

One-third of Illinois Educators Considering Leaving Profession in Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

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SPRINGFIELD – Today, the Illinois Education Association (IEA), the largest education organization in Illinois, announced that a poll of its membership showed one-third are considering leaving the profession, amid an already existing teacher shortage, over concerns of safety and stress. The IEA will hold a news conference tomorrow morning to release the poll results.

“This should sound the alarm for every person in Illinois who values our children and their education. We are already in the middle of a teacher shortage. Teacher retirements are at their highest rate in five years, and others are considering switching careers,” IEA President Kathi Griffin said. “We need to figure out how to keep our talented people in education. And we think the best way to do that is by asking local health departments to intervene when school boards and/or administrations aren’t keeping their students and staff safe.”

IEA polled more than 1,300 members the week of Oct. 19 to ask about several issues, including their experiences with the start of the school year:

When asked the question: “Thinking about this year and everything that has come along with it, how has this experience affected your plans to be an educator or teacher?”

The most common responses were:

“Don’t want to be a teacher anymore” - 12%

“Considering early retirement” - 10%

“It made me re-evaluate my career path” – 13%

“I wish I could say I’m surprised so many are considering leaving the profession, but I’m not. Our teachers are struggling. Our support staff are struggling. Some of them are working in school districts without a safe plan in place. Others are working in districts where there is a safe plan, but the district is not enforcing it,” Griffin said. “And even those in districts where everything is being done safely and appropriately, they are saddled with extreme amounts of stress and extra work.”

Additional survey questions illustrated the stress many educators are feeling due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

When asked to compare their workload between this fall and last:

76% said this year’s workload was either somewhat, or much heavier, than last.

And, when asked to select from a list of descriptions that apply to them:

66% said, “I have been more burned out more than usual this year.”

The percentage of educators who said they were aware of their school district’s policy on the five required safety policies in schools falls short in several categories:

face coverings – 98%

social distancing – 90%

adequate cleaning supplies – 79%

formal cleaning schedules – 74%

and provided appropriate PPE for staff – 62%

And, when asked how likely educators felt it would be for schools to reopen safely for full in-person learning for all students next semester:

69% felt it was either “not very” or “not at all likely.”

“We are not against in-person learning, we are against unsafe learning. Based on metrics alone, in 75 of Illinois’ 102 counties, and Chicago, there is evidence of significant community spread,” said Kathi Griffin, president of IEA. “What’s happening now is many districts aren’t following their own plans or, they aren’t following the state’s guidance. And, in some places, it seems local health departments and school districts are not coordinating strategies as outlined in state guidance. Or, boards of education are ignoring school leaders’ advice. We’re turning to the Illinois Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics (ICAAP) again for its assistance to review plans and advise districts on ways to improve safety. If schools don’t make changes, local union leaders will report these issues to local health departments. If that doesn’t work, we’ll determine our own steps.”

“School reopening is important to student well-being and education but it can only be done if districts have and follow plans to maximize the safety of students and staff,” said Daniel Johnson, MD, FAAP board member of the Illinois Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics and Pediatric Infections Disease Specialist. “We are happy to lend our expertise to schools and participate in town halls to support educators, school administrators, parents and communities on mitigation best practices.

The IEA represents 135,000 teachers, classroom aides, paraprofessionals, janitorial staff, school secretaries, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, school nurses, social workers, grounds crews and many other school employees in districts across the state of Illinois.

The IEA will be announcing the poll results during a Zoom news conference on Wed., Nov. 11 at 10 a.m. Teachers who are considering leaving the profession will also be sharing their stories. If you plan to attend, please sign up through [this link](#) and the Zoom information will be emailed to you.

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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.