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## RSAI 2025 Legislative Priority: Rural School Staff Shortage and Educator Quality

**Background:** Although rural Iowa schools have excellent teachers dedicated to student success, conditions in rural Iowa are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers, in addition to school employees in many different job roles, and it has been getting worse.

**Official Shortages:** The Iowa Department of Education compiles a list of areas with staff shortages annually. The list of Teacher Shortage Areas by Endorsement Title for 2024-25 is posted on DE's website: <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/educator-quality/practitioner-preparation/teacher-shortage-areas> The top 10 shortage area position titles for 2024-25, comprised of 34 separate teaching endorsement credentials, are: 1) Grades 5-12 Special Education Mild/ Moderate, 2) Elementary Classroom Teacher, 3) Math, 4) Science, 5) Language Arts, 6) Music, 7) Art, 8) English as a Second Language, 9) Social Studies, and 10) Counselor. The remaining 18 shortage area titles, comprised of an additional 50 separate teaching endorsement credentials, include some positions that have been short for a long time (e.g., physics, chemistry, business, family and consumer science, and world languages) but others may be more surprising (e.g., physical education, reading, early childhood, STEM and computer science).

The School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) conducted a detailed survey of staff shortages in August 2023. With 78% of districts responding, they estimated nearly 1,500 vacant or not appropriately filled positions as school started. See the [SAI Staff Shortage 2023 Flyer](#). Almost all districts in Iowa are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators.

### **Impact:**

When there are shortages, few and sometimes no qualified candidates apply to fill vacant and mandated positions. Existing teaching and administrative staff carry the load, sometimes teaching in areas under conditional licensure, creating larger class sizes or dropping course offerings when positions are unfilled.

Although competition is fierce in both public and private schools, private-sector competition is also compelling. Iowa's employers are looking for a strong work ethic, communication skills, and the ability to get to work on time. They can often pay employees with similar qualifications more than public schools can. Iowa was facing a teacher shortage before 2020, which was amplified by the pandemic due to early retirements, increased absences and fewer substitutes, but the shortage continues.

### **Teacher Shortage Data:**

Data comparing Iowa teacher pay with the rest of the nation to show the impact of 2024 Legislative action setting a beginning teacher salary of \$47,500 for 2024-25 and \$50,000 for 2025-26 and minimum salary for teachers with 12+ years of experience of \$60,000 for 2024-25 and \$62,000 for 2025-26 will not be available for a few years. Although this significant investment will help, especially in rural Iowa, other states also invest in teacher pay to address a national shortage. The following is the latest data currently available:

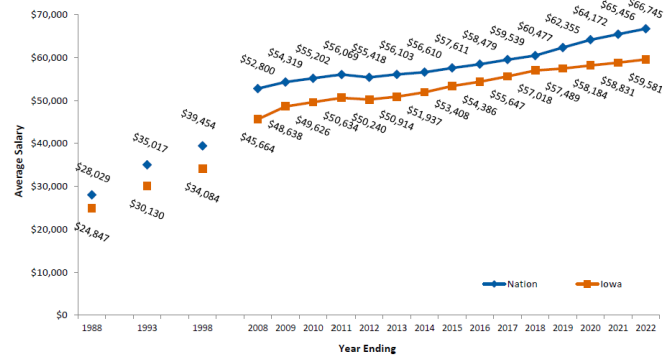
The gap between Iowa's Average Teacher Salary and the National Average grew, as reported in the 2023 [Iowa Condition of Education Report](#):

*“Iowa’s average regular teacher salary increased slightly to \$61,162 in 2022-2023 compared to \$59,492 in 2021-2022.*

*Iowa’s average public-school teacher salary decreased in national rankings to 27th in the 2021-2022 school year down from 24th in the 2020-2021 school year”.*

Figure 5-10

Average Salaries of Public School Teachers for Iowa and the Nation, 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



Source: National Education Association, Rankings and Estimates of School Statistics.



Staff

The Annual Condition of Education Report 2023

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The Report also provides comparison data for teacher salaries in the Midwest:

*“Iowa’s ranking maintained its place at 6th in the 2021-2022 school year compared to other Midwest states as Iowa was also ranked 6th in the 2020-2021 school year”.*

Please note: the national rankings are typically available one year after the state data is available.

Geography matters. With two of Iowa’s neighbors, IL and MN ranking 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Midwest teacher pay, school districts on those borders must compete with significantly higher compensation for just a short commute.

Table 5-17

Average Salaries of Public School Teachers for Iowa, Midwest States and the Nation, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

Nation and State	2020-2021			2021-2022		
	Salary	National Rank	Midwest Rank	Salary	National Rank	Midwest Rank
Nation	\$65,456			\$66,745		
Illinois	\$70,653	13	1	\$72,315	12	1
Indiana	\$53,072	42	10	\$54,596	39	10
Iowa	\$58,831	24	6	\$59,581	27	6
Kansas	\$53,619	38	9	\$54,988	35	9
Michigan	\$64,262	17	3	\$64,884	16	2
Minnesota	\$66,561	15	2	\$64,184	18	4
Missouri	\$51,557	47	11	\$52,481	47	11
Nebraska	\$56,463	31	7	\$57,420	31	7
North Dakota	\$54,755	34	8	\$55,666	34	8
Ohio	\$63,082	18	4	\$64,353	17	3
South Dakota	\$49,547	50	12	\$50,592	49	12
Wisconsin	\$59,992	23	5	\$60,724	24	5

Source: National Education Association, Rankings and Estimates of School Statistics.

**Relationship to School Funding/Per Pupil Funding Gap:** Iowa’s investment in education is determined based on a per pupil increase set annually by the Legislature. Although never below zero in 14 of the last 15 years, the per pupil increase has been lower than the cost increases schools experience. Since schools spend an average of 80% of general fund budgets on staff, it’s no surprise Iowa is not keeping up with other states in teacher pay. [US Census data](#) reported an increase in per pupil spending from FY 2021 to FY 2022 of 8.9% nationally, while Iowa’s spending per pupil increased 4.4%. The FY 2022 USA average spending per pupil was \$15,633 compared to Iowa’s \$13,259, or \$2,374 per student below the national average. About every 10 years, when Iowa has fallen behind, the State has turned to higher teacher pay minimums funded today through Teacher Salary Supplement (TSS) categorical funding, to make up ground. If per pupil funding

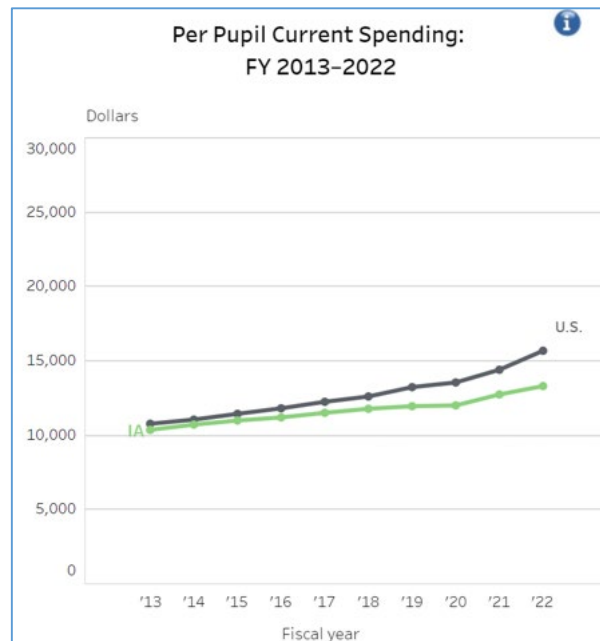
increases do not keep up with inflation or other states' investments in education, Iowa's teacher pay ranking among the states will not rebound as high as anticipated during the 2024 Session action.

This chart reported by US Census in the FY2022 Annual Survey of School System Finances shows the 10-year comparison of Iowa and USA Average per pupil expenditures since 2013:

Source Link:

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>

Rural school leaders are concerned that the gap continues to widen. Successive years with low increases in per pupil funding have prevented districts from increasing compensation for teachers and staff sufficient to keep up with the economy or pressures from other states also experiencing a teacher shortage.



**Current Reality:** The qualified worker challenge impacts all schools in Iowa:

- Some rural schools have been able to help a willing and capable teacher obtain certification in a shortage area of content, but the rules limit provisional licensure status to two years. Access to fewer colleges and universities within a short distance adds to this burden. Tuition and the costs of coursework may be unaffordable for lower-paid rural teachers and nearly unattainable for new teachers, given the level of starting pay in a rural area and ongoing college loan payments. RSAI is excited to be participating in Gov. Reynolds Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Program, with a consortium of over 30 school districts accessing federal pandemic funds to help participants become certificated or degreed over 2-3 years through paid internships as paraeducators, developing teaching skills on the job as an apprentice. RSAI has had almost 160 participants. Gov. Reynolds dedicated \$45 million statewide over three years. Additional state appropriations or another funding source may be necessary to keep this program going. Other teacher-intern models would be helpful but must include student teaching and ongoing mentoring and support.
- New teacher-pay minimums: by next year, \$50K for new to 11-year teachers and \$62K for 12+ years of teaching enacted by HF 2612. Funding for the program is formula-driven based on data school districts report to DE. Some districts are struggling with enough funding to meet the new minimums and also address salary “compaction”, which is a term used for the problem which occurs when there is no salary increase for several years for an employee (e.g., all teachers in some schools make \$50K whether they have 1 or 11 years of experience.) This program should encourage more college students to go into education and may attract teachers from other states. Iowa's average teacher pay was \$7,035 behind the national average. HF 2612 invested \$73 million in teacher pay for the 2024-25 school year. Although that is progress, the increase applied to 38,190 Iowa teachers will increase Iowa teacher pay an average of \$1,911, well below

the \$7,035 salary gap compared to the national average (sources: Iowa Condition of Education [Report](#) and the [National Education Association Rankings and Estimates](#)).

- Since January 1, 2022, educators new to Iowa can receive licensure reciprocity for a valid teaching, administrator or coaching license from any other state. Competitive pay and benefits packages help districts compete with other states also vying for qualified staff. Additional authority and a funding stream for recruitment programs, such as loan forgiveness, are critical to help address the teacher shortage.
- Recent changes to IPERS: allows a retired teacher to return to the classroom without impacting retirement income and shortens the bona fide retirement period to one month through 2027. Both are showing some promise. However, with a minimum \$62,000 12-year veteran teacher pay next year, the IPERS limit of \$55,000 income generation before negatively impacting IPERS income will need to be addressed to continue programs to engage retirees in returning to the classrooms.

**RSAI Priority for 2025: Staff Shortages:** In addition to sufficient SSA, strategies to rebuild Iowa's education workforce must address two areas during an unprecedented staff shortage:

**Recruitment:** to rebuild the pipeline of interest into education, the Legislature, BOEE and DE must provide additional flexibility for school districts to provide hiring incentives, ongoing investment in CTE programs for high school students to study and experience work in education, provide resources for grow-your-own educators and appropriate certifications including expanded intern licenses, provide means-tested tuition assistance and minimize the economic costs of unpaid student teaching, provide more loan forgiveness, and change the culture of political speech to restore education to a respected profession.

**Retention:** to slow the out-migration of staff from schools to other professions or retirement, the Legislature, BOEE and DE must provide maximum flexibility to hire staff to deliver great instruction; use of the Management Fund for recruitment and retention incentives, flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, opportunities for teaching expanded courses within existing and/or competency-based licensure, institute social studies and other content generalist credentials, define a shorter bona fide retirement period for schools to hire retirees, consider tax incentives for teachers, increase state funding for teacher salary supplement, and maintain the commitment to resources for mentoring, training and supporting staff.

**Competitive and adequate compensation:** school funding primarily pays for quality staff and employees to provide a great education for students. In 2019-20, Iowa ranked 28<sup>th</sup> in the nation in average teacher pay (including TLC for teacher leaders at the high end) and starting teacher pay was ranked 38<sup>th</sup> (source: *Learning Policy Institute, Understanding Teacher Compensation State by State Analysis*).

In both the short and long term, legislation, policy, and public support provide improved compensation and benefit options for educators. They must also foster respect for the education profession, which is well deserved, to attract more Iowans into teaching and retain more teachers in Iowa. Only when we are able to do this will Iowa be able to have adequate numbers of quality individuals educating and supporting our children.