

# State Board Engages Illinois Unions to Support First-Year Teachers With Coaches and Mentors as They Navigate Unique Fall

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**SPRINGFIELD** – The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) announced today a partnership with the Illinois Education Association (IEA) and the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) to pair new teachers with building mentors and virtual instructional coaches to help guide them through this most unique first year of teaching. The Illinois Virtual Instructional Coach and Building Mentor Program is a one-of-a-kind support system for Illinois' first-year teachers.

“This program will offer essential supports to our first-year teachers as they embark on their careers during an unprecedented school year,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. “Our coaches and mentors will ensure that Illinois’ new teachers feel supported and have veteran educators to turn to with their questions.”

Each year, nearly 4,000 new K-12 teachers are hired to fill vacancies for the school year. Many first-year teachers this year did not have the chance to complete their clinical training, commonly referred to as student teaching, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and schools’ sudden shift to remote learning this past spring.

“Being a first-year teacher is exciting, exhilarating and amazing! At the same time, it can be stressful, scary and pressure-filled, especially when you begin your teaching career in the middle of a pandemic,” said Kathi Griffin, president of the IEA. “Add to this, the fact that their in-person training time was cut short and many of the students are suffering traumatic circumstances, it’s an awful lot to handle. We wanted to be a support and this virtual mentor program will help. We are in the middle of a teacher shortage and we will continue to do whatever we can to encourage students to pursue a career in education and support them to stay in this rewarding profession.”

High-quality induction programs are proven to reduce turnover among new teachers. This new program will match first-year teachers with coaches and mentors based on grade level, content area, cultural affinity, and interviews. First-year teachers will receive these additional supports for the 2020-21 school year.

Illinois Federation of Teachers president Dan Montgomery added, “Student teaching experiences cannot be replaced, but we hope this program will give new teachers the tools, experiences, and a support network to help them succeed in their new profession.”

Nearly [two-thirds](#) of Illinois’ students are starting the 2020-21 school year remotely. The mentors and coaches participating in the program will receive training on family engagement, cultural competence and anti-racism, and building safe and welcoming environments. The program will further prepare first-year teachers to support instructional equity during remote learning.

The [Illinois Virtual Instructional Coach and Building Mentor Program](#) will offer the following comprehensive supports:

- A virtual instructional coach, trained to provide support for beginning teachers for online instruction, social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices;
- A trained and certified building mentor to help connect the teacher with the school community;

- Access to a robust virtual coaching platform with an online library of resources and a way to connect other first year teachers with each other;
- And, support and feedback through one-on-one and small group virtual coaching sessions.

ISBE engaged IEA and IFT with a \$6.5 million grant, funded through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.

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*The 135,000 member [Illinois Education Association](#) (IEA-NEA) is the state's largest union. IEA represents Pre K-12 teachers outside the city of Chicago and education support staff, higher education faculty, retired education employees and students preparing to become teachers, statewide.*

*The [Illinois Federation of Teachers](#) (IFT) represents 103,000 teachers and paraprofessionals in PreK-12 school districts throughout Illinois, faculty and staff at Illinois' community colleges and universities, public employees under every statewide elected constitutional officer, and retirees.*