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Fwd: What hard-to-staff-positions? All of them

1 message

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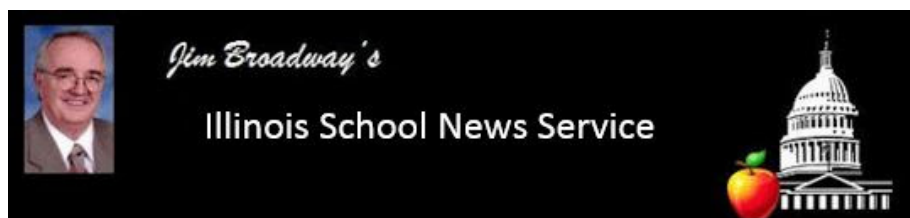
Wed, Sep 26, 2018 at 8:25 AM

October Board Meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>
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What hard-to-staff-positions? All of them

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The last couple of issues have focused on the status of teachers in Illinois. This focus continues. Today's analysis is more sharply concerned with the shortage of teachers and what the policymakers have been trying to do about it. Many ideas have been considered, some even implemented - but not making a dent.

The talented NPR Illinois education reporter Dusty Rhodes spun an interesting article for Illinois Times, a piece suggesting that greater reliance on [classroom paraprofessionals](#) may be part of the solution to the teacher shortage that vexes school districts and policymakers in this and other states.

The "parapros" provide a wide range of services to school districts and other LEAs, and they receive wildly disparate rates of compensation for those services. Some actually receive as little as \$8.50 per hours; the top pay rate Rhodes reported was \$33 per hour. The typical rate was \$14. Other benefits varied as well.

Can policy on parapros be altered to leverage their assets as educators? It would be worth looking into, some educational leaders told Rhodes. "It would really help school districts across the state if there was a way of utilizing our current talent, investing in them and having them then transition from a paraeducator into a teaching role," Tony Sanders, superintendent of Elgin's U-46, the state's second-largest district, told her.

But paraprofessionals are also likely to be in short supply for a while, [according to ISBE](#). Their most recent report on teachers' supply and demand projected that "the largest number of full-time equivalent (FTE) educators needed, the greatest needs through 2019-20," are likely to be in the following areas:

- Regular Teachers
- Paraprofessionals
- Special Education Teachers
- Bilingual Education Teachers
- Principals
- School Counselors
- School Social Workers
- Assistant Principals
- Speech Language Pathologists (non-teaching)
- English as Second Language Teachers

What else is there?

The Illinois State Board of Education has known for a good while that it has a job to do with regard to guiding state policy in a direction that creates an influx of teachers who are more than just "qualified" in a technical sense but, rather, preside in the classroom and teach in ways that make educators proud.

The agency [released a report this month](#) entitled "*Teach Illinois: Strong Teachers, Strong Classrooms*." The document is a product of "a year of study," of 40 focus group sessions and input from 400 "teachers, parents, students, principals, superintendents, college of education deans and other partners."

ISBE conducted its research in partnership with the Joyce Foundation, which is in the forefront of seeking "evidence-based" solutions to the most difficult public policy issues. An example is its support of "[Deans for Impact](#)," facilitators of five Illinois universities' efforts to make ISBE's dreams come true.

In a joint news release, the deans described their mission. "Nearly two-thirds of Illinois school superintendents report that they have significant difficulty finding well-qualified teachers, and ISBE has identified teacher quality as a major challenge facing Illinois in the coming years," their media statement noted.

"The Illinois Ed Prep Impact Network addresses this challenge by bringing together representatives from participating institutions and their district partners to work together on improving teacher-candidates' readiness to teach in culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse classroom settings. Together, network participants will examine state and district data to identify variations in program performance and to initiate improvements."

This ISBE-initiated process is likely to be a big deal for a long time.

Meanwhile, how are the policymakers doing with regard to motivating bright young people to consider teaching as a profession? It's a bit of a mixed bag, actually. The legislature, by somewhat narrow margins, believed it would be good to change the current statutory minimum wage for first year teachers.

What is their current minimum wage? It's a whole \$10,000 per annum. Obviously, no one whose qualified to teach (or do almost anything else) would do what teachers have to do for that amount of money. The legislators proposed sliding the minimum to \$32,076 for the coming school year, and moving it up from there.

By the 2022-2023 school year, the minimum wage for teachers would be \$40,000 per year, and that figure would be indexed to the Consumer Price Index in the future. (Perhaps the theory is, since teachers pay from their own resources for so many classroom supplies, the state should pay them enough to do that.)

That policy is contained in [SB 2892](#), a twice-amended measure that emerged from the Senate on a vote of [37-16](#) and from the House on a vote of [65-47](#). If you clicked either link, you saw that Democrats supported the bill and Republicans didn't. Why would the GOP caucuses want to keep teachers' minimum at \$10,000?

You might recall from last week's review of the PDK education poll for 2018. The pollsters [found strong support](#) for teachers among parents and the general public; they found that most folks don't think teachers are paid enough; they learned that 78% of parents would support teachers striking for higher pay.

Those are powerful numbers, especially in an election year. But that seems not to matter to Gov. Bruce Rauner. He vetoed SB 2992. (You may remember that 2014 ad including a video of Rauner actually saying that he doesn't think there should be a minimum wage - for anybody. Apparently his opinion has not changed.)

But here's what he said in his [veto message](#):

"Teachers are our greatest asset in ensuring the future of our youth and they deserve to be well-compensated for their hard work. However, minimum pay legislation is neither the most efficient nor the most effective way to compensate our teachers. Illinois is one of only 17 states that utilize statewide teacher salary schedules to guarantee some level of minimum pay for teachers. This approach to teacher compensation both limits a school district's local control and imposes a significant unfunded mandate on school districts. Furthermore, as is well exemplified by Illinois, a salary schedule needs to constantly be updated in order to remain relevant; legislative action is not the most efficient way to maintain relevance.

"There are many innovative teacher compensation strategies that, if adopted and implemented at the school district level, would preserve local control and protect districts from the burden of even more unfunded mandates. Things like pay-for-performance, diversified pay for teachers in hard-to-staff schools or subjects, or pay incentives for teachers with prior work experience are all viable options to provide greater compensation for teachers. I highly encourage local school districts to adopt and implement the compensation structures that best suit their local needs."

[Here's what the bill's sponsor](#), Sen. Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill) had to say:

"There should be no teacher in Illinois that lives in poverty. There should be no young teacher who's been in the classroom for one or two years that has to worry about how they're going to pay off a student loan. I mean, that's the circumstances today, and that's why we have a teacher shortage," he told NPR's Dusty Rhodes.

State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith has ISBE [focusing hard on the problem](#) of attracting and retaining teachers. The [report released this month](#) defines the problem statistically. (What percentage of new teachers are still with their initial employer after two years? Still teaching after five years? Etc.)

But it also defines the problem in more human terms. "My grandmother said she was proud to say her granddaughter was a teacher," a principal from a rural district in Southern Illinois said in an ISBE-sponsored focus group. "For my generation, I'm not sure she'd say the same thing."

On the problem of a nearly empty pipeline, the report authors went on to say (p. 8):

"ISBE heard from high school students who said they had not considered teaching as a profession because they thought it might be 'too stressful,' and 'too big a responsibility.' They also ... worried the pay was too low and that there were not good career ladders ... that would allow them to move up the pay scale."

It's often said, including in the commentaries of ISNS, that educators do not enter the profession for the money. They know upfront that they will not get rich. They do it for

the satisfaction of knowing that what they do for a living makes a positive differences in the lives of children. But if poverty's likely, they'll opt out.

Links to newsletters posted so far this year are available [at this web page link](#).

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