

Teacher shortage: it's complicated

Panel reserves a day for crash course in teacher workforce trends

The Interim Study Committee on Education has scheduled a fourth meeting on October 19 at 1:00 p.m. in the House Chamber to examine the dwindling teacher labor supply.

State Board of Education member Gordon Hendry, a Democrat, released a proposal Wednesday for a scholarship program to incentivize the training of future educators (you can find it at www.ourIndianaschools.com).

Under the Hendry plan, students in the top 20% of their high school graduating class with SAT scores above a designated threshold would be eligible for a full-tuition scholarship to attend any accredited Indiana education program. In exchange, they would have to commit to four years of teaching in an Indiana school.

There's certainly been no shortage of finger-pointing in the national, state, and local media coverage.

The shortages (systemwide and in high-need areas; nationally and here in Indiana) have been attributed to the education reform movement, demographic changes and the retirement of the Baby Boomers, tougher college entrance requirements and state licensure exams, budget cuts and recessionary layoffs, stagnant pay and low starting salaries, and declining autonomy in the classroom, to name a few theories.

The *Washington Post* ran a piece Thursday - which trended high nationally among *Post* stories that day - asserting that the situation in Indiana is "Pretty much the same thing as in Arizona, Kansas and other states where teachers are fleeing: a combination of under-resourced schools, the loss of job protections, unfair teacher evaluation methods, an increase in the amount of mandated standardized testing and the loss of professional autonomy."

The WaPo Answer Sheet blog added that if the Republican co-chairs of Indiana's Interim Study Committee on Education want to get to the root of the teacher labor shortage, they should "look in the mirror," suggesting it's a direct consequence of the Republican education reform policies.

On her eponymous blog, educational policy analyst Diane Ravitch wrote that Indiana's shortage "is the outcome of a dozen years of phony 'reform,' which demonizes teachers, busts unions, takes away teachers' right to due process, and ties salaries and evaluations to test scores."

Columnist Dave Bangert of the *Lafayette Journal & Courier* observed that "the killing of collective bargaining, the rise of private school vouchers, pay raises tied in part to student performance on standardized tests and more" have "depleted the ranks of undergrads studying education in state universities and put some districts on their heels when it comes to recruiting for open positions."

Gerardo Gonzalez, dean emeritus of the Indiana University School of Education, traces the shortage "directly to the policies promoted under then-Gov. Daniels and Indiana schools superintendent Tony Bennett. Between 2000 and 2012 constant-dollar teacher salaries in Indiana decreased by 10 percent, outpaced nationally only by North Carolina's 14 percent decrease."

For more, please see the following page . . .

If all else fails, call Phalen

IPS collaborates; takeover goes smoothly

When four Indianapolis schools converted to Turnaround Academies, the transitions were mostly a disaster as the new operators struggled with special education violations, staff shortages, lax discipline, and low enrollments, among other challenges.

We're only one week into the school year at the Phalen Leadership Academy at School 103, Francis Scott Key Elementary, but in stark contrast to how management transitions have unfolded in the past, the Innovation Network School is off to a promising start.

Earl Martin Phalen opened a traditional charter school in Indianapolis in 2013, and its students made such strong academic progress (100% of third-graders passed IREAD) that he was invited to take over Francis Scott Key under the Innovation Network School model.

Francis Scott Key is the lowest-performing school in the Indianapolis Public Schools. Only 25% of third graders pass IREAD, and 15% of third graders pass ISTEP+. Of the five IPS buildings with the most student discipline incidents, four are high schools, and Francis Scott Key is the fifth.

Not a single teacher who worked at Francis last year applied to stay on at the new PLA, even though pay and benefits are the same or better (some teachers were reportedly worried about losing their state pension). So over the Summer, PLA hired a new staff (about 35% - 40% of the teachers are male). The Glick Foundation stepped up with funding to sponsor an additional week of professional development.

With funding from IPS and labor donated by company RCE, the mocha-colored walls were repainted with bright, fresh colors, and 12 of the 14 classrooms were given brand new carpet.

Through the first week, enrollment stands at 333 students, up from 324 last year.

PLA expects student growth of around five to ten percentage points per year as measured on IREAD and ISTEP.

Chalk up the smooth transition to the regime change at IPS and the lessons that Phalen learned from the 2012 takeover challenges.