

UEN 2025 Priority Issue Brief

Teacher, Administrator, Staff Shortage

Background: Iowa's largest schools have excellent teachers dedicated to student success. Competitive economic conditions, however, are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers, indeed school employees in many different job roles, and it's getting worse.

The Iowa Department of Education (DE) certifies shortages annually. The list of Teacher Shortage Areas by Endorsement Title for 2024-25 is posted on DE's [website](#). The top 10 shortage area position titles for 2024-25, comprised of 34 teaching endorsement credentials: 1) Grades 5-12 Special Education Mild/ Moderate, 2) Elementary Classroom Teacher, 3) Math, 4) Science, 5) Language Arts, 6) Music, 7) Art, 8) English as a Second Language, 9) Social Studies, and 10) Counselor. The remaining 50 teaching endorsement credentials include some positions short for a long time (e.g., physics, chemistry, business, family and consumer science, and world languages) but others may be more surprising (e.g., physical education, reading, early childhood, STEM and computer science).

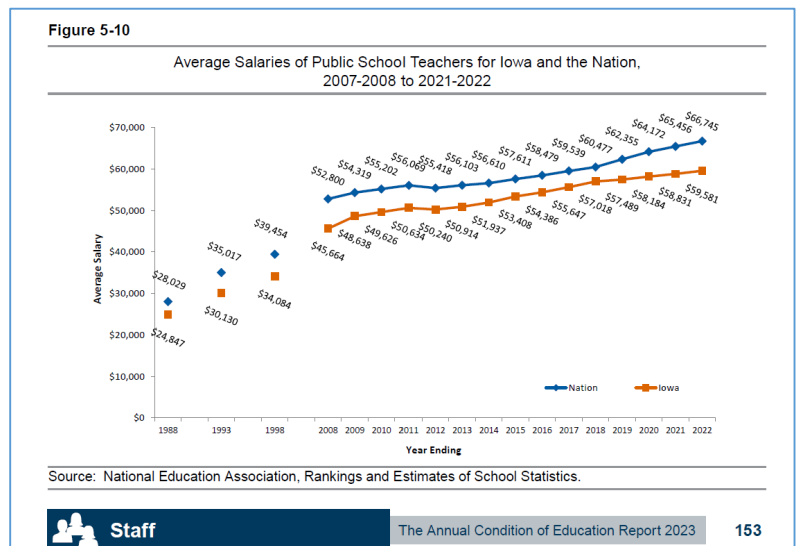
The School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) conducted a detailed survey of staff shortages in August 2023. With 78% of districts responding, they estimated nearly 1,500 vacant or not appropriately filled positions as school started. See the [SAI Staff Shortage 2023 Flyer](#). Almost all Iowa districts struggle to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators.

Impact: When there are shortages, few and sometimes no qualified candidates apply to fill vacant and mandated positions. The shortage is especially evident among qualified teachers of special education and English Learners, both of which have concentrated populations of students in urban schools. Existing teaching and administrative staff carry the load, sometimes teaching in areas under conditional licensure, creating larger class sizes or dropping course offerings when positions are unfilled.

The latest data currently available:

The gap between Iowa's Average Teacher Salary and the National Average grew, as reported in the 2023 [Iowa Condition of Education Report](#): "Iowa's average regular teacher salary increased slightly to \$61,162 in 2022-2023 compared to \$59,492 in 2021-2022.

Iowa's average public-school teacher salary decreased in national rankings to 27th in the 2021-2022 school year, down from 24th in the 2020-2021 school year".



Although competition is fierce in both public and private schools, 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. They can often pay employees with similar qualifications more than public schools can. Iowa was facing a teacher shortage before 2020, which was amplified by the pandemic due to early retirements, increased absences and fewer substitutes, but the shortage continues.

The Report also provides comparison data for teacher salaries in the Midwest:

“Iowa’s ranking maintained its place at 6th in the 2021-2022 school year compared to other Midwest states as Iowa was also ranked 6th in the 2020-2021 school year”.

Please note: the national rankings are typically available one year after the state data is available.

Geography matters. With two of Iowa’s neighbors, IL and MN, ranking 1st and 2nd in Midwest teacher pay, school districts on those borders must compete with significantly higher compensation for just a short commute.

Teacher Shortage Data: Data comparing Iowa teacher pay with the rest of the nation to show the impact of 2024 Legislative action setting a beginning teacher salary of \$47,500 for 2024-25 and \$50,000 for 2025-26 and minimum salary for teachers with 12+ years of experience of \$60,000 for 2024-25 and \$62,000 for 2025-26 will not be available for a few years. Although this significant investment will help, albeit more concentrated in rural Iowa and less substantial change in urban schools, other states also invest in teacher pay to address a national shortage.

Relationship to School Funding/Per Pupil Funding Gap: Iowa’s investment in education is determined based on a per pupil increase set annually by the Legislature. Although never below zero in 14 of the last 15 years, the per pupil increase has been lower than the cost increases schools experience. Since schools spend an average of 80% of general fund budgets on staff, it’s no surprise Iowa is not keeping up with other states in teacher pay.

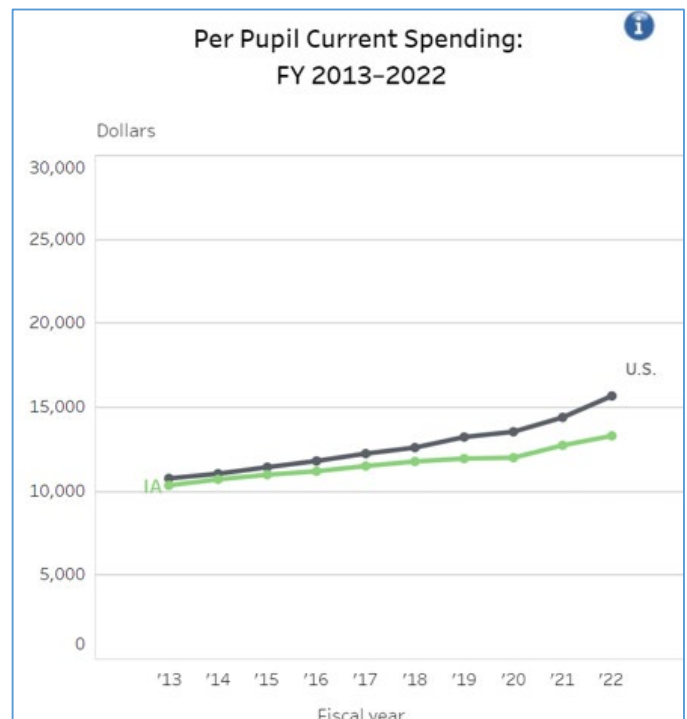
This chart reported by US Census in the [FY2022 Annual Survey of School System Finances](#) shows the 10-year comparison of Iowa and USA Average per pupil expenditures since 2013. [US Census data](#) reported an increase in per pupil spending from FY 2021 to FY 2022 of 8.9% nationally, while Iowa’s spending per pupil increased 4.4%. The FY 2022 USA average spending per pupil was \$15,633 compared to Iowa’s \$13,259, placing Iowa \$2,374 per student below the national average.

Urban school leaders grow increasingly concerned as the funding gap widens. Successive years with low increases in per pupil funding have prevented districts from increasing compensation for teachers and staff sufficiently to keep up with the economy or pressures from other states also experiencing a teacher shortage. About every decade or two, when Iowa has fallen behind, the State has turned to higher teacher pay minimums funded typically through Teacher Salary Supplement (TSS) categorical funding, to make up ground. If per pupil funding increases do not keep up with inflation or other

Table 5-17
Average Salaries of Public School Teachers for Iowa, Midwest States and the Nation, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

Nation and State	2020-2021			2021-2022		
	Salary	National Rank	Midwest Rank	Salary	National Rank	Midwest Rank
Nation	\$65,456			\$66,745		
Illinois	\$70,653	13	1	\$72,315	12	1
Indiana	\$53,072	42	10	\$54,596	39	10
Iowa	\$58,831	24	6	\$59,581	27	6
Kansas	\$53,619	38	9	\$54,988	35	9
Michigan	\$64,262	17	3	\$64,884	16	2
Minnesota	\$66,561	15	2	\$64,184	18	4
Missouri	\$51,557	47	11	\$52,481	47	11
Nebraska	\$56,463	31	7	\$57,420	31	7
North Dakota	\$54,755	34	8	\$55,666	34	8
Ohio	\$63,082	18	4	\$64,353	17	3
South Dakota	\$49,547	50	12	\$50,592	49	12
Wisconsin	\$59,992	23	5	\$60,724	24	5

Source: National Education Association, Rankings and Estimates of School Statistics.



states' investments in education, Iowa's teacher pay ranking among the states will not rebound as anticipated during the 2024 Session action.

Current Reality: The qualified worker challenge impacts all schools in Iowa:

- Some urban schools have been able to help willing and capable teachers obtain certification in a shortage area of content, but the rules limit provisional licensure status to two years. Tuition and coursework costs may be unaffordable for teachers supporting families and nearly unattainable for new teachers, given the tuition costs, starting pay and ongoing college loan payments. Several UEN districts are participating in Gov. Reynolds Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Program to access federal pandemic funds to help participants become certificated or degreed over 2-3 years through paid internships as paraeducators, developing teaching skills on the job as an apprentice. Gov. Reynolds dedicated \$45 million statewide over three years. Additional state appropriations or another funding source may be necessary to keep this program going. A state-funded program would help minimize the accounting and reporting burden required by the use of federal funds for TPRA. Other teacher-intern models would be helpful but must include student teaching and ongoing mentoring and support.
- New teacher-pay minimums: by next year, \$50K for new to 11-year teachers and \$62K for 12+ years of teaching enacted by HF 2612. Funding for the program is formula-driven based on data school districts report to DE. This program should encourage more college students to go into education and may attract teachers from other states. Rural and urban districts have a common challenge in supporting experienced teachers with sufficient salary increases along the way, given these new minimums. For rural districts, the issue is known as salary "compaction," a term used for the problem which occurs when there is no salary increase for several years for an employee (e.g., all teachers in some schools make \$50K whether they have 1 or 11 years of experience.) For urban districts, attracting and retaining teachers with larger class sizes, diverse student populations and greater needs is challenged when the mandated minimums approach urban salary schedules. Urban schools received the lowest increases in per pupil TSS as HF 2612 was implemented.
- Iowa's average teacher pay was \$7,035 behind the national average. HF 2612 invested \$73 million in teacher pay for the 2024-25 school year. Although that is progress, the increase applied to 38,190 Iowa teachers will increase Iowa teacher pay an average of \$1,911, well below the \$7,035 salary gap compared to the national average (sources: Iowa Condition of Education [Report](#) and the [National Education Association Rankings and Estimates](#)).
- Since January 1, 2022, educators new to Iowa can receive licensure reciprocity for a valid teaching, administrator or coaching license from any other state. Competitive pay and benefits packages help districts compete with other states who are also vying for qualified staff. Additional authority and a funding stream for recruitment programs, such as loan forgiveness, are critical to help address the teacher shortage.
- Recent changes to IPERS: allows a retired teacher to return to the classroom without impacting retirement income and shortens the bona fide retirement period to one month through 2027. Both are showing some promise. However, with a minimum of \$62,000 for a 12-year veteran teacher pay next year, the IPERS limit of \$55,000 income generation before negatively impacting IPERS income will need to be addressed to continue encouraging retirees back into classrooms.

Teacher, Administrator, Staff Shortage

State and local leaders must generate enthusiasm for teaching by speaking about and treating educators with deserved respect to both attract new teachers to Iowa and keep great Iowa teachers in classrooms. Adequate funding is essential for public schools to compete with the private sector in hiring and retaining experienced employees. All schools are facing a reduced pool of applicants, shortages in special education and nearly every content area, even elementary classroom teachers.

New policies are needed to recruit, attract and retain educators that mirror our diverse students and communities, including licensure flexibility, grow-your-own programs, internships and on-the-job programs, tuition support, and loan forgiveness programs. School districts should have the flexibility and opportunity to provide training and CEU's toward needed licensure. Internship and apprenticeship programs should be simplified to allow school staff to easily implement and support participants. UEN supports use of the Management Fund for recruitment and retention programs.

UEN maintains a commitment to quality and support for every teacher in the classroom. Quality should not be sacrificed for interns, apprentices or any fast-track credentialing program. Content knowledge is critical, but so is pedagogy and instructional skill. Schools need adequate resources to provide clinical experiences during the credentialing process, plus mentoring, modeling, instructional coaching, classroom management support and ongoing skill development after program completion.

Research demonstrates that good administrators are critical for supporting teachers to thrive in classrooms. Pressures to limit administrative staff, salaries and expenses only serve to move paperwork and compliance burdens to teachers. Investments and expectations for increasing teacher pay, for all licensed staff in classrooms plus other staff in school districts, requires additional funding above and beyond the SSA rate. Compensation funding should be delivered in equitable ways to all school districts to reward all teachers and educational support employees and to support all students.