



RSAI 2024 Legislative Priority: Rural School Staff Shortage and Educator Quality

Background: Although rural Iowa schools are full of 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's getting worse.

The Iowa DE compiles a list of areas with staff shortages annually. The list for 2023-24 includes the following: Deaf or Hard of Hearing B-21, Visually Impaired B-21, Special Education - All Exceptionalities, Elementary Education Core Subjects, Science 5-12, Family and Consumer Science, Art Education, Early Childhood - Birth through Kindergarten, Mathematics 5-12, Industrial Technology 5-12, World Languages – Spanish, Music Education, Agriculture, Professional School Counselor K-8, 5-12, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Earth Science, Physical Education, Teacher Librarian K-8, 5-12, K-12, PK-12 Talented and Gifted and Any World Language. <https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/educator-quality/practitioner-preparation/teacher-shortage-areas>

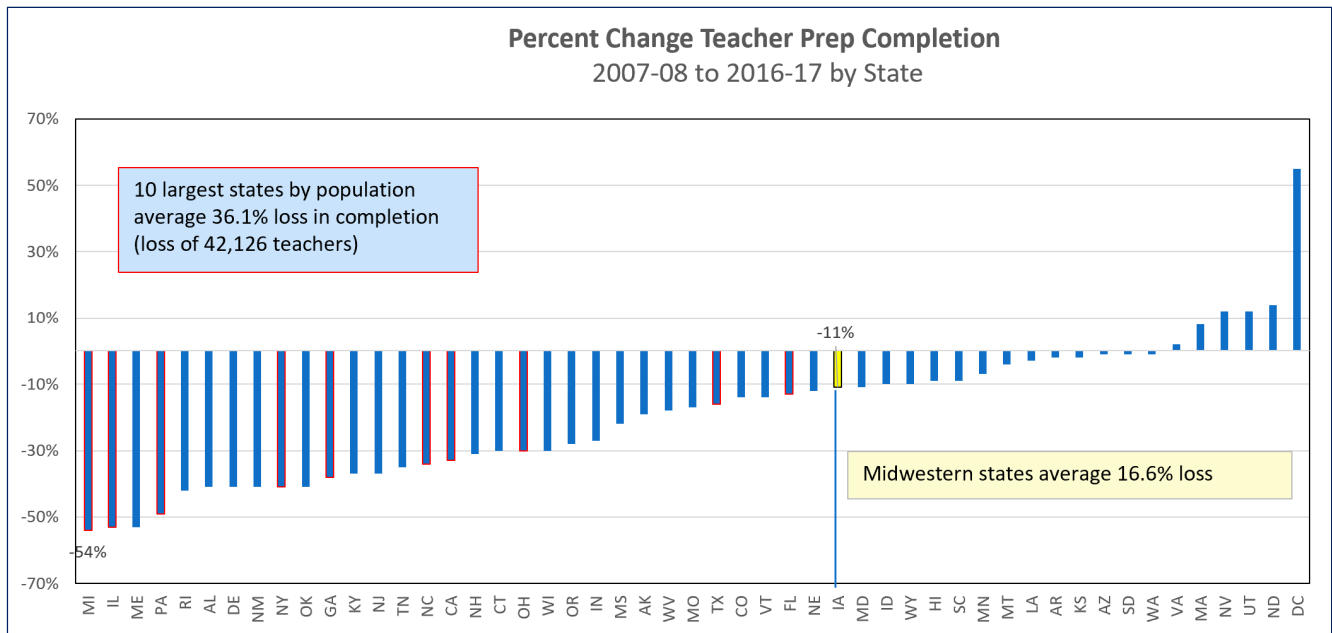
The School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) conducted a detailed survey of staff shortages last August. With 78% of districts responding, they estimated nearly 1,500 vacant or not appropriately filled positions as school started. See the SAI Staff Shortage 2023 Flyer here: <http://www.sai-iowa.org/2023-24StaffShortageFlyer.pdf>. Almost all districts in Iowa are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers.

When there are shortages, fewer qualified candidates apply to fill vacant and mandated positions, and sometimes no candidates at all. Our existing teaching and administrative staff have to double up on work when positions are unfilled. 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. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators. Iowa was facing a teacher shortage before 2020, amplified by the pandemic, with staff retiring earlier than planned, retired teachers more reluctant to return as substitutes, increased needs for qualified staff to cover when teachers are sick, and increased academic and mental health needs of students.

Teacher Shortage Data:

- The gap between Iowa Average Teacher Salary and the National Average, as reported in the 2021 Iowa Condition of Education Report, in 2020 was \$5,949 (in 1988, the gap was \$3,182). The estimated gap for 2021-22 places Iowa's average teacher pay at \$7,135 below the national average. Higher pay for teacher leaders, paid as much as \$10,000 more for additional work through TLC plans, has helped to improve our average pay ranking since 2015. Iowa ranked #22 in 2018, however, has slipped further. From *the 2021 Iowa Condition of Education Report*: "Iowa's average regular teacher salary increased slightly to \$58,771 in 2020-2021 compared to \$58,110 in 2019-2020. Iowa's average salary is 24th in national rankings and 6th when compared to other Midwestern states in the 2019-2020 school year." 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 teacher and staff to keep up with the economy or pressures from other states also experiencing a teacher shortage.

- With significant teacher shortages across the nation, beginning teacher pay is critical to keep Iowa graduates in Iowa and attract graduates from other states. Iowa is in the second to lowest quintile and has slipped 8 places in recent years, ranking 38th in starting teacher pay. *Source: Understanding Teacher Compensation: [A State-by-State Analysis](#)*
- Fewer teacher preparation candidates are graduating from colleges and universities of education, as reported in **Teacher Retention and Recruitment: Shortages in Iowa/Nation, 50-state Comparison of Strategies**, [Education Commission of the States](#). In the Midwest states alone, between 2008-2017, there were 8,183 fewer graduates, for a loss of 17%. The following chart, compiled by Iowa School Finance Information Services, shows the nationwide data, which is even more drastic and predates COVID pandemic stressors on teacher supply.



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 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](#) through which 40 school districts are accessing federal pandemic funds to help participants become certificated or degreed over the next 2-3 years. State appropriation may be necessary to keep this program going.
- Some community members, dedicated to the rural community in which they live, may be willing to teach in areas of their expertise but can't afford to quit working for two years to become certified in teaching. Some programs in CTE areas have provided avenues to on-the-job training, a good model that could be expanded. Other teacher-intern models would be helpful but must include student teaching and ongoing mentoring and support.

- Beginning January 1, 2022, educators new to the state receive licensure reciprocity for their teaching, administrator or coaching license with a valid out-of-state license. This should help districts recruit candidates from other states, but competitive pay and benefits packages will be necessary to compete with districts from across the nation also vying for qualified staff.
- Some community members, dedicated to the rural area in which they live, may be willing to teach in areas of their expertise but can't afford to quit working for two years to become certified in teaching. Some programs in CTE areas have provided avenues to on-the-job training, a good model which could be expanded. Other teacher-intern models would be helpful but must include student teaching and ongoing mentoring and support.
- Beginning January 1, 2022, educators new to Iowa receive licensure reciprocity for their valid teaching, administrator or coaching license from any other state. Additional authority and a funding stream for recruitment programs, such as loan forgiveness, is critical to help address the teacher shortage.

RSAI Staff Shortage Priority: 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 28th in the nation in average teacher pay (including TLC for teacher leaders at the high end) and starting teacher pay was ranked 38th (*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.