allowing retired teachers to return to the classroom without hurting their pension benefits and increasing the time substitute teachers can be in the classroom, are most impactful.

Schools report remedying more than 6,100 teacher position openings, from special education and early childhood to elementary education and bilingual education, in ways that go beyond hiring full-time, qualified teachers. They addressed the openings through a variety of approaches: hiring substitutes, modifying class offerings, using third-party vendors to find educators, or going virtual.

**WHAT’S NEXT**

ISBE and Governor JB Pritzker are advocating for a continued $45 million investment for the third and final year of the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program in fiscal year 2026.

Other initiatives include Career and Technical Education [**Education Career Pathway Grants**](https://www.isbe.net/Lists/News/NewsDisplay.aspx?ID=1507) that have equipped nearly 12,000 high school students to pursue careers in education; the new [**Teacher Apprenticeship Program**](https://dceo.illinois.gov/news/press-release.30349.html), which, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, upskills paraprofessionals for

successful placement into the teaching profession; and the [“The Answer Is Teaching”](https://www.becomeateacher.com/) teacher recruitment marketing campaign, which attracted more than 17,000 potential new teachers.

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 for 2024-2025:

* 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, and
* Focus on acute shortage needs with mentoring and administrative support, and financial incentives.

**LEARN MORE**

* **IARSS Educator Shortage Survey:** [**https://iarss.org/**](https://iarss.org/)
* **ISBE Unfilled Positions Data Collection: https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Data.aspx**