Illinois Education Association Releases Annual, Bi-Partisan State of Education Report

Poll shows Illinoisans believe educators are paid too little, are concerned about the impacts the teacher and education employee shortages are having on students’ education and support teaching about racism and slavery in schools

SPRINGFIELD — The Illinois Education Association (IEA) today released its fourth annual State of Education report, the only bipartisan poll monitoring Illinoisans views on all aspects of public schools. The results show deep concern around the teacher and education employee shortages, which have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. The results also show Illinoisans are strongly in favor of an honest teaching of American history in schools, including slavery and racism.

“These last two years have been the most trying years in our educators’ lives, and Illinoisans see that and are genuinely concerned about the future of our students and our public schools,” IEA President Kathi Griffin said.

The data show that overall, the public places more importance on having high-quality public schools than on balancing the state budget and lowering taxes. Illinoisans believe teachers and parents should have the biggest say in how our schools are being run, more so than politicians or school administrators.

“The people of Illinois know the value of public education. Teachers and parents understand the needs of our students the most,” Griffin said. “We need to continue to work together to make sure we are creating thoughtful solutions that helps us address the rampant staffing shortages we are seeing in our schools.”

A majority of Illinois residents believe funding for our schools should increase, teachers are paid too little and education support staff are also not paid enough. The words those surveyed most closely associate with teachers are underpaid, overworked and dedicated.
Illinoisans show broad support for making education a more attractive profession:

- 72 percent of Illinoisans are on board with changes to the Tier 2 pension system that would help the teachers who are forced to work until the age of 67 in order to collect from the system they pay into.
- 77 percent support student loan forgiveness for those working in education.
- 74 percent support a minimum wage for adjunct professors.
- 72 percent support mental health days for educators.

“We need to make meaningful changes to put us back on the right track. We are losing good teachers and staff every single day. Many of those who haven't left yet, are considering leaving,” Griffin said. "They’re burned out, not making enough money and don’t feel respected as educators. This is not just about K-12 either, our higher educators are impacted, too."

Illinoisans were also asked about Critical Race Theory. The vast majority of Illinoisans are in favor of an honest teaching of United States History in schools and believe students should be taught about slavery and racism.

“It’s interesting because Critical Race Theory or CRT is a term that’s truly divisive, but what these data show is that when asked about racism and slavery, a large majority of Illinoisans, even if they’re opposed to CRT, support teaching about racism and slavery,” Griffin said. “It’s also important to remember CRT is an advanced course for those studying law, we absolutely know that CRT is not taught in K-12 schools.”

The poll, conducted by Normington-Petts and Next Generation Strategies, surveyed 1,000 Illinoisans between Dec. 2 and 12. It has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent with 95 percent confidence.

“The people of Illinois are united in their quest for strong public schools. That’s clear. This poll is the only bi-partisan look at the state of public schools in Illinois,” Normington-Petts’ Jill Normington said.

“This poll gives us a truly get an honest look at the state of education in Illinois. It’s a barometer for what the people of Illinois want and where we should be going,” Next Generation Strategies Pat Brady said.

To request the full poll and crosstabs, email bridget.shanahan@ieana.org. To join this event click here to register for the Zoom news conference. For more information, please go to ieana.org/iea-state-of-education.

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The 135,000 member Illinois Education Association (IEA-NEA) is the state’s largest education employee’s organization. IEA represents preK-12 teachers outside of the city
of Chicago and education support staff, higher education faculty, retired education employees and students preparing to become teachers, statewide.