

The Teacher Shortage



A Further Look at Illinois State Regulatory Rules and Their Impact on Candidates in Teacher/Administrative Education

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For the past three years, I have worked in conjunction with the Illinois Council of Professors in Education Administration (ICPEA) and the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) to study the impact of the changes in the state rules and regulations and their impact on the number of candidates going into education in the state of Illinois. We surveyed and received data from a cross-section of universities in the state of Illinois.

The data is showing that decisions made by the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Legislature between 2008-2014 has led to the teacher shortage. In addition, all candidates, especially minority candidates, have suffered immensely under the massive regulatory rules established at the bureaucratic level.

Issue #1: TAP Test

The number one problem of the teacher shortage is the Illinois basic skills TAP Test (Test of Academic Proficiency) required to get into university education programs. While the state has now instituted the ACT as an additional possibility, the ACT required 22 average is too high. Note that the ACT requires an average score. The TAP test requires passage of all four tests even though one might have top scores in three of the four areas.

The following table reflects those that passed all four tests. This in itself shows a poorly designed test.

Latest TAP Test Results— PASSAGE OF ALL FOUR TESTS

	Test Takers	Passed	Did Not Pass
August 2017	291	53 (20%)	208 (80%)
December 2017	146	26 (18%)	120 (82%)
January 2018	133	23 (17%)	110 (83%)
March 2018	192	37 (19%)	155 (81%)

Solution:

As an educator for 46 years, I do not support eliminating a basic skills test. I do offer these alternatives:

A. Remove the current TAP Test and requirement that a candidate has to pass all four areas of the TAP Test. Even changing to an average score for passage would be an improvement. From an instructional standpoint, there is no need for an elementary teacher to know the concepts of advanced algebra, trigonometry and analytic geometry to be effective in the classroom.

Second career people need not take assessments on college level math. I taught math but would struggle on the basic math part of the test without a great deal of review.

B. We hear all the time from government officials and the media that we need more diversity in our teaching staff. In my opinion, admission standards at the state level have done more to impede minorities in the classroom than any other factor.

C. As much as I thought I would never say this, go back to the original Illinois Basic Skills Test. This test, along with content area tests and grades, provide school districts enough background information to research and hire quality candidates. We must not forget that there is an art in effective teaching. Sometimes our impactful teachers have not been good test takers but understand the art of teaching.

D. Move the current 22 average requirement on the ACT/ SAT equivalent to a 20 average requirement, along with passage of the individual's content area test.

Issue #2: Illinois College Freshman Heading Out of State

The rising costs of education and fear of failure on the TAP Test is leading Illinois High School students to enter universities in other states.

As recently reported by the Champaign News–Gazette, “Illinois was second only to New Jersey (28,932) in net loss of

students—19,275, according to data released by the Illinois Board of Higher Education...among recent Illinois high school graduates attending four-year institutions, 48 percent enrolled in out-of-state schools in 2016, compared to 29 percent in 2002.”

This problem can get worse. Perceived poor pay and working conditions for teachers in Illinois, along with a national emphasis on testing and teacher blaming is an issue. For example, ISBE recently set the meets/exceeds benchmark on the SAT state test 50 points higher than the benchmark established by the College Board of SAT who established when a student is college ready. The College Board benchmark is based on 50 years of research. ISBE established this on a gathering of college professors and practicing teachers over two to three meetings. Again - no research. This gives a false negative public perception of schools and teachers in Illinois, which leads to Illinois' high school students going to universities outside of Illinois.

Lack of an Illinois budget for the past three years has led to lack of financial aid, grants and scholarships for students. Other states are taking advantage of this. The current shortage of substitute teachers is directly related to the number of candidates coming out of the universities. Administrators are having to substitute teach throughout the state of Illinois. This is a great loss to student growth in the schools.

Solution:

A. In the past, ISBE leadership placed most issues in regulatory areas which made mistakes easier to change. Unfortunately, from 2008-2014, ISBE staffers placed most licensure issues in the statutes, which has placed the legislature in a difficult position to make needed changes. A statutory study is needed to evaluate and remedy the over-regulation of school districts and universities in Illinois. This evaluation needs to cover all areas of educational licensure, including elementary, middle school, secondary, technical/industrial arts, principal and superintendent as all areas are or will be impacted by the shortage.

B. The Illinois State Board of Education needs to set benchmarks that are consistent with national guidelines i.e. SAT benchmarks and special education (IDEA) rules. Further, all benchmarks need to be based on research, not opinion.

C. Illinois universities have to study the simple economic equation of higher tuition equals less students. While the forced tuition increase surrounded state policies, studies need to be done at the university level to hold down the costs of tuition.

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Issue #3: Lack of Teacher Candidates in Illinois

There were 2,423 fewer students that graduated in Illinois in 2016 than in 2006, according to the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

Why is this happening? Besides the previously discussed issues, there are other issues reflecting this problem.

- A. Beginning in January 2018, elementary or secondary candidates seeking to obtain their middle school endorsement must complete an additional 32 credit hours to obtain a license as opposed to taking a block of 2-3 classes approved by the university. This exemplifies a continued regulatory philosophy leading to diminished numbers in the field of education. This will lead to a shortage of middle school teachers in approximately 2-3 years as most high school graduates will not choose the middle school option.
- B. The current Illinois retirement benefits kick in at the age of 67, which is a problem as no other surrounding states have this. This will be a detriment for future shortage problems. Those interested in teaching will choose to teach at neighboring states so they can retire earlier.
- C. The changing of endorsement grades, especially taking kindergarten out of the elementary teaching endorsement/license has caused huge problems for elementary districts regarding staff placement. This change was done without any research.
- D. Lack of grants has dramatically impacted students from a lower socio-economic background and lowered enrollment across the board.

Solution:

- A. Project a positive attitude toward the education profession and those that serve.
- B. Raise starting salaries for teachers.
- C. Research issues before making changes.
- D. Roll back rules implemented between 2008–2014 that have had negative results.
- E. Protect Map grants so students who are economically disadvantaged have access to the profession. Work with business and industry to encourage more scholarships for the economically disadvantaged.

In closing, it is time for action to deal with the shortages of candidates in the field of education. It is time for leaders in the state of Illinois to look at the current regulatory rules and make the proper adjustments using the research at hand to again enhance the field of education.

With our current emphasis statewide on testing and more data, it would be great if the Illinois State Board of Education would establish a five-year strategic plan to address the teacher shortage problem. This is no different from school districts and universities having to make human resource and budget projections five years out.

While the current state board did not create a majority of the problems, they do have a responsibility to fix this problem as they make recommendations to our legislators.



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