

Effective and Sustained Principals

for Every Illinois Community



Effective leadership, especially principal leadership, is vital to the success of every school.

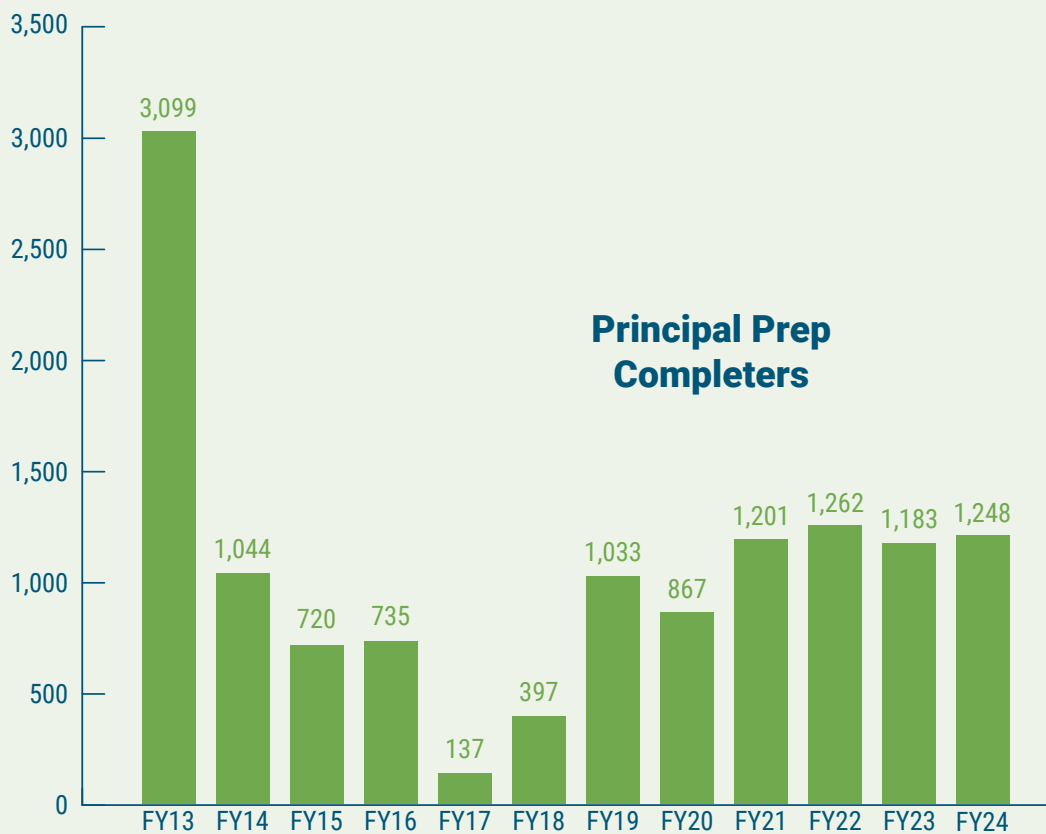
With adequate support, resources and time, principals can do extraordinary work to benefit their students, teachers, and communities. Unfortunately, principals today find themselves under-invested, overly stressed, and lacking the time to be effective. Thus, a high number of principals are choosing to leave the profession, and many who

could be outstanding school leaders disregard the principalship as a viable career pathway.

The Illinois Principals Association (IPA), an organization serving more than 6,600 school leaders throughout Illinois, intends for this document to serve as a reminder of the critical role principals play in fostering and leading effective

schools. Further, it details the serious problem schools face with principal attrition and how attrition is exacerbated in Illinois with a dwindling pipeline. Lastly, recommendations are provided for consideration by policymakers and school districts to help slow attrition and bolster the principal pipeline.

Illinois schools average TWO principals at the same school every SIX years.



Principal Stressors



Principals' Key Areas of Concern

Mandates and Compliance

School Funding

Compensation

Student SEL Support

Student Assessment

Family Engagement

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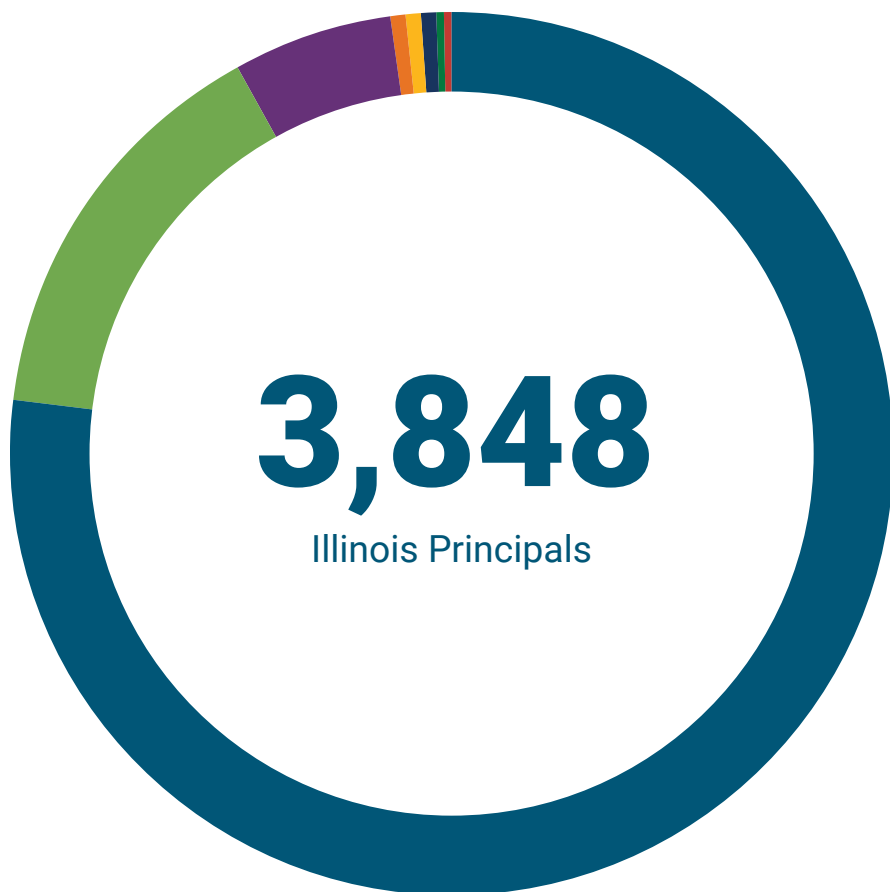
“In many ways, the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal’s leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and degree of concern for what students may or may not become. The principal is the main link between the community and the school, and the way he or she performs in this capacity largely determines the attitudes of parents and students about the school. If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place; if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching; if students are performing to the best of their ability; one can almost always point to the principal’s leadership as the key to success.”

— U.S. Senate, 1970¹

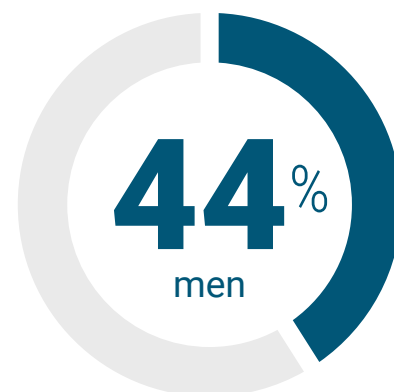
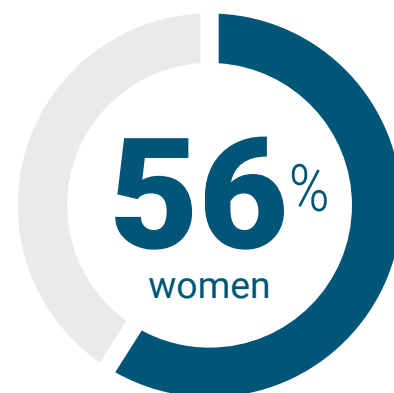
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Statistics courtesy of the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Principals Association.

Illinois Principal Profile



- 77% White
- 15% Black or African American
- 6% Hispanic or Latino
- <1% Unknown
- <1% Multi-Race
- <1% Asian
- <1% American Indian or Alaska Native
- <1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander



46
average age

\$110,968
average salary

11
average years
of admin
experience

32.7%
have post-master's
degree

Even over a half-century ago, members of the U.S. Senate understood what was needed to ensure the success of our nation's schools, teachers, and ultimately students - School Leadership. Fifty years later, we have the research to back this up. In 2009, the Wallace Foundation determined in their report, *Assessing the Effectiveness of School Leaders: New Directions and New Processes*:

Effective leadership is vital to the success of a school. Research and practice confirm that there is a slim chance of creating and sustaining high-quality learning environments without a skilled and committed leader to help shape teaching and learning.²

More recently, Wallace amped up the importance of school leadership, notably principal

leadership, in its 2021 report, *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systemic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*, which states:

The impact of an effective principal has likely been understated, with impacts being both greater and broader than previously believed: greater in the impact on student achievement and broader in affecting other important outcomes, including teacher satisfaction and retention (especially among high-performing teachers), student attendance, and reductions in exclusionary discipline.³

Additionally, researchers have shed light on the central role school leaders must play to ensure all students, especially those who have been historically

marginalized, are treated equitably.⁴ Of note, studies indicate school leaders have the greatest impact on student performance in schools with the greatest needs.⁵ In order to support all students adequately and appropriately, school leaders must dismantle inequitable systems that perpetuate “the gaps” (access, opportunity, achievement, expectations, relationships and hope) resulting in ongoing student failure, chronic absenteeism, high suspension rates, consistently low graduation rates, and systemic racism.⁶

Overall, schools require school leaders who are capable of collaboratively crafting a vision for student success, cultivating a student-centered culture, building others' leadership capacity, improving instruction, and leading school improvement efforts.⁷ Essentially, effective school leaders lead effective schools.⁸

Our Problem of Practice

While we have gained a greater understanding of the importance of school leadership and the impact school leaders have on their learning organizations, our nation's schools face a serious problem of practice — leadership attrition and churn. According to a 2019 study from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), principals across the country only have an average tenure of four years at their schools.⁹ Drilling deeper into the data paints a stark picture showing that 35 percent of principals are in their schools less than two years with only 11 percent of principals being at their schools for 10+ years. The School Leaders Network plainly states that only 1 in 4 principals stay in a given leadership position longer than 5 years, which is concerning since school leaders require between 5 and 10 years to establish positive, sustainable change in their learning organizations.¹⁰ From more recent analysis, a 2023 report from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) highlighted that more than 11 percent of the nation's public school principals serving during the 2020-2021 school year left the profession altogether.¹¹ Further, Education Resource Strategies (ERS) reports that principal turnover now matches or in some cases exceeds pre-COVID 19 levels.¹²

Illinois schools average
2 principals
every **6 years**.¹³



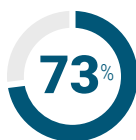
Why Principals May Be Leaving

School leaders choose to leave their positions for a variety of reasons, both positive and negative. District level opportunities, other building level positions, or retirement may motivate individuals to move on. While these transitions are likely positive in many circumstances, negative forces have been mounting over the past couple of decades that keep prospective leaders from considering school leadership as a career path, push individuals out of positions, or cause some to leave the profession altogether. These forces include longer hours, mounting mandates, and rising expectations not backed with adequate resources.¹⁴ In their 2019 report, *Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover*, NASSP and LPI identified five reasons principals choose to leave their positions:

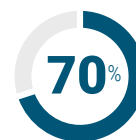
The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) found in their most recent 10-year study of the principalship (2018) that principals view their position as being increasingly complex, especially when it comes to handling student and staff social emotional issues.¹⁶ Also, principals report they are now spending more than 60 hours a week on the job both inside and outside of their school. A recent survey of Illinois principals by the IPA had principals reporting that they are under extreme stress more than 16 hours every week.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, residual effects from the COVID-19 pandemic continues to put significant pressure on school leaders. Key findings from a 2022 National Association of Secondary School Principals survey of the nation's school leaders included:



One out of two school leaders claim their **stress level is so high** they are considering a career change or retirement.



Three-quarters of school leaders report they **needed help with their mental or emotional health** last year.



Many school leaders report they have **personally been threatened or attacked**, physically or verbally during the past year.¹⁸

Another post-pandemic effect school leaders face is political divisiveness in their schools and local communities. A joint study of high school principals out of UCLA and the University of California - Riverside stated that more than two-thirds of public high school principals reported working through substantial political conflict tied to divisive issues during the 2021-2022 school year.¹⁹

Illinois' Principal Pipeline Concerns Persist

Fortunately for Illinois schools, the administrator vacancy rate sits at 1.2 percent, which is less than the teacher vacancy rate of 3.0 percent.²⁰ Evidence Based Funding and educator reciprocity legislation undoubtedly have provided districts with critical resources and tools to fill school leadership positions. However, concerns about Illinois' principal pipeline persist.

According to the 2023-2024 educator shortage study led by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS), 45 percent of respondents reported having 5 or fewer candidates for open building leadership positions.²¹ This indicates a shallow pool of candidates available for consideration for these critical positions. But, why the shallow pool?

Currently, only half of Illinois schools employ someone in a non-administrative position who possesses the necessary

endorsement to be a building principal or assistant principal.²² Therefore, many districts cannot look from within their organizations for viable candidates.

Also, those seeking and obtaining the endorsement needed to be a principal have decreased to historically low levels. According to data retrieved from ISBE, the number of people completing all requirements to become a principal has dropped by almost 60 percent between FY13 (3,049) and FY24 (1,248). Of the 1,248 who met the requirements in FY24, 547 earned their endorsements through an ISBE review of transcripts, which indicates the endorsement was likely given through reciprocity with another state. Therefore, only 701 candidates were endorsed by Illinois higher education institutions that year compared to more than 2,600 in FY13. The chart following provides the historic principal preparation completer data between FY13 and FY24.

Historic Principal Preparation Completer Data

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
ISBE Review	412	400	618	668	80	121	332	267	472	460	517	547
American College of Education	32	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Argosy University	5	4	1	0	0	0	0					
Aurora University	221	47	15	2	3	21	42	40	65	63	55	47
Benedictine University	82	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Bradley University	14	4	0	0	1	1	8	5	3	4	0	
Chicago State University	20	7	3	5	3	0	9	7	3	7	9	15
Concordia University	794	158	33	15	12	99	166	139	184	194	162	127
DePaul University	51	18	0	1	1	6	14	8	12	17	7	8
Dominican University	24	11	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eastern Illinois University	172	32	4	0	1	7	30	21	42	45	38	35
Governors State University	115	19	9	3	1	3	30	19	31	54	31	16
Illinois State University	29	6	1	0	2	13	11	15	11	26	20	15
Lewis University	73	53	2	0	2	0	11	9	12	19	6	10
Loyola University (Chicago)	5	1	0	0	1	3	9	2	7	8	6	6
McKendree University	116	19	5	4	2	11	35	19	27	22	19	22
National-Louis University	91	21	2	4	2	12	53	51	55	66	35	59
New Leaders	10	1	0	7	7	7	15	6	0	10	7	5
North Central College	9	3	0	2	1	13	17	19	13	17	29	23
North Park University	9	10	2	4	1	1	8	9	12	25	14	16
Northeastern Illinois University	112	16	0	3	3	24	80	60	58	61	57	33
Northern Illinois University	58	12	4	1	1	4	25	18	19	15	18	23
Olivet Nazarene University	179	71	2	1								
Quincy University	5	2	0	0	0	0						
Roosevelt University	35	6	1	0	0	4	12	15	9	15	9	54
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	6	2	1	0	2	2	5	9	1	2	5	6
Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville	91	12	2	1	0	3	20	27	22	35	30	74
St. Xavier University	104	12	1	0	1	0	1	1				
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	44	8	1	1	0	5	37	33	35	35	21	25
University of Illinois at Chicago	5	3	3	4	2	14	1	8	11	9	11	15
University of Illinois at Springfield	23	12	2	1	1	2	9	14	11	9	9	10
University of St. Francis	52	48	2	1	0	6	32	20	35	22	40	31
Western Illinois University	51	20	5	7	6	14	21	26	51	22	28	26
Total	3,049	1,044	720	735	137	397	1,033	867	1,201	1,262	1,183	1,248

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Notes: A Completer is defined as an individual who has completed their degree, passed certification exams, and taken initial teacher evaluation training/assessment.

In Illinois, there is a sizable number of individuals (17,859 in 2024) that possess the endorsement needed to be a principal or assistant principal but are employed in non-administrative roles according to data acquired from ISBE. With so many endorsed individuals available to fill school leadership positions in the state, it begs the question as to why the vacancy rate is not closer to zero and candidate pools for job openings are not much higher on average. Curious as to whether the non-administrator endorsement holders had plans to seek school leadership positions in the future, the IPA surveyed them in the spring of 2024. These individuals were asked if they planned to seek a school leadership position sometime in the next 3 years, and if not, why not? Just more than 2,500 individuals responded to the survey, and of that group, 40 percent (roughly 1,000) of the respondents shared that they plan to pursue a school leadership position between now and 2027. From the almost 1,500 that stated they do not plan to pursue a school leadership position, their top reasons included:

- Too much stress and time required
- Insufficient compensation and benefits
- Lack of respect for the profession
- Not a good fit for family
- Too many mandates

It is encouraging that 1,000 individuals in non-administrative positions with the principal endorsement may seek a school leadership position in the next couple of years. However, it is not a large enough number (only 5.6 percent of the total of 17,859) to give confidence that the administrator vacancy rate will be lowered, and school leader candidate pools will be increased. This particularly holds true since the total number of those in this group has been trending downward since 2014 when the number was 23,032.

To attract more individuals to the profession of school leadership, better support current principals, reduce attrition, and improve student outcomes, ERS recommends policymakers and school districts consider the following strategies:

- Clarify principals' roles, responsibilities, and expectations, while ensuring their workloads are manageable
- Provide flexibility that enables principals to make the best decisions for their school's context
- Embed coordinated support structures into principals' experiences and positioning principal supervisors to bridge the gap between school and district leadership
- Offer competitive, differentiated compensation based on principals' experiences and responsibilities²³

Reduce Attrition

How do these strategies look in Illinois? The IPA offers the following recommendations to reduce attrition and rebuild the principal pipeline.

Grow school funding to attain building administration staffing levels recommended by the Evidence Based Funding Model. State statute requires that each school district shall receive the funding required to employ one principal position per 450 students in an elementary school, one principal position per 450 students in a middle school, and one principal position per 600 students in a high school. In addition, each school district should receive funding required to employ one assistant principal position per 450 students in an elementary school, one assistant principal position per 450 students in a middle school, and one assistant principal position per 600 students in a high school.

Acknowledge and address the emerging needs of students and staff that principals lack the time or expertise to manage. Both students and staff are coming to school with emerging needs related to anxiety, trauma, and other mental/physical health issues. While principals desire to appropriately care for those they serve, the support that some students and staff require goes beyond the capacity of time and skills school leaders possess. Efforts must continue to ensure that every school possesses the

counselors, social workers, and nurses needed so building leaders can stay primarily focused on creating conditions that lead to student and staff learning and growth.

Provide statewide leadership mentoring and coaching, especially to new principals. In 2006, Illinois recognized the importance of mentoring new principals to help them build a sustainable foundation for a successful career in school leadership. Public Act 94-1039, subject to appropriation, required new principals to be paired with an experienced school leader who is trained to be an effective mentor. State funds were made available for a couple of years until the great recession. Recently, ISBE dedicated \$3.6 million of Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support new principals during the FY22, FY23, and FY24 school years at a rate of \$1.2 million per year. Evidence from new principals who received services showed how mentoring positively impacted their leadership skills and sustained them in the profession.²⁴ However, ESSER dollars are winding down. Only limited funds are being made available to serve new principals on a first-come first-served basis in FY25. It is imperative that the state begin covering the cost, \$1.2 million annually, for new principal mentoring starting in FY26. Since the average cost to prepare and onboard a new principal is \$75,000, Illinois would only need to reduce

the attrition of 16 school leaders every year to make up for the \$1.2 million annual investment.²⁵

Provide continuous professional learning opportunities.

The IPA views principals as learning leaders leading learning organizations as detailed in our school leadership framework, the School Leader Paradigm.²⁶ To ensure principals continue to improve and model what they expect from students and staff, they must be afforded the time and resources to engage in meaningful professional learning experiences. Within the School Leader Paradigm, the IPA has outlined a cycle of inquiry process to help school leaders intentionally develop and monitor growth aimed at improving their performance. ISBE and school districts should consider leveraging this tool to not only support school leader growth but also the continuous improvement of school leaders' learning organizations.

Review compensation and benefits packages. The statutorily required increases of teacher salaries required by Public Act 101-0443 has caused bottom-up pressure on teacher compensation overall. Therefore, some teachers at the top of their salary schedules are earning more than their school leaders, especially when calculating salaries on a per diem basis. As a result, school leaders are disincentivized from staying in their positions, and aspiring leaders are disincentivized from even considering school leadership as a viable career path. School leader compensation should be assessed and adjusted to ensure it is commensurate with the responsibilities of the job.

Improve policies that currently make school leaders' jobs untenable and hinder their ability to improve their learning organizations. Since 2000, the Illinois School Code has doubled in size. While there has been important legislation passed over the last 20+ years which positively impacts schools (i.e. the Evidence-Based Funding Formula), several statutes, many unfunded, have been codified requiring school leaders to do additional work with little to no additional resources or time. Also, some statutes have not shown to have a demonstrable positive impact on adult and student performance. Policies that should be reviewed immediately include:

- **Place a Moratorium on All New Mandates while Reviewing Current Mandates** – Policy makers should place a moratorium on all new mandates to engage stakeholders in a review of current mandates to determine their necessity. Mandates determined to be ineffective should be discontinued immediately. For those that remain, adequate resources must be provided so they can be implemented with fidelity.
- **Develop a Process to Determine the Necessity of New Mandates** – Due to the large number of current mandates and the fact that many mandates are passed without fully vetting the time, finances, personnel, and systems needed to implement more mandates with fidelity, a process should be developed to determine the necessity of new mandates. When deciding whether to institute a new mandate, consideration should be given to whether the mandate

erodes educators' autonomy and authority, aligns with leading, teaching, and learning standards, is fiscally responsible, and aligns with ISBE's strategic plan amongst other requirements.

- **Review Teacher Licensure** – It is no mystery that the educator shortage is real as school leaders throughout the state wrestle with finding sufficient individuals to fill open teaching positions across all grade levels and content areas. While ISBE has made strides to remove barriers to earning a teaching license, more needs to be done. For instance, permanently removing the edTPA requirement for student teaching candidates, reworking the teaching endorsement grade bands, and allowing teacher preparation programs to offer post-bachelor's teacher endorsements that maintain rigor but are streamlined would prove helpful.
- **Redesign Teacher Evaluation** – Few policy changes in recent years have required more time and attention from school leaders than the Performance Evaluation Reform Act. The IPA appreciates the General Assembly's call to review PERA's requirements to identify how the current statute can better inform improving educator performance and make the evaluation requirements more tenable to administer.²⁷ With the preliminary results of the study now available, efforts should be made to make teacher evaluation more doable by allowing for school districts' joint committees to:
 - Determine if student growth measures are a useful component of the teacher evaluation process
 - Differentiate evaluative processes based on length of tenure and history of teacher performance
 - Focus the evaluative process on instructional coaching and teacher growth rather than performance ratings
- **Eliminate the Comparative Rating from the 5Essentials Survey** – The IPA is fully supportive of school leaders surveying their school and community stakeholders for feedback and possibilities for improvement. However, the 5Essentials Survey continues to pose problems as a statewide instrument for schools to assess stakeholder perceptions. For example, the survey was constructed for a large urban setting, so questions, in some cases, use language that does not match the context of certain parts of the state. In addition, the raw data from survey respondents too often is misaligned with the rating generated by the survey, which causes a lack of trust in the survey overall. To quickly remedy this issue, ISBE should stop generating a rating from the 5Essentials and only report the raw results. Another alternative is to commission the development of a survey tool that aligns with the state's default principal evaluation tool, The School Leader Evaluation Plan.
- **Develop student discipline policies that support safe and equitable learning environments** – In January 2024, the Illinois Education Association (IEA) published The Impact of Student Discipline Policy Reform.²⁸ The report detailed an increase of attacks on school personnel and that almost half of teachers

were inclined to quit or transfer schools due to concerns about school safety. Also, the report offered teacher testimonials about the status of student management since the passage of SB 100, now Public Act 99-0456. For example, one teacher shared that “Student behavior has been an increasing problem in the last couple of years that completely changes the climate and culture of schools from a positive setting to a stressful negative one.” The IEA outlined several policy implications, which include:

- Appropriate state resources for educator professional development
- Expand access to school-based and school-linked health centers
- Expand incentives for school-based clinicians
- Amend Public Act 99-0456 to ensure schools can respond appropriately when serious violent student behavior occurs

Public Act 106-005 was signed into law this past spring, which directs ISBE to create resources for school district student management and support. While the IPA applauds this step of recognizing the needs in the field related to student management, more needs to be done to amend Public Act 99-0456 to provide school districts with the tools they need to appropriately respond to violent student behaviors.

Rebuild Illinois’ Principal Pipeline

Adopt the School Leader Paradigm as the state’s principal leadership framework. In 2022, the IPA and 14 other principals’ associations from across the United States published the third iteration of the School Leader Paradigm.²⁹ This innovative school leader framework not only outlines the work highly effective principals do, but the Paradigm also specifies the internal competencies and attributes principals must possess to do their work effectively.

Study why individuals are not choosing school leadership as a viable career path. While some broad data exists as to why individuals are not choosing to become school leaders (i.e. working conditions, compensation, etc.), work should be done to contextualize this data for Illinois. Special attention should be given to the effect of Tier 2 and Tier 3 pensions. Anecdotal evidence has begun to present itself that young people are choosing career paths other than education due to the reduced benefits and the prospect of not receiving a full pension until age 67.

Begin identifying prospective school leaders earlier in their career. Current school leaders must intentionally seek out and identify individuals who possess the competencies and attributes needed to be effective principals. From the beginning of their careers in education, these promising individuals should be encouraged to consider school leadership by being provided opportunities to lead, support with attaining advanced degrees, and encouragement to grow their professional learning network by connecting with current and future school leaders.

Continue to offer scholarships and other incentives for individuals who choose the principalship as a career path, especially for Black, Latinx and other underrepresented groups. Financial incentives, including scholarships and paid internships, should be offered to those pursuing the principalship, especially for those committed to serving in underperforming schools. These incentives are especially critical for Black, Latinx, and other groups who are significantly underrepresented in the principalship. For example, 17 percent of the student population in Illinois is Black while 14 percent of the principals are Black. The disparity is worse for Latinx

students who make up 27 percent of the student population and only 6 percent of Illinois principals are Latinx.³⁰ In FY22, FY23, FY24, and FY25, the state allocated \$1.8 million of funding to support the development of the principal pipeline with an emphasis of improving its diversity. These funds have been used to support the preparation of a diverse cohort of 185 aspiring school leaders over a two-year period. The IPA was responsible for supporting 102 of the 185 aspiring school leaders in the first cohort. From the 102 who made up the IPA’s first cohort, 46 percent were hired into school leadership positions upon completion of their principal preparation programs in the spring of 2024.

Support alternative pathways to the principalship. The traditional pathway to the principalship may not be a viable option for some individuals who desire to be a school leader, especially veteran educators. ISBE recently approved Aurora University’s Alternative Principal Endorsement Program for individuals with a master’s degree in education. Individuals who choose this pathway can earn their principal endorsement by taking the principal internship and earning 14 skills-based Micro-Credentials from the IPA’s Ed Leaders Network platform. Candidates must also pass the state’s two principal certification exams (195 & 196) and complete the initial teacher evaluator training. This pathway is more cost-effective and can be done in a year’s time as compared to the traditional route of earning the endorsement by earning a degree. In 2024, almost 70 candidates have been pursuing the Principal Endorsement through Aurora University’s program. The IPA is exploring the use of Micro-Credentials within other principal prep programs including the University of Illinois-Springfield and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Remove 6 percent cap penalty for individuals who transfer in-district from an instructional position to an administrative position. This salary cap provision prevents school districts from “growing their own” educators into needed administrative positions. For example, an educator would need to seek employment in a different district to receive greater than a 6 percent earned salary increase for their added educational experience, credentials, and licensure as an administrator.

While “crisis” is not a term to be used or taken lightly, it is not an understatement to say that the rate of principal attrition and the lack of individuals entering the principalship in Illinois are at crisis points. Policymakers and school districts must make a concerted effort to invest in both current and future school leaders. The recommendations offered in this document are meant to jumpstart conversations to develop strategies that ensure every school has an effective and sustained principal.

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The IPA serves more than 6,600 school leaders across Illinois including principals, assistant principals, deans, aspiring, and other school leaders. With a mission of developing, supporting, and advocating for innovative educational leaders, the Association serves its members by providing high quality professional learning, community building opportunities, and advocacy with state and federal policymakers.

You can learn more about the IPA by visiting [**ilprincipals.org**](http://ilprincipals.org).

Questions?

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