

Retaining Educators Takes Added Investment Now (RETAIN) Act (S. xx) **Senator Dick Durbin**

Across the country, communities are experiencing a severe and persistent shortage of educators. Exacerbated by low pay, school leadership turnover, and poor teaching conditions, the shortage significantly impacts schools with high proportions of students of color and low-income students. These same schools also struggle to retain principals, early childhood education staff, paraprofessionals, and mental health services providers. The lack of qualified teachers and education professionals threatens students' ability to learn and thrive.

The Need in Communities. Data from the Learning Policy Institute found that in 2024, one in eight teaching positions were either unfilled or filled by a teacher who was not fully certified. Educators increasingly are unwilling to teach in difficult working conditions at current compensation levels. Across the nation, the average teacher salary in 2023-24 was \$72,030—though this average masks variation in pay across regions and the income level of the school district. In 2023-2024, the average salary for a first-year teacher was \$46,526, and in 2024, early childhood educators made \$37,120—barely above the federal poverty line for a family of four. While federal data show inflation-adjusted teacher pay has been stagnant since 1990, the inflation-adjusted cost of college has nearly doubled, leaving teachers with large amounts of student loan debt and low pay.

Teachers who leave the classroom do not necessarily leave for a non-teaching job. Many experienced teachers move on to serve in well-resourced schools in more affluent neighborhoods where pay is higher, school leadership is well-established, and necessary supports are already in place. Teacher effectiveness has been demonstrated to increase over time with classroom experience. Yet, as a result of these challenging factors, students with the greatest need frequently are taught by teachers with the least experience. Studies show that teachers of color improve outcomes for all students, and especially for students of color. However, schools consistently struggle to attract and retain teachers who reflect the diversity of the student population they serve due in part to the low pay in the profession.

The Solution. The *RETAIN Act* creates a fully refundable tax credit for teachers, paraprofessionals, school-based mental health providers, and school leaders in Title I schools; and educators, program providers, and program directors in early childhood education programs funded by Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Care and Development Block Grants. The tax credit increases at key points in a teacher's career to incentivize retention.

- Years 1 – 2: \$5,800
- Years 3 – 4: \$7,000
- Years 5 – 9: \$8,700
- Year 10: \$11,600
- Years 11 – 15: \$8,700
- Year 16: \$7,000
- Years 17 – 20: \$5,800

Endorsing Organizations. Advance CTE; Association for Career and Technical Education; All4Ed; American Federation of Teachers; American Association of School Personnel Administrators; American School Counselor Association; Association of Educational Service Agencies; Council of Administrators of Special Education; Council of the Great City Schools; Deans for Impact; Education Leaders of Color; Educators for Excellence; First Five Years Fund; Illinois Associate for the Education of Young Children; Illinois Education Association; Illinois Federation of Teachers; Illinois Head Start; Illinois Principals Association; Learning Forward; National Association of Elementary School

Principals; National Association of School Psychologists; National Council for Languages and International Studies; Joint National Committee for Languages; National Education Association; National Parent Teacher Association; Save the Children; AASA, The School Superintendents Association; Teach For America; Teach Plus; UnidosUS.