

Recruitment and Retention: Innovative Ideas

Illinois and Iowa have struggled with recruitment and retention of effective and diverse teachers. The problem spans across the teacher talent continuum; for example, high school students increasingly say they are not interested in becoming teachers. In addition, 54 percent of parents [say they would not want their child to become a public-school teacher](#), citing low salaries, tough working conditions, and lack of respect for the profession as their rationale (Phi Delta Kappan, 2019). These issues have drawn attention and concern nationally and from education leaders in the Midwest.

Nationally teacher [enrollment rates have declined more rapidly than general postsecondary enrollment](#) (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015). Between 2009/10 and 2012/13, teacher enrollment has decreased by 31 percent, compared to 3 percent for general postsecondary enrollment. Further, both Illinois and Iowa have seen a significant decline in the completion rates of teacher preparation programs. In Illinois, the number of program completers dropped 53 percent from 2008 to 2016. Similarly, Iowa's number of program completers dropped 11 percent from 2008 to 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This mirrors national trends of continual decline in teacher preparation program completion.

Teacher attrition also has been rising. For example, in the 2015 school year, Illinois had a 7.03 percent attrition rate, which translates into more than 170,000 positions. Moreover, the systemic barriers, exclusion, and more challenging working conditions faced by teachers of color contributes to a higher turnover rate than White teachers. Similarly, in the 2021/22 school year, Iowa registered [20 vacant endorsements as a result of teacher vacancies](#) (Iowa Department of Education, 2022). Further, teacher attrition does not impact all students equally; the most vulnerable populations of students experience the more severe effects of teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Time for Change: Imagine Things as They Could Be

Efforts to strengthen and diversify the teacher workforce are hindered by a decrease in the number of individuals entering the profession plus increased teacher attrition. With learning loss experienced by our most marginal student population, now is the time for change (Goldhaber et al., 2022). With increased national attention on teacher shortages and the influx of funds from COVID-19 relief packages, state education agencies and local school districts have an opportunity to leverage those funds for transformational change that places our most

talented individuals in all classrooms. This is an opportunity to reimagine K-12 education and implement innovative solutions that not only increase the pipeline of effective teachers, but also elevate the profession to make it more appealing for the next generation. We can be intentional about making systemic policy and practice changes. Over the past year, members of the Region 9 Comprehensive Center (R9CC) advisory board shared how this is a critical time for change—an opportunity to improve systems through innovative and creative ideas.

“In this kind of work, we have to stop looking at things as they are and imagine them as they could be, and that requires work”

- Lindsey Jensen, R9CC Board Member, 2018 Teacher of the Year

Method: Engaging the Advisory Board

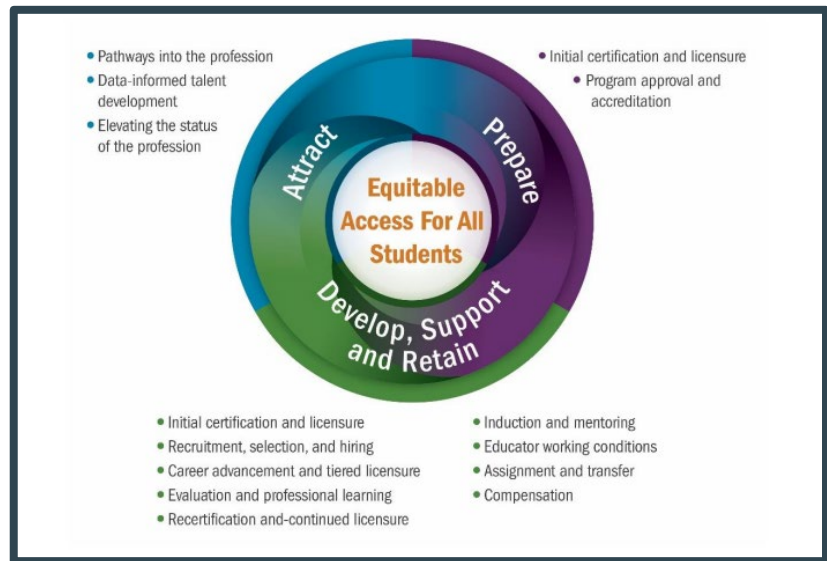
The R9CC advisory board comprises Illinois and Iowa stakeholders engaged in education. The board provides advice, insight, and recommendations for addressing the region’s educational needs as it helps maintain a high standard of quality to promote equity and improve student achievement. In September 2021, R9CC assembled two advisory board affinity groups, allowing board members to split and engage in smaller group discussions on emerging topics in the region as they align with [priorities proposed by the office of U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona](#) (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The affinity groups discussed (a) equity in education, which aligns with Cardona’s second priority, “promoting equity in student access to education resources, opportunities and welcoming environments,” and (b) diverse teacher and leader workforce, which aligns with his third priority, “supporting a diverse educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning.” In the affinity group meetings covering diverse teacher and leader workforce, teacher shortages and the impact on Region 9 and the nation dominated the discussion. The advisory board members discussed innovative strategies designed to attract and retain the next generation of teachers to the profession. This resource outlines innovative ideas presented by advisory board members, bolstered by contemporary research.

Innovative Strategies: Existing and Potential Ideas

The Region 9 Comprehensive Center advisory board members recognized that past efforts to mitigate shortages will likely be insufficient to meet existing labor needs in the region. As such, our affinity group took the opportunity to brainstorm new and innovative strategies. Such

innovative strategies may lack an extensive evidence base; however, they do demonstrate a rationale of effectiveness that—when paired with a high-quality logic model and enhanced with a rigorous research agenda—may contribute to statewide policy and practice changes. This is in no way a comprehensive list of strategies; rather, these are ideas generated by the advisory board in our facilitated discussions. In the sections that follow, we share these ideas, along with examples of emerging innovative programs and initiatives in our region and elsewhere. Some examples are new and have not yet been evaluated; therefore, we share these examples with the caveat that they require further research and evaluation to understand their effectiveness. We share these emerging programs and initiatives to highlight how these innovative strategies are being implemented.

Board members recognized the need to employ strategies across the educator career continuum; therefore, we have positioned the board’s innovative ideas within the [Talent Development Framework \(TDF\)](#) developed by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American



Institutes for Research, n.d.). The TDF emphasizes three key phases within the teacher talent continuum: (a) attract; (b) prepare; and (c) develop, support, and retain. Of course, these three phases do not exist in isolation, but are connected. Strategies are organized according to the framework, but often are connected and impact various points of the career continuum. We encourage you to consider how the TDF can be used when considering innovative strategies or programs that could be implemented in your region or school district to recruit and retain the next generation of quality, diverse educators.

Attract

- **Grow-your-own programs:** Grow-your-own (GYO) programs work to identify and recruit aspiring educators among student populations, career changers, paraprofessionals, nonteaching school faculty, and community members to teach in their communities. GYO programs typically recruit either through precollegiate or community-focused pathways (Gist et al., 2018). GYO is an approach to create a pipeline of educators for specific

workforce needs and to develop a workforce which reflects the communities it serves. A few studies have been conducted to measure the effectiveness of GYO programs; however, many remain in their infancy, and each program varies, making it difficult to evaluate program effectiveness on a larger scale (Valenzuela, 2017). Researchers and experts have cited GYO as a promising practice for tackling educator shortages, but more research is needed to understand its effectiveness in recruiting and retaining educators long-term (Gist et al., 2018).

- [Educators Rising](#) provides GYO programming through a curriculum that introduces high school students to the teaching profession and builds interest in education and training programs. Educators Rising is a national program serving more than 2,400 schools in 27 states. In Illinois, 29 schools use the Educators Rising curriculum through Educators Rising clubs which introduced aspiring educators to the education profession, providing valuable technical skills necessary for the classroom. In April 2022, an [Illinois House bill](#) was signed, allocating \$400,000 for the Educators Rising curriculum, which allows more than 60 schools to gain access to high-quality curriculum at no cost to the school (Illinois General Assembly, 2021; Starr, 2022). The curriculum is adaptable, offering single-semester courses to 3-year study programs that include dual-credit opportunities (Jensen, 2022). In addition, Educators Rising students gain access to national conferences, clinical experiences, and leadership opportunities to encourage them to return and teach in their communities after college, providing a longer-term solution to teacher shortages. A 16-school network has been established at [Aurora University](#) in Aurora, Illinois, which graduates an average of 75 Educators Rising participants every year; of those, 73 percent of those become education majors, with the majority working within 15 miles of where they graduated high school (Aurora University, 2022; Jensen, 2022). Establishing Educators Rising clubs in schools and creating regional partnerships, similar to the partnership at Aurora University, can be replicated in other regions to develop local education pathways to recruit quality, diverse candidates from local schools (Jensen, 2022).

“This is a 2-year investment in teacher recruitment which will allow us to recruit the next generation of our profession in more equitable ways”

- Lindsey Jensen, R9CC board member, 2018 Teacher of the Year

- The [Peoria, Illinois, Grow Your Own](#) initiative supports aspiring educators, with a focus on educators of Color, to become licensed and teach in their own communities (Peoria Public Schools, 2022). Supported by a grant from the not-for-profit [Grow Your Own Teachers Illinois](#) organization, the program’s mission since 2005 has been to support low-income community members of color to become effective teachers in their neighborhood schools (Grow Your Own Teachers, 2022). After receiving a teaching license, each GYO graduate commits to teach for at least three years in Peoria Public Schools. The GYO Illinois grant provides funding to GYO sites throughout Illinois proportionally based on the number of candidates within each program site (Reves & Klein, 2021). The funding supports Peoria candidates financially, providing \$25,000 in forgivable loans, in addition to a \$1,000 student teaching stipend and other aid that candidates may need for certification. Program candidates are supported by a blended cohort of candidates that come together for monthly meetings and yearly professional development programming. The cohort also provides a mentorship program, with many of the mentors being Peoria GYO graduates, to represent the diversity of the incoming candidates (L. Wilson, personal communication, September 7, 2022). The program undergoes an annual evaluation, which includes survey data from candidates and other progress data points (Reves & Klein, 2021).

“We’d [Peoria Grow Your Own] like to have longevity, so candidates stay in the area... that is why the community aspect [of the program] is important when recruiting”

- Linda Wilson, Director of Peoria Grow Your Own

- [The Texas Education Agency](#) (TEA) allocated \$10 million to establish a GYO program that targets rural communities in Texas starting in 2018/19. The funding is awarded to districts who establish a program to enroll high school student in education and training coursework, a program of study within the state’s career and technical education program. Students can take classes in high school that will earn them college credit toward a degree in education. TEA provides technical assistance with the application and implementation processes. The agency also provides training, resources, and a community of practice for participating school districts (TEA, 2022). The program is being evaluated; no evidence of effectiveness is yet available.

- **Financial incentives for student teaching:** The R9CC board members suggested providing financial incentives for student teachers as a potential recruitment strategy. Student teaching provides critical preparation for the public education workforce, ensuring that new educators are highly trained and prepared. However, [student teaching](#) stints usually go unpaid and last anywhere for 10 weeks to approximately 4 months, depending on the program (Greenberg et al., 2011). In a 2017/18 study from Michigan, survey data of nonteaching certified teachers found that respondents most frequently selected wanting a higher salary as one of the three most important reasons why they were not teaching. Respondents also frequently selected financial incentives—such as allowing retirees to retain their retirement benefits, improving other benefits, and forgiving loans—as one of their three most important incentives (Lindsay et al., 2021). In our facilitated discussion, the board members mentioned how unpaid student teaching may provide an additional financial burden or barrier for quality candidates who cannot afford to commit full time to student teaching without compensation. In its recent Educator Supply and Demand report, the Southern Regional Education Board identifies compensating student teachers as an effective recruitment strategy for educator preparation programs, as well as helping graduate more highly trained candidates from such programs (Greenberg et al., 2011).
 - The Oklahoma State Department of Education recently announced its paid student teaching initiative beginning in the 2021/22 school year, which will pay up to \$3,250 for the duration of the student teaching period to qualifying students approved by Educator Preparation Providers (Ready Together Oklahoma Initiative, n.d.).
 - Three low-performing Metropolitan Nashville Opportunity schools added a yearlong, paid student teaching position as part of an initiative in the 2013/14 school year—[Metropolitan Nashville’s Aspiring Teachers Program](#)—aimed at increasing their pipeline of teachers (Barrett, 2014). In the first year, the program placed 33 master’s degree candidates from teacher preparation programs at three universities—Lipscomb, Vanderbilt, and Trevecca Nazarene—that expressed interest in the program. Aspiring teachers are paid \$10.25 per hour for 1,500 hours of work in the 10-month position, or a total of \$15,800. Teachers also are offered benefits and have priority for applying for full-time jobs at the end of the yearlong program. When the program was evaluated after its first few months, aspiring teachers reported feeling more prepared and more a part of their teaching teams, citing the compensation, the mentorship they received and the circle of learning between themselves and veteran teachers (Barrett, 2014).
- **Elevate and celebrate the profession:** Research suggests that poor perception of the teaching profession has hurt the recruitment of potential candidates (Auguste et al., 2010);

Croft et al., 2018; Podolsky et al., 2016). In response, national and statewide campaigns have been launched to elevate the profession. For example, Louisiana’s “Be A Teacher” Campaign features a Louisiana Department of Education website dedicated to promoting the profession, which includes a video about teaching’s impact and appeal in the state.

“I think appealing to the person's purpose and how we, as a district can satisfy that purpose, you know I want to help others, I want to make an impact that makes a difference [...] we're giving you that opportunity in our district.”

- Dana Schon, R9CC board member, professional learning director in Iowa

- **Targeted recruitment:** Influential research from Helen Watt and colleagues (2011, 2012, 2014) has investigated why young people choose teaching as a profession; it found that teaching carries a perceived high utility value. Social utility value includes the desire to shape the future of children, enhance social equity, make social contributions, and work with children; students choose to become teachers for these reasons. As such, marketing, public relations, and teacher recruitment should rely on the specific social utility values that come with being a teacher. For example, Dana Schon, R9CC board member and professional learning director at the School Administrators of Iowa, believes that marketing the teaching profession should include “appealing to the person's purpose and how [the district] can satisfy that purpose... [young people] want to help others,...make an impact... [By being a teacher, the district is] giving you that opportunity in our district.”

Prepare

- **Alternative certification programs:** Alternative certification refers to nontraditional avenues that lead to teacher licensures. High-quality alternative routes to certification include recruitment of candidates, selection of candidates, preparation of candidates (including field experiences), and ongoing support and mentoring for candidates. Alternative certification programs are geared toward aspiring teachers who have a baccalaureate degree but need additional education and classroom experience for licensure. Alternative certification programs are popular; approximately one third of all new teachers certified annually enter the field through alternative certification (Mikulecky et al., 2004). New and innovative alternative certification programs can offer even more flexibility for aspiring educators, with the addition of hybrid class models and flexible hours.

- [The Teacher Intern Program at Morningside University in Iowa](#) offers an accelerated, 2-year, hybrid format that allows individuals with a bachelor’s degree to become a licensed teacher in Iowa. In the 2-year program, teacher interns participate in online classes and a single in-person monthly meeting to receive a teaching license following their first year in the program. In addition, teacher interns are provided support and supervision throughout their first year of teaching and benefit from being part of a cohort group of peers. The program is designed to adequately prepare individuals interested in teaching through alternative pathways and remove barriers by offering an alternative, more flexible, and more affordable pathway.
- **Registered teacher apprenticeships:** An [apprenticeship](#) is an “industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, classroom instruction, mentorship, and a portable credential” that is nationally recognized (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). State education agencies can leverage U.S. Department of Labor resources and funds to support developing registered apprenticeships, which are common in other industries, for teachers. National efforts are underway to establish apprenticeship models for teaching.
 - [Tennessee](#) launched a teacher apprenticeship program in 2019 using \$20 million in state-funded grants (Tennessee Department of Education, 2022). Student apprentices work alongside a veteran educator for 3 years while earning wages rather than paying for training. So far, 650 participants have completed the program, which officials estimate is enough to fill one-third of the state’s teacher vacancies. Tennessee braided funds from Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) and the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education to enhance this pathway program.
 - The [Iowa Department of Education](#) is partnering with the Iowa Department of Labor to launch a similar program for assistant teachers using American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief funds. Through competitive grants, school districts partner with local community colleges or universities to design an apprenticeship program for both (a) high school students and working adults to begin a career as a paraeducator while working toward an associate degree and (b) paraeducators to continue working while earning a bachelor's degree and teaching license ((Office of the Governor of Iowa, 2022).
- **Teacher residencies:** A [teacher residency program](#) is a “school-based teacher preparation program in which a prospective teacher, for not less than one academic year, teaches alongside an effective teacher, as determined by the state or local educational agency...receives concurrent instruction during the year...and in the teaching of the content

area in which the teacher will become certified or licensed” (National Teacher Residencies, 2017; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965/2015). Teacher residencies typically produce new teachers who are better prepared and are more likely to train greater numbers of teachers of color (Madhani et al., 2022; Podolsky et al., 2016). Title II funds, as well as other U.S. Department of Education resources, can support programs to develop teacher residencies.

Develop, Support, Retain

- **Parent mentor programs:** Teachers often leave the profession citing burdensome and additional tasks stacked onto their existing responsibilities. To avoid burnout, teachers need support in the classroom; one way to support teachers with instructional tasks is by leveraging parent volunteers. For example, the [Illinois Parent Mentor Program](#) recruits parents to volunteer in their own children’s schools for 2 hours per day. Parents receive small stipends, weekly training on instructional practices, and mentoring from a teacher. Parents are a part of a small cohort of volunteers serving together. The Parent Engagement Institute offers up to \$80,000 to start up and run the Parent Mentor Program in two schools, with a cohort of eight parent mentors in each school.
- **Four-day school week:** Shifts in schooling in response to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized teacher burnout and the need to support teachers’ social and emotional well-being. Advisory board members mentioned further exploring and sustaining “the four-day workweek as an enticement for teachers.” This also would benefit students by allowing them time in the week for appointments, jobs, internships, and informal learning. According to a [2021 RAND study](#) of six states implementing a four-day school week, “District and school leaders, school board members, and teachers believed that a [four-day school week] was advantageous for recruiting and retaining teachers” as well as improving teacher attendance (RAND Corp., 2021). Other research has suggested a link between a four-day school week and a decrease in student achievement (Morton et al., 2022). Leaders may consider the unintended consequences of such a schedule beyond staffing models.

“We have a couple districts in Iowa that are using the four-day week. I think it could be especially promising for students, for creating a day where they have time to do appointments, internships, or shadowing hours.”

- Dana Schon, R9CC board member, professional learning director in Iowa

- The [Guilmette Elementary School, Lawrence, Massachusetts](#), schedule provides 260 hours of additional instructional time in its academic year and adds common planning time by extending its school day and strategically aligning its grade team schedules. This provides regular instructional schedules for students Monday through Thursday, with enrichment programming on Friday. Teachers at Guilmette participate in professional development and planning on Fridays. The Center for American Progress found that the school had more collaborative planning time, added opportunities for enrichment and targeted intervention, and saw improvements in English language arts and math proficiency scores (Benner & Partelow, 2017).
- **Other flexible/innovative school schedules:** Teachers in the United States have many tasks to complete during their busy workday beyond regular instructional time. Effective school schedules help educators maximize their time for lesson planning, professional development, collaboration, and family engagement; also, it may create a healthier work–life balance. The R9CC board members discussed flexible or innovative school schedules as one strategy that may help attract and retain the next generation of educators.
 - The [Generation Schools secondary schedule, Brooklyn, New York](#) creates up to 30 percent more learning time than that of traditional public schools in New York City through a 180-day work year. Teachers participate in a 2-week Summer Institute for collaborative planning for the upcoming school year, in addition to 2 weeks of professional collaborative time throughout the year. The school has created a lower teacher–student ratio through the creation of instructional roles and has provided differentiated schedules for students to fit their individual needs. In a Center for American Progress report, authors found that the school improved student achievement and graduation rates, increased instructional time for students, reduced teacher workloads, and boosted collaborative planning time for teacher teams (Benner & Partelow, 2017).
- **Rethinking the structure of school:** The structure of the school day is another potential means of strengthening the workforce. For example, often overlooked things such as the daily school schedule, teaching assignments, and modalities (that is, remote, in-person, hybrid) all can play a contributing role in improving access to effective and diverse teachers.
 - The [Opportunity Culture model](#) from Public Impact includes identifying excellent teachers and extending their reach to additional students using a multi-classroom leadership model, in which teachers oversee a group of other, more novice colleagues, and support and participate in their classroom instruction. Such additional

responsibilities, status, and increased compensation are associated with improved achievement and teacher retention (Backes & Hansen, 2018; Natale et al., 2016)

- Team-based staffing models such as the [Next Education Workforce](#) reimagines the teacher role expanding from one primary instructor of record for a single class to a team of teachers with various specialties working together to teach a larger group of students. Team-based models designed around categories of educators allow “school and system leaders much greater degrees of flexibility than the one-teacher, one-classroom model. In fact, a human capital strategy built on these categories opens the possibility of dramatically expanding the education workforce so it can surround learners with the adults they need” (Basile & Maddin, 2022; p. 4). The added flexibility allows for more strategic matching of teachers and students based on need. No evidence exists for an association with teacher retention; however, this potential strategy contributes to filling vacancies.
- Iowa City Community School District’s K–12 Online Learning Program (ICCS Online) is intended to meet students’ individual learning needs, provide more challenging classes, and allow students more independence. [ICCS Online](#) is open to all Iowa students and “provides a high-quality, at-home alternative to the district’s traditional classroom setting” (Iowa City Community School District, 2022). Courses are taught by district teachers and provide students an alternative academic setting without sacrificing the traditional benefits of working directly with teachers and classmates. Students also can participate in co-curricular activities at on-site facilities, allowing them to engage in sports, clubs and co-curricular activities.

Wrap-Up

Illinois and Iowa stakeholders know what research confirms: Teachers are the most important in-school factor impacting student achievement. The best way to strengthen K–12 systems is to invest in teachers. Hiring effective, diverse educators will be crucial for student success in the coming years and for future student generations. Across the Talent Development Framework, we need to invest in the teacher workforce. Let’s celebrate the profession. And let’s go beyond empty words.

Considering innovative programs and systems and keeping up to date with the evaluation of such programs may help leaders address the root causes affecting the supply of teachers in Illinois and Iowa and beyond. Although many of these programs are in their infancy and are not yet considered evidence-based, leaders can still use these innovative ideas to help them think creatively when considering strategies for recruiting and retaining quality, diverse educators.

Education leaders may consider how these ideas and elements of these innovative strategies and initiatives could be implemented in their school/district/region.

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