



Fwd: Teacher shortage remedies will be a mixed bag

1 message

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April Board Meeting

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Teacher shortage remedies will be a mixed bag

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The shortage of truly qualified teachers - in Illinois and nationally - is irrefutably documented. It's a crisis, especially for school districts with just average or below-average resources. [Ideas to "fix" the crisis have surfaced](#), but many of them are controversial combinations of positive *and* negative elements.

The "[pipeline](#)" has shrunk. Last year, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) reported that the number of undergraduate education degrees awarded by U.S. colleges "peaked at almost 200,000 in the early 1970s and is less than 100,000 today." Not all drivers of that decline can be seen as bad.

Consider that women earned about 80% of education degrees. In fact, in 1970-71, 36% of all degrees women earned were in education. But since the 1970s, other fields have opened up for women to such an extent that, while the number of degrees earned by women doubled, the number they earned in education fell by almost half.

So what's the answer?

Regarding other fields - e.g., medicine, law, business leadership - it would clearly benefit education if the old barriers that made it so difficult for women to enter or succeed in those professions *could be restored somehow*.

(Sure, this idea seems a bit far out, but I'm just sayin'.)

Extrinsic rewards (pay and pensions) remain problematic. Gone are the days when it was enough to give the schoolmarm a few sacks of potatoes and corn from the field, tomatoes and cucumbers from the garden. Educators today remain [undercompensated](#), but reducing them to such a severe level of poverty no longer suffices.

[SB 10](#) (sponsored by [Sen. Andy Manar](#), D-Bunker Hill) and [HB 2078](#) (by [Rep. Katie Stuart](#), D-Edwardsville), seek to raise the current *statutory* minimum pay for teachers from the

current requirement (\$10,000 for college graduates) to \$32,000 per year in the near term, and rising to \$40,000 gradually over a period of years.

Unfortunately, even these relatively low salary requirements exceed the early steps on the pay scales in place at a number of school districts that - in spite of [Evidence-Based Funding \(EBF\)](#) - still receive from all sources less than 60% of funding per-student that EBF calculations say is needed to support an "adequate" education.

What if the state paid the cost for those districts to compensate their teachers enough to comply with SB 10 or HB 2078? Manar told his Senate colleagues that it would take \$20 million for that to happen. Where would the money come from? EBF allocations? General Revenue Fund? An amendment to SB 10 in May seems likely.

What about educators' pensions? Back in the 1970s, when I was a reporter covering seven Madison County school districts, I learned that, while [educators never get rich](#) they found their jobs emotionally satisfying, their pay reliably linked to negotiated contracts and their post-career pensions promising security.

Reliable if somewhat dated (2015) information is reported by a coalition of non-profit organizations that assess educators' pension plans nationwide in a document entitled "[Negative Returns: How State Pensions Shortchange Teachers.](#)" The data reported includes a key factor the authors called the "break-even point."

That would be the length of time an educator must work to receive pension benefits that would exceed their own pension contributions, plus interest. Illinois (35 years) is one of 10 states that "set the break-even point ... at more than 30 years." Only Massachusetts is worse; their teachers will break even at "never."

Illinois teachers hired after January 1, 2011 do not receive benefits comparable to educators hired earlier, but the disparity is unlikely to be closed ever. This reality will not attract teaching aspirants to the shrunken pipeline, of course. Other ways of attracting them, or *at least not repelling them*, will have to be found.

How one becomes a licensed teacher is also under review. Briefly, the tension is usually between those who want to relax the criteria, lower the barriers, as ways of drawing young people into the profession, versus those who want to maintain existing "standards" no matter what. This is a key struggle.

A significant number of bills in the "[Education Personnel](#)" section of the ISNS bill-tracking page reflect this controversy. The frequency and costs of tests - and their perceived lack of value in teacher-preparation - is a thread of the conflict. It's a challenge to get a credential even to substitute teach in Illinois.

What's the solution? Attracting aspirants to the pipeline, retaining qualified educators now in the classrooms and filling classrooms that lack a credentialed educator with the best ersatz teacher that can be found - those seem to be the current goals. They are not always compatible with each other.

When the load you're trying to pull just seems unwilling to budge, sometimes you have to ease up, to actually loosen the strain on the rope, to achieve some stability - and *then give it a yank*. Sure, it may seem counter-intuitive, but the biggest gains often follow a brief relaxation, a period of reduced intensity.

Snippets:

Intrinsic rewards of teaching were not even discussed in the paragraphs above. They are, when they can be achieved, a very [attractive subset of motivations](#) for bright young people to enter the profession. Sadly, however, I've heard too often, even from Illinois school leaders, that these "perks" have been badly eroded.

The war on educators in the 1980s, the test-and-punish policies that began in the 1990s - undermining the classroom authority of teachers and the school management prerogatives of administrators - have diminished the intrinsic rewards, drained the "fun" out of the profession for many. ([Here's recent testimony.](#))

So what will legislators do next week? Nothing, at least by way of achievements at the Capitol. They took the week off, remember, and won't return to work until April 30. When they do, the focus returns to the committees. Deadlines did kill many bills in their chamber of origin, but the survivors are now taken seriously.

The chambers usually convene at noon on the day they return, but some committee hearings are scheduled even before that. [In the Senate](#), two subcommittees on capital will meet today. [Three House committees](#) are scheduled to meet this week. And on April 30 a joint House-Senate panel will discuss veterans' issues.

Researchers into childhood asthma typically link this condition - and its negative effects on learning - with pollution caused by vehicular traffic. This [article in The Conversation](#) includes an interactive map showing the U.S. counties in which this correlation is the strongest, despite dramatic recent improvement.

Cook County still ranks up there with large areas of southern California as areas where asthma is a major problem for kids in schools. About 9% of U.S. children have asthma, which is a serious enough problem. But in places like Chicago, the test scores of 25% to 50% of children can be affected, [Lifespan reports](#) indicate.

19 states still allow corporal punishment in schools, and that is 19 too many according to NFL football players Demario Davis and Doug Baldwin. In an [op-ed commentary](#) published last week, they asserted that the practice should be outlawed nationwide, that it is inhumane and disproportionately victimizes children of color.

Illinois, of course, outlawed ([ILCS 5/24-24](#)) the barbaric practice years ago. Pretty much all southern states, our neighbors Missouri, Kentucky and Indiana, plus Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Idaho and Wyoming - [all still see pain and humiliation](#) as corrective. (Kids there should be thankful that stoning is rarely practiced.)

The American Conservative Union Foundation - an arm of an organization that takes a "right" position on such issues as "protecting" the 2nd Amendment, supporting a strong military and opposing immigration - takes on the huge task of rating legislators in most states, based on their votes on issues of concern to the ACUF.

There are more than 7,000 elected state legislators in the U.S.

The ACUF has released its report on Illinois legislators. Sadly, in their view, just two Illinois state senators and 28 Illinois state representatives were honored for their "conservative excellence [or] achievement in 2018, while 26 senators and 41 representatives were in the "coalition of the radical left." ([Excellent report!](#))

These special ISNS features will be updated regularly: the [bill-tracking web page](#) showing the status of viable bills that could affect public education policy, and a page of links to all [ISNS newsletters so far delivered](#) in 2019. (The URL for these pages was changed for April 15, so only ISNS readers can access them.)

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