



UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S OF VALUE:
Defining Educator Compensation

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KEEP ILLINOIS

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UNDERSTANDING WHAT’S OF VALUE: Defining Educator Compensation

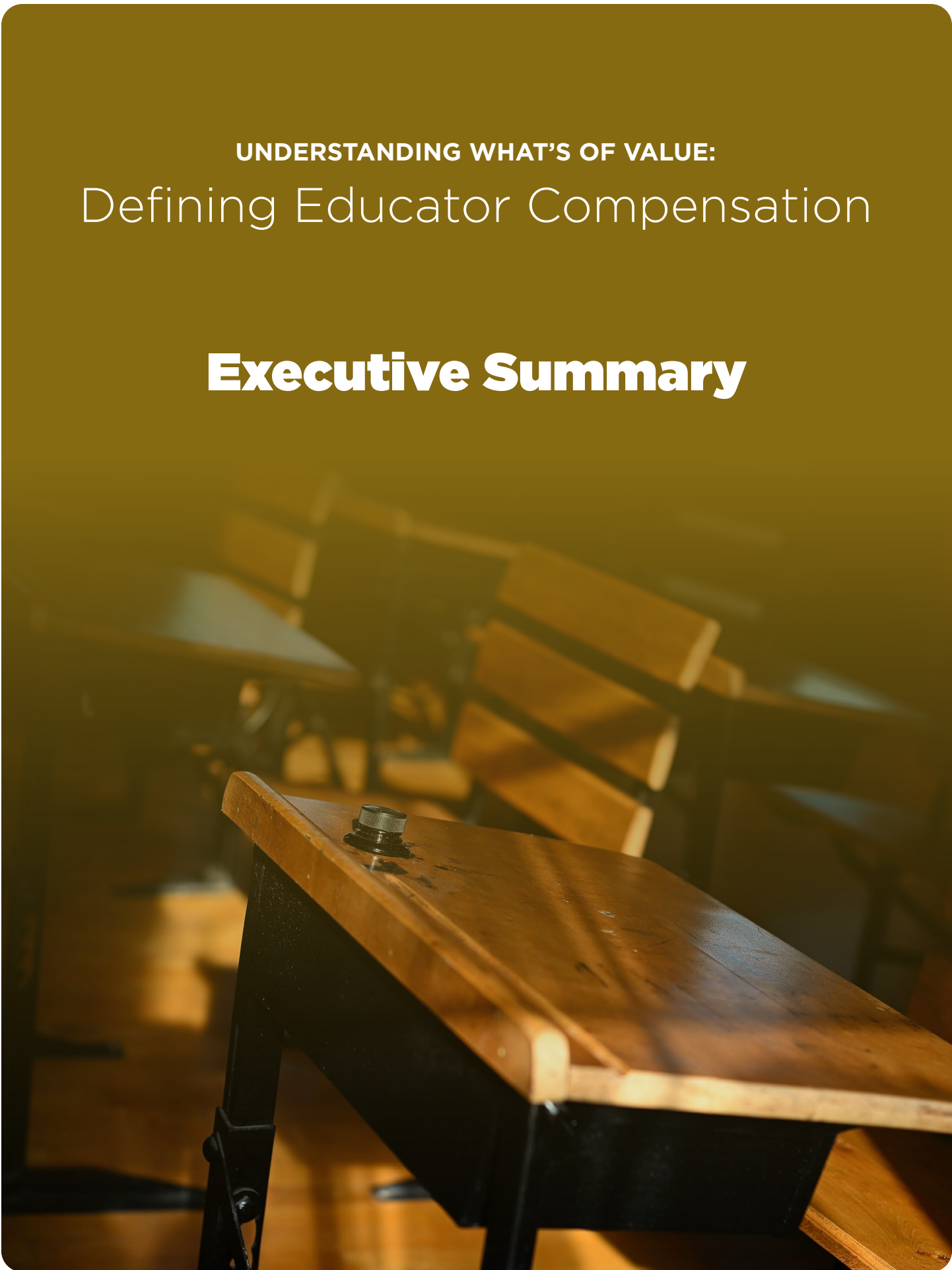
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Executive Summary



The Illinois P-20 Network's KEEP Illinois initiative is a grassroots effort comprising approximately 100 educators from across the state who share a common goal: improving educator retention by fostering greater educator engagement, which in turn supports ongoing improvements in student learning. In Fall 2024, KEEP Illinois published a comprehensive literature review, [*The Road to Retention: Understanding the educator shortage and ways to engage and keep educators*](#). This report issued four recommendations for additional work:

- Compensation
- Teacher Leadership
- Professional Development, Coaching, and Co-Teaching
- Conditions, Culture, and Wellness for Educators

This study, *Understanding What's of Value: Defining Educator Compensation*, seeks to dive deeply into the topic of Compensation. The Illinois P-20 Network conducted a statewide survey to understand what educators value related to compensation in order to best understand how to use limited school district and state resources to most effectively compensate educators in the ways in which they want to be compensated. With over 1,300 responses from school districts across Illinois and with 228 school districts from across Illinois identified through the survey, a robust analysis of survey responses and school district factors was conducted.

Key takeaways include, but are not limited to:

- Educators want to be paid more.
- For early and mid-career educators with less than 20 years of experience, increasing take-home pay in their paychecks is their most important compensation priority.
- For later career educators with more than 20 years of experience as well as for administrators, improving their overall compensation package is their most important compensation priority.
- For non-licensed educators (e.g., paraprofessionals), increased take-home pay was their most critical compensation priority.
- Time-to-retirement for Tier II educators is overwhelmingly considered problematic.

As a result of these key takeaways, this report highlights the following policy recommendations at the state level:

- Creating and implementing new mechanisms for increasing take-home pay for educators within their existing salaries.
- Additional funding for increased educator salaries, particularly for early career educators.
- New mechanisms to allow for school district participation in statewide insurance programs, which can allow for decreased costs and, possibly, improve benefits simultaneously.

This report also highlights actions that can be taken in local school districts:

- Local survey data collection should take place prior to the start of collective bargaining negotiations to allow for negotiations to best meet local needs within existing resources — A sample survey has been provided in the appendix.
- Enhance salaries and take-home pay by eliminating benefits that are not valued by employees locally.
- Examine differentiated benefits for different employees and/or groups of employees to best target existing resources to more effectively meet the needs of different employees/employee groups.

In the case of both the state policy recommendations and the recommendations for local consideration, this report acknowledges that Illinois' statewide educator professional leadership groups collaborate effectively and demonstrate strong knowledge and creativity. These groups are well positioned to identify and develop new statewide and local solutions informed by this report. Engaging with these groups based on the findings of this study represents a critical next step.

Finally, this report details a wide range of areas for further research. Supporting such research efforts with attention, funding, and data sharing can accelerate the pace of such research and can improve its depth and complexity.

Stepping Back to Understand

Defining Educator Compensation



In 2023, the Illinois P-20 Network updated its Areas of Focus to include a new area, *Educator Engagement*. At its foundation, Educator Engagement sought to address the educator shortage across Illinois and the United States by focusing energy, research, and resources on educator retention. There have been organizations of all sizes across Illinois working on the pipeline end of solving the educator shortage for many years, with programs ranging from the development of future educators as high school students, to programs designed to support paraprofessionals with obtaining their teaching licenses, to programs designed around the needs of career-changers. Despite all of the work of these groups and the impact that such efforts were having, following the COVID-19 pandemic, it became even more clear that the educator shortage would not be solved so long as the profession continued to hemorrhage teachers, clinicians, and administrators from their daily roles as licensed educators practicing in Illinois school districts. To address this issue, the Illinois P-20 Network launched KEEP Illinois (Keeping Educators Engaged Professionally) to tackle this issue.

KEEP Illinois is a statewide grassroots initiative through which the Illinois P-20 Network called upon educators from across Illinois to identify and address issues around educator engagement. At a minimum, the goal of KEEP Illinois is to improve educator retention; however, the initiative aims to go beyond that goal by identifying policies and practices that promote deep, sustained engagement throughout educators' careers. Such engagement enables educators to continually grow, improve, and innovate in their practice, allowing them not only to remain in the profession but also to better serve students over the course of their careers.

Upon its initial formation, KEEP Illinois saw nearly 100 volunteers from across Illinois, spanning the Wisconsin border to the Ohio River, from teachers to administrators, from elementary schools and high schools, and from newer educators through retirees. Based on the group's early conversations, the decision was made to provide roots for future work in the literature around educator retention, and KEEP Illinois undertook a comprehensive literature review, [*The Road to Retention: Understanding the educator shortage and ways to engage and keep educators*](#). In addition to a comprehensive examination of the literature, that report issued four recommendations for additional work:

- Compensation
- Teacher Leadership
- Professional Development, Coaching, and Co-Teaching
- Conditions, Culture, and Wellness for Educators

In the area of Teacher Leadership, the Illinois P-20 Network joined forces with other statewide organizations around the Teachers LEAD Coalition. The Illinois P-20 Network is engaged in supporting the forward movement of that work. In the area of Professional Development, Coaching, and Co-Teaching, the [*Illinois P-20 Network's Educational Coaching Network*](#) (ECN) continues to lead innovative statewide work. While the ECN work focuses on coaching and professional development related to coaching and does not more broadly address co-teaching or other areas of professional development, significant work with practitioners across Illinois continues to move forward as it relates to this recommendation. Each of the two remaining recommendations, Compensation and Conditions, Culture, and Wellness for Educators, are areas in which the tremendous diversity seen across Illinois in everything from school district type and size to geographic location to community culture suggests that additional research is necessary to guide specific actions related to policy and/or practice. While there is continued research to be conducted in all four recommendations from *The Road to Retention*, the Illinois P-20 Network has taken significant first steps toward answering Illinois-specific questions about educator compensation in 2025. The *Defining Educator Compensation* study is original research conducted to better understand how compensation is viewed by educators across Illinois and to suggest potential statewide policy actions as well as ideas for local practices related to compensation. This study aims to better understand educators' perspectives on compensation to inform strategies that support retention. It also seeks to establish a foundation for future research on educator pay across Illinois's diverse communities and school districts, benefiting both practitioners and policymakers.

Defining Educator Compensation Methodology



Given the aforementioned diversity of schools, school districts, other educational organizations, such as special education cooperatives, regional offices of education, regional safe schools, area career centers, and Education for Employment (EFE) system regional offices, and the diversity of the educators within these organizations across Illinois, the Illinois P-20 Network sought to best understand what the term compensation means to educators across Illinois. On the one hand, we assumed that all educators may likely be interested in earning more money, and we also know that resources are limited at both the state and local level. Given this inherent constraint, understanding what educators value and how those values differ by role, region, experience, and district type, can inform more precise policy and practice recommendations.

To gather the information presented in this report, a survey was designed. The survey is available to view in Appendix B at the end of this report. The survey was hosted online in Qualtrics through the Northern Illinois University Qualtrics license. This platform allowed for the survey to easily be completed across common desktop and mobile operating systems in the web browser. The survey was designed to be anonymous for the individual, though the survey's final question did optionally request that the respondent provide their school district (or other educational organization). If respondents provided their school district, their answers were able to be connected to publicly available district-level information, such as the school district's funding level, teacher and administrator salary information, teacher retention rate, and more.

Prior to distribution, the survey was pilot-tested internally at Northern Illinois University for readability, clarity, time-to-completion, and accessibility both across device types as well as for individuals with a range of needs. During the pilot-testing phase, the survey was completed by school district human resources leaders, teachers, and Northern Illinois University staff members. Feedback was sought from these individuals to ensure that the questions were clear and understandable, that the answer choices were easy to comprehend, that the survey worked on a variety of devices, operating systems, and web browsers and to understand the time-to-completion. On average, the pilot-testing respondents completed the survey in approximately five minutes.

The survey was available for responses from educators from across Illinois for approximately six weeks during Spring 2025. Communication about the *Defining Educator Compensation* study included the every-other-week Illinois P-20 Network Newsletter, the Illinois P-20 Network's Educational Coaching Network monthly newsletter, announcements and table signs at the Educational Coaching Network Conference, as well as communication in meetings and via email to participants at Illinois P-20 Network IPIE meetings. The Illinois P-20 Network also posted about the survey on LinkedIn on multiple occasions. Additional electronic written communication about the survey was provided by other statewide organizations, including:

- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)
- Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO)
- Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA)
- Illinois Education Association (IEA)
- Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS)
- Illinois Principals Association (IPA)

In each of these communications, individuals were encouraged to both take the survey and share the survey with colleagues. An example of text that was shared with partners follows:

Through May 7, the [Illinois P-20 Network](#) is conducting a statewide study of early childhood through high school educators to explore their thoughts on compensation. This study builds off the recommendations included in [The Road to Retention](#), which offered four recommendations to better engage educators throughout their careers and to improve retention. Those recommendations included: compensation; teacher leadership; professional development, coaching, and co-teaching; and culture, working conditions, and wellness.

This study seeks to gather more information directly from educators of all types, including both licensed teachers, clinicians, and administrators as well as paraprofessionals, across all levels (early childhood through high school) from throughout Illinois. This survey is anonymous and completely voluntary, is likely only to take as little as 5 minutes to complete, and can inform conversations both locally and statewide about educator compensation.

[KEEP Illinois Defining Educator Compensation Survey](https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cOz8ce5YgWfeMLk) (Direct link: https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cOz8ce5YgWfeMLk)

The goal of both the survey design and the communication strategy was to try to maximize the number of responses and the diversity of educators represented (geographically, position type, school district type, and size). As part of the effort to achieve this goal, there were questions that were intentionally left out of this survey to make it non-threatening to potential respondents and to encourage them to complete the survey. Examples of potentially relevant questions that were intentionally not asked include:

- What is your current salary?
- Do you have _____ medical insurance benefits from your current district? (individual, family, or no/none)
- Are you a TRS or IMRF system employee?
- Are you a Tier I or Tier II employee?
- Individual demographic questions, such as:
 - Gender
 - Race/Ethnicity

Following the closure of the survey window, attention shifted to preparing data for analysis. There were two key steps in the data preparation process: Step one included identifying the usable data and ensuring that it was correctly coded from the survey and imported into the statistical analysis software. Then, the survey data was transformed with appropriate codes to represent text answers. The second step was to collect data from the 2024 Illinois Report Card for the 228 school districts that were identified. Data fields that were collected from ISBE's publicly available dataset for each district included:

- Evidence-Based Funding Adequacy Level/Adequacy Percent
- Operational Expense Per Pupil
- Student Enrollment
- Low Income Students
- English Learners
- Students with IEPs
- Student Attendance
- Chronic Absenteeism
- Total Teachers
- Master's Degree or Higher

- Novice Teachers
- Short-Term or Provisional Teachers
- Teacher Retention
- District Teacher Salary
- Percent of Teachers with Ten or Fewer Absences
- District Average Administrator Salary

Finally, three additional data fields were created to describe district-level characteristics for further analysis. These fields included:

- Administrator vs Teacher Salary — Utilizing the ISBE reported District Teacher Salary and District Average Administrator Salary, a new metric was created to compare these fields. This field simply divided the District Average Administrator Salary by the District Teacher Salary.
- District Geographic Location — This field defined nine general geographic locations in the State of Illinois. In education in Illinois, while there are a number of already established geographic locations, outside of the regional offices of education (of which there were too many to use for this field), none is deeply established. So, for the purposes of this study, the following geographic regions were identified:
 - Chicagoland — Cook County and the “Collar Counties”
 - North Central
 - Northwestern
 - East Central
 - Central
 - Western
 - Metro East — Suburban St. Louis
 - Southeast
 - Southern
- District Size — While the State of Illinois already has a measure for district size it did not provide the level of nuance needed for this study. As such each of the identified districts was assigned to one of the size categories based on student enrollment. These descriptors are designed to apply specifically to Illinois school districts in this study and not to school districts nationally.
 - Very large — More than 10,000 students
 - Large — 5,000 to 10,000 students
 - Medium — 1,500 to 4,999 students
 - Small — 700 to 1,499 students
 - Very small — Less than 700 students

Once data were cleaned and coded, data analysis began. As the primary purpose of this study is to begin to define what educators in Illinois believe is of importance in terms of their compensation, the primary focus of the data analysis for this study is descriptive in nature. Descriptive statistics are provided throughout this report. In addition to the descriptive statistics described and displayed throughout the report, statistical tests were run, but those are not reported on given the overall response rate in comparison to the population of licensed and non-licensed educators in Illinois. Interested organizations and individuals can contact the authors for further discussion about those analyses.

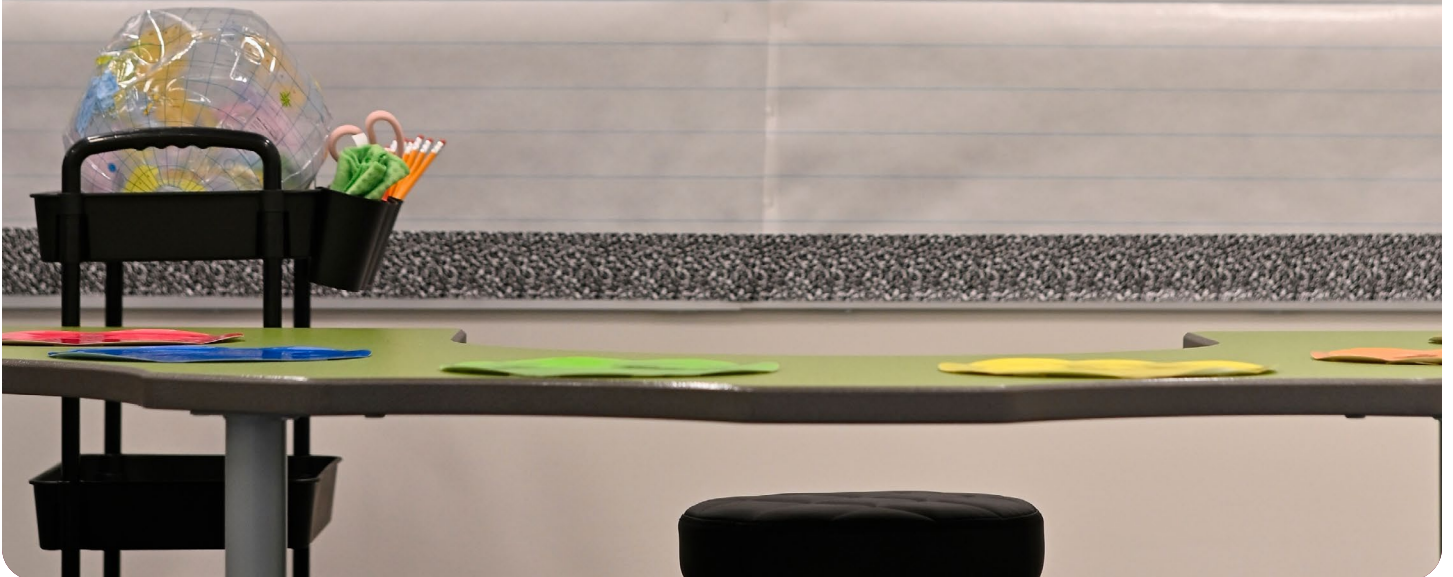
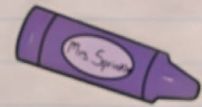
Study Participants



WELCOME



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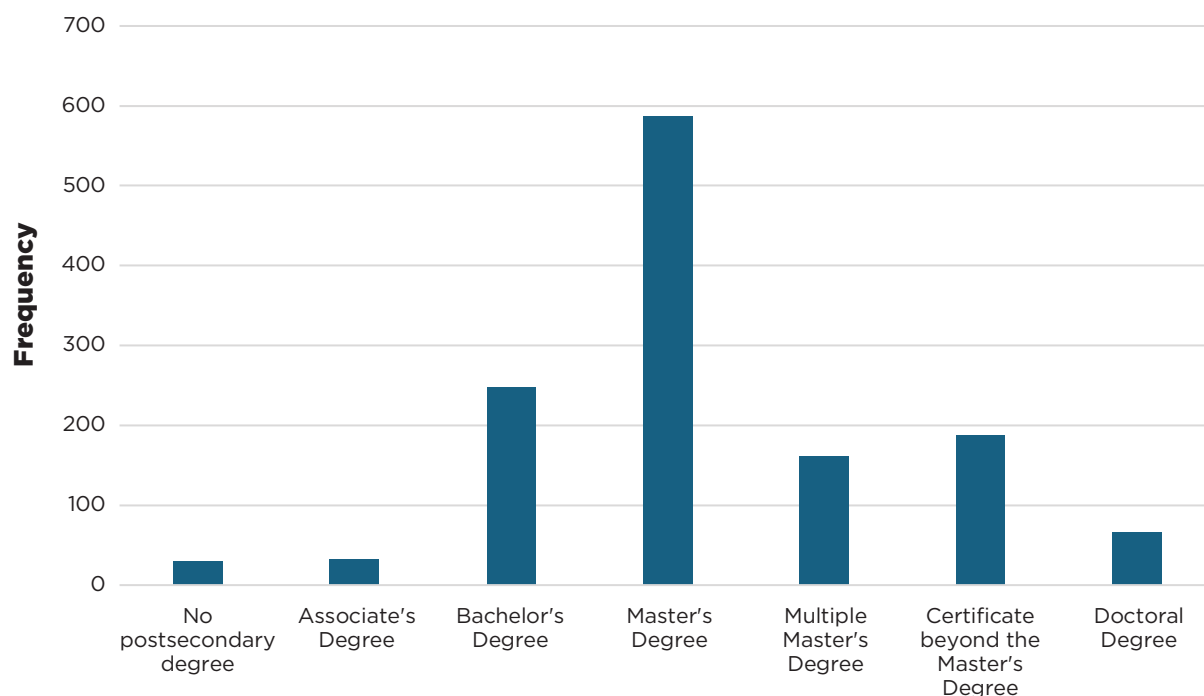


The population for the study included 137,212 teachers and 13,642 administrators in Illinois, plus an unknown but relatively large number of instructional paraprofessionals. The study sample contained 1,311 usable responses. The number of responses on individual questions varies from 1,311 as survey respondents could elect not to respond to individual questions as they moved through the survey.

Amongst the respondents, 1,201 had a Professional Educator License (PEL), and 103 respondents did not have a PEL. Of the PEL respondents who were not teachers, 186 were in administrative roles at the school or district-level whereas 244 were in non-teacher, non-administrative roles. Non-teacher roles included instructional coaches, librarians, curriculum coordinators, teachers on special assignment, school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc. Amongst the respondents, 771 of those with a PEL were in classroom teacher roles.

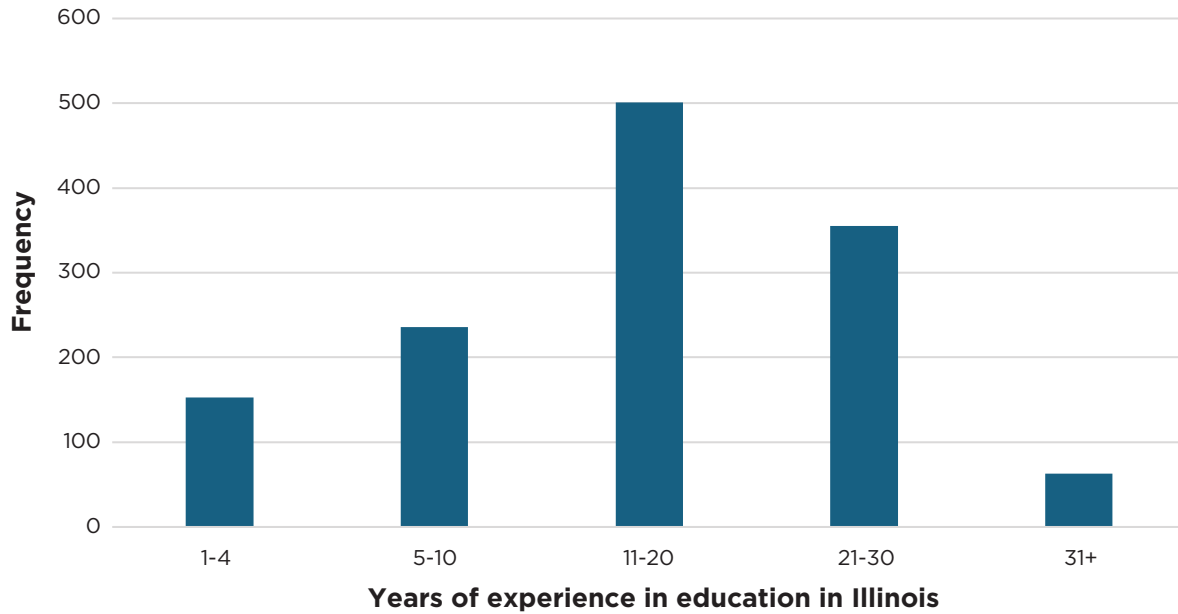
The majority of respondents had a Master’s Degree or higher (including multiple Master’s Degrees) as can be seen in Figure 1; 4.7% of respondents had an Associate’s Degree or no postsecondary degree, and 18.9% had a Bachelor’s Degree. Given the diversity of positions that were included in this survey, it was difficult to make meaningful comparisons to publicly available state data, which is reported for teachers and, separately, for administrators, but is not reported for paraprofessionals. To provide a broader context, 42% of teachers in Illinois have Bachelor’s Degrees while 57% have a Master’s Degree or higher. Administrators in Illinois would, in nearly all cases, be required to have at least a Master’s Degree. When thinking about teachers and administrators as a single group of educators, approximately 58,222 educators have Master’s degrees (13,642 administrators plus 44,580 teachers). Of the approximately, 150,854 educators in Illinois that were reported on the 2024 Illinois Report Card (137,212 teachers plus 13,642 administrators), 38.6% have a Master’s Degree. While this sample will prove to be a diverse statewide sampling of educators, the respondents clearly skew toward having attained advanced degrees to a greater degree than do educators generally in Illinois.

Figure 1. Highest postsecondary degree earned



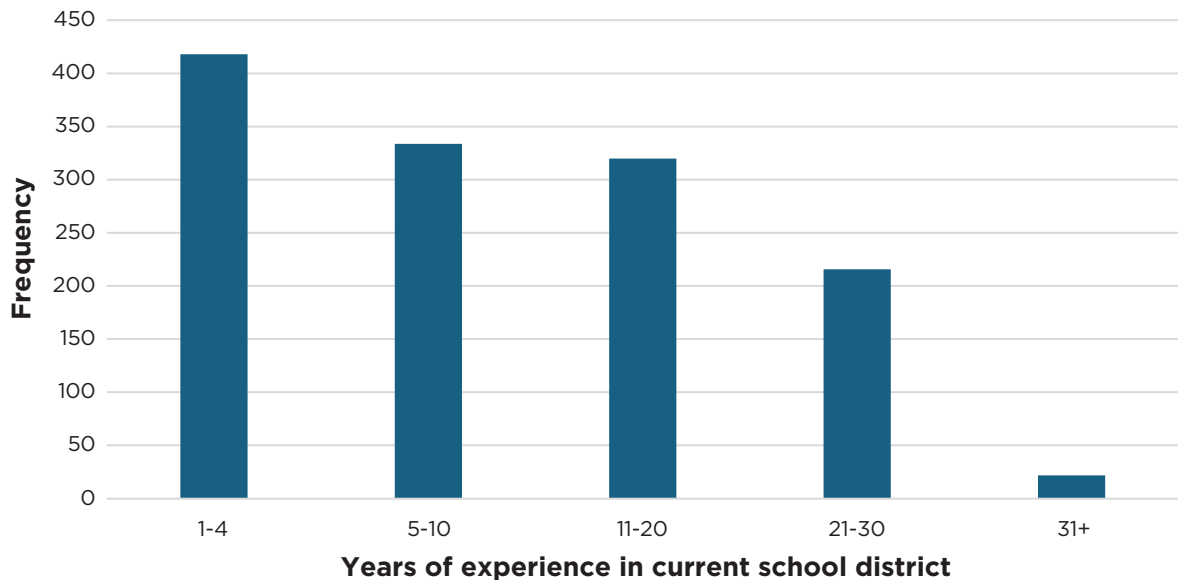
70.1% of respondents have more than ten years of experience working in Illinois schools whereas 11.7% of respondents were in their first four years of teaching in Illinois. The Illinois Report Card only reports Novice Teachers, who are those with less than 2 full-time equivalent years of public school teaching experience. 6.7% of Illinois teachers on the 2024 Illinois Report Card were considered novice. Given that this survey also included administrators, who tend to be more experienced, this data suggests a representative dataset in comparison to the entire population of Illinois educators with regards to experience working in Illinois schools.

Figure 2. Years of experience in Illinois schools



Many respondents had more years total in education than they did working in their current district, indicating mobility. To some extent, this could be explained with the inclusion of administrators in the sample, who often teach in one district before becoming an administrator in another district. As can be seen in Figure 3, over half of respondents had less than ten years of experience in their current district with the largest single reporting group having only between one and four years of experience in their current district.

Figure 3. Years of experience in current school district



Given the numbers of respondents in each of these categories of experience in their current district, this data represents not only administrators moving between districts but other PEL educators. As can be seen in Table 1, administrators and non-licensed staff who responded to the survey were more likely to be in their first four years in the current school district. At the same time, overall the division of respondents across the range of mid-career years of experience categories (5-10 years, 11-20 years, and 21-30 years) was quite consistent across all three role categories with a fairly even distribution, particularly for licensed educators in the 5-10 years and 11-20 years categories within their current school districts.

Table 1. Number of years in current district by job category

	N	1-4 years (%)	5-10 years (%)	11-20 years (%)	21-30 years (%)	31+ years (%)
Non-Licensed	102	52.0	15.7	22.5	8.8	1.0
Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff	1015	28.6	26.9	24.9	17.7	1.9
Administrator	186	39.2	23.7	22.6	13.4	1.1

Of those 1,311 usable survey responses, 972 respondents (73.9%) elected to report their school district. While this data will be useful in a variety of analyses throughout the remainder of this report, this data is particularly helpful to further identify that this sample represents the diversity of school districts across Illinois.

Of the 972 responses, 2.7% reported that their school districts were from the following categories: Area Career Centers, Other public school in Illinois, Public Charter Schools, Regional Safe Schools, Special Education Cooperatives, and State Illinois Public Schools (e.g., IMSA, Illinois School for the Deaf, Laboratory Schools, etc.). Each of these categories had at least one respondent, and the number of respondents per category ranged from one to 13. While this was a small percentage of the overall survey responses (and is a correspondingly small percentage of educators in Illinois), this does demonstrate that this survey did reach the range of other public educational entities in Illinois beyond school districts.

Respondents came from 228 unique school districts, representing 26.8% of the 851 districts in Illinois. The number of respondents per district ranged from one to 82. The mean number of respondents per district was four, and the median number of respondents per district was one. Of the 228 unique districts with respondents, 130 had 1 respondent.

With regards to where the respondents' school districts were located, Illinois was well-covered geographically as shown in Table 2. While a significant number of school districts were in the Chicagoland region, the sample was also representative of Illinois overall.

Table 2. Respondents' school districts by geographical region

Region of Illinois	Number of School Districts Represented in this Survey Data
Chicagoland	113
North Central	19
Northwestern	10
East Central	22
Central	23
Western	8
Southeast	11
Metro East	8
Southern	14

In addition to the respondents being from geographically diverse regions of the State of Illinois, the size of respondents' school districts was also diverse with respondents coming from both Illinois' smallest districts and largest districts. For example, school district student enrollment from these 228 districts ranged from the smallest district with an enrollment of 146 students to the largest district with an enrollment of 321,668 students. Table 3 shows the breakdown of these districts based on student enrollment.

Table 3. Respondents' school districts by size based on student enrollment

School District Size	Number of School Districts Represented in this Survey Data
Very large More than 10,000 students	19
Large 5,000 to 10,000 students	26
Medium 1,501 to 4,999 students	87
Small 701 to 1,500 students	51
Very small Fewer than 700 students	45

Survey respondents came from a wide range of school districts across Illinois. Not only is that diversity of school districts apparent above based on their geographic location and size, but these districts are also diverse in important school finance measures:

- The Evidence-Based Funding Adequacy Percent for districts ranged from a low of 63% of Adequacy to a high of 262% of Adequacy. The mean Adequacy Percent for all of the identified school districts was 88.35%.
- Operating Expense per Pupil, which is an absolute measure and not relative to the needs of students or local costs ranged from a low of \$10,115 per student to a high of \$44,941 per student. The mean Operating Expense per Pupil for identified school districts was \$16,977.69, which was below the state average Operating Expense per Pupil of \$18,905 for FY 2023 as indicated on the 2024 Illinois Report Card.
- The mean District Teacher Salary for districts in this survey dataset was \$69,182.17, which was below the state average of \$75,978. The range in the District Teacher Salaries in this dataset went from a low of \$40,580 to a high of \$131,948.
- The mean District Average Administrator Salary for districts in this survey dataset was \$114,137.23. The statewide District Average Administrator Salary for all districts is \$119,384. The range in the District Average Administrator Salary in this dataset went from a low of \$71,060 to a high of \$197,845.

The diversity of school districts represented provides an important and interesting foundation for examining and understanding respondents' feelings about what is important to them related to educator compensation. While there are differences between those who participated in this survey and the people who work in a full range of roles as educators across Illinois, the respondents represented a diverse swath of Illinois school districts and roles within those districts.

The Value Placed upon Compensation

The authors sought to identify what educators value about their compensation and how they feel about their compensation.

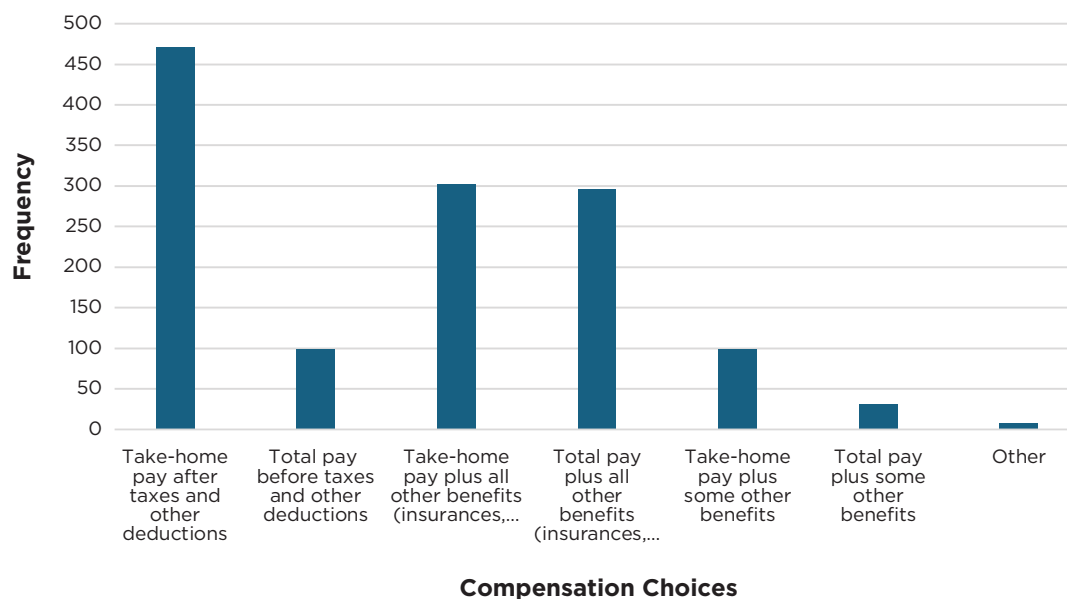
The survey began by asking educators what they considered to be part of their compensation package. The question presented the following range of close-ended responses:

- Take-home pay after taxes and other deductions
- Total pay before taxes and other deductions
- Take-home pay plus all other benefits (insurances, retirement, sick days, tuition reimbursement, etc.)
- Total pay plus all other benefits (insurances, retirement, sick days, tuition reimbursement, etc.)
- Take-home pay plus some other benefits
- Total pay plus some other benefits
- Other

The “Other” option allowed respondents to enter text, and there were only eight responses in this text box. Two of those responses were numeric and may have represented salary amounts (170000 and 70000). Another response cited “summer off” as part of their compensation package. Another response stated, “I view my compensation as not enough to survive.” While another response was, “Never thought about it.” One individual responded with a statement about compensation for extra duty responsibilities such as supervision, co-curricular sponsorship/leadership, and/or coaching or directing. This one response that pointed at these sources of additional compensation for additional work was, “pay additional to my salary for duties outside that of my contract.” One other response stated, “I don’t take the insurance “benefits.” And, there was this response, “compared with other national, state compensation associated with educational level and years of employment.”

Figure 4 shows how respondents viewed their compensation. Just over two-thirds of respondents (66.8%) view some form of take-home pay as the central definition of “compensation” versus only slightly less than one-third of respondents (32.6%) who viewed some form of total pay as central to their definitions of compensation. Understanding this perspective has important implications for both statewide policy and for local school districts. At the same time, a sizable number of respondents recognized the value of other, non-cash forms of compensation, such as insurance, retirement system contributions, sick days, and tuition reimbursement. Nearly half of respondents (45.8%) selected one of the two choices that included all other benefits as part of their compensation package. Another 10% of respondents selected choices that included other benefits. On the flip side, this also means that nearly half of all respondents seem to be less interested in considering those other types of benefits as part of their compensation packages.

Figure 4. All educators’ views of their compensation



Disaggregating the same compensation question by groups of survey respondents allows for the possibility that compensation may be most effective when differentiated for different groups and their specific needs and/or wishes. First, this question is analyzed based on the category of job role. For this analysis, different educational roles that individuals have in their organizations have been rolled into either Non-Licensed, Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff, or Administrator. Figures 5a, 5b, and 5c show the responses for each of these categories respectively.

Figure 5a. Non-licensed educators' views of their compensation

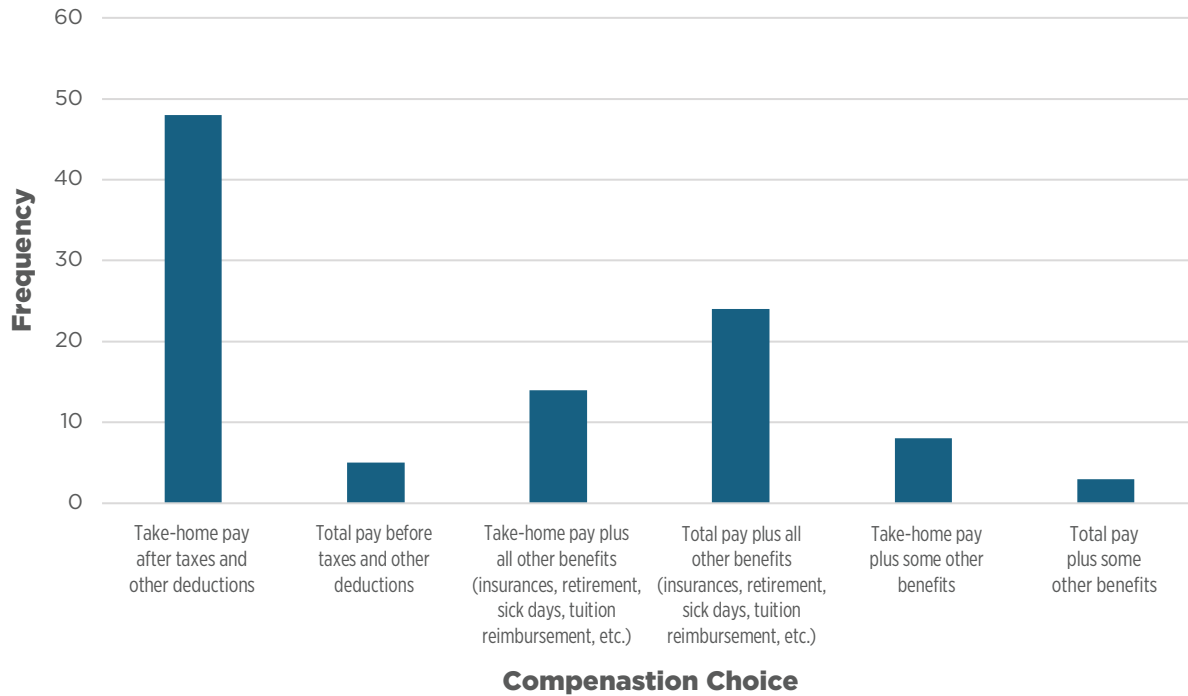


Figure 5b. Teachers or other non-administrator PEL staff's views of their compensation

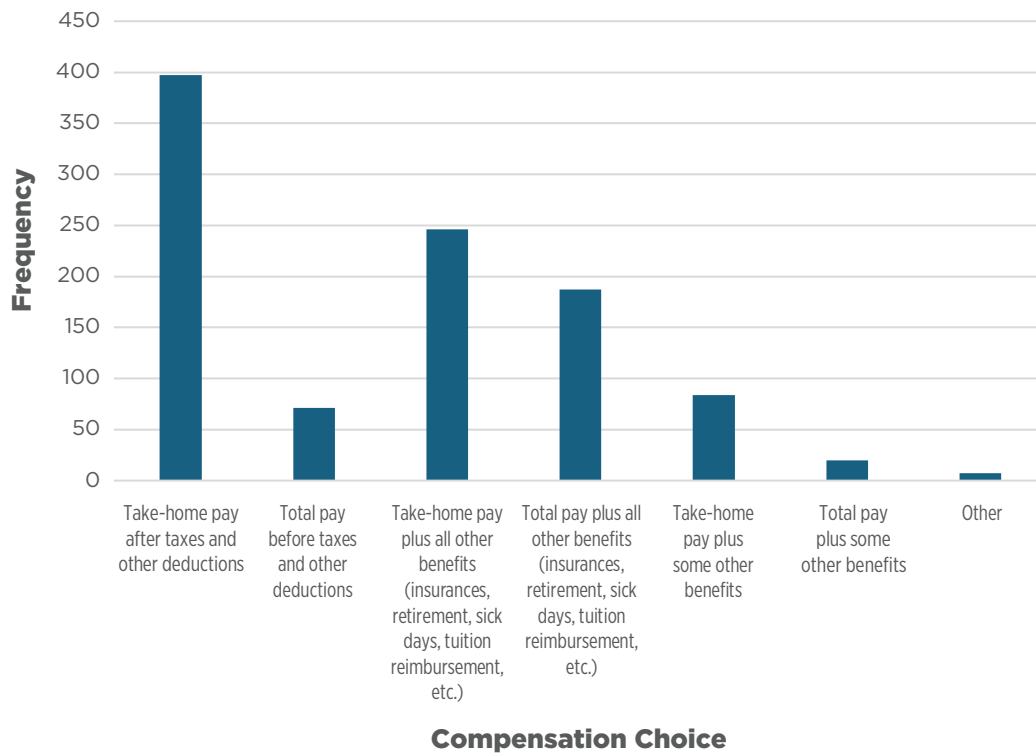
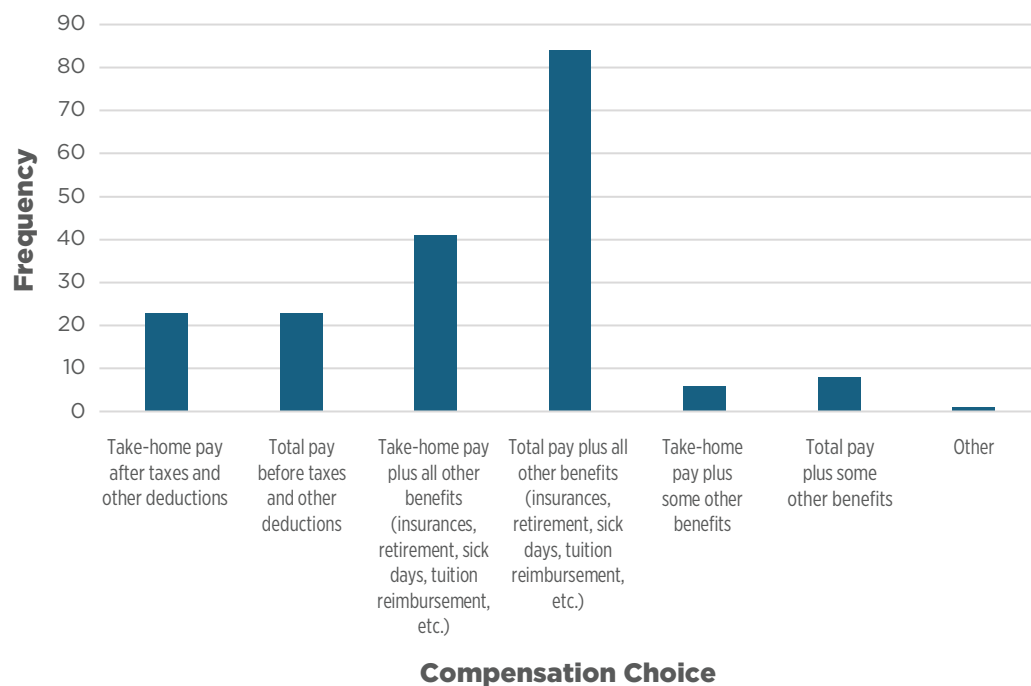


Figure 5c. Administrators' views of their compensation



While the survey (intentionally) did not ask individuals for their current salaries or compensation in any form, generally, non-licensed educators are among the lowest paid individuals in a school district, teachers have the largest range of pay among them, and administrators tend to be among the highest paid individuals in a school district. In short, and as shown in Table 4, a far greater percentage of non-licensed educators and teachers prioritize take-home pay compared to administrators. The differences in Table 4 would benefit from further study.

Table 4. Respondents' prioritization of take-home pay by job category

Job Category	Percent of Respondents Selecting a Take-Home Pay Option
Non-Licensed Educators	68.6
Teachers or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff	71.8
Administrators	37.6

In examining this same question based on how many years of experience respondents had as educators in Illinois, a similar pattern emerged. Knowing that educators tend to be paid more as they work more years, Figures 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, and 6e show a trend that suggests that one's salary, understandably, has an impact on the answer to this question. For educators with fewer years of experience (shown in Figures 6a and 6b), Take-home pay after taxes and other deductions saw a far higher number of responses relative to all the options compared to the figures for respondents with more years of experience. In other words, it appears from both the previous set of figures and from this set of figures that until one's salary is at a certain level, the focus is on how much money is coming home as take-home pay. Note that the number of respondents in each of these groups varied, and as a result, the y-axis in each of these figures also varies as the priority was to show the relative responses on each option within each group rather than the absolute number of responses across all groups.

Figure 6a. Educators' views of their compensation, 1-4 years of experience in Illinois

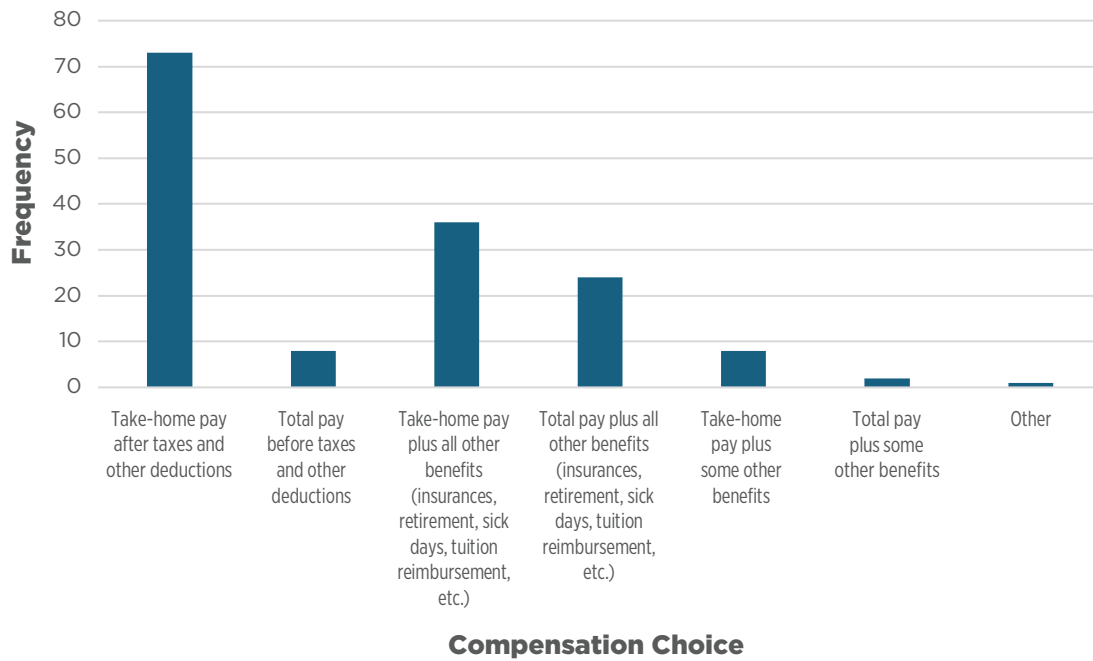


Figure 6b. Educators' views of their compensation, 5-10 years of experience in Illinois

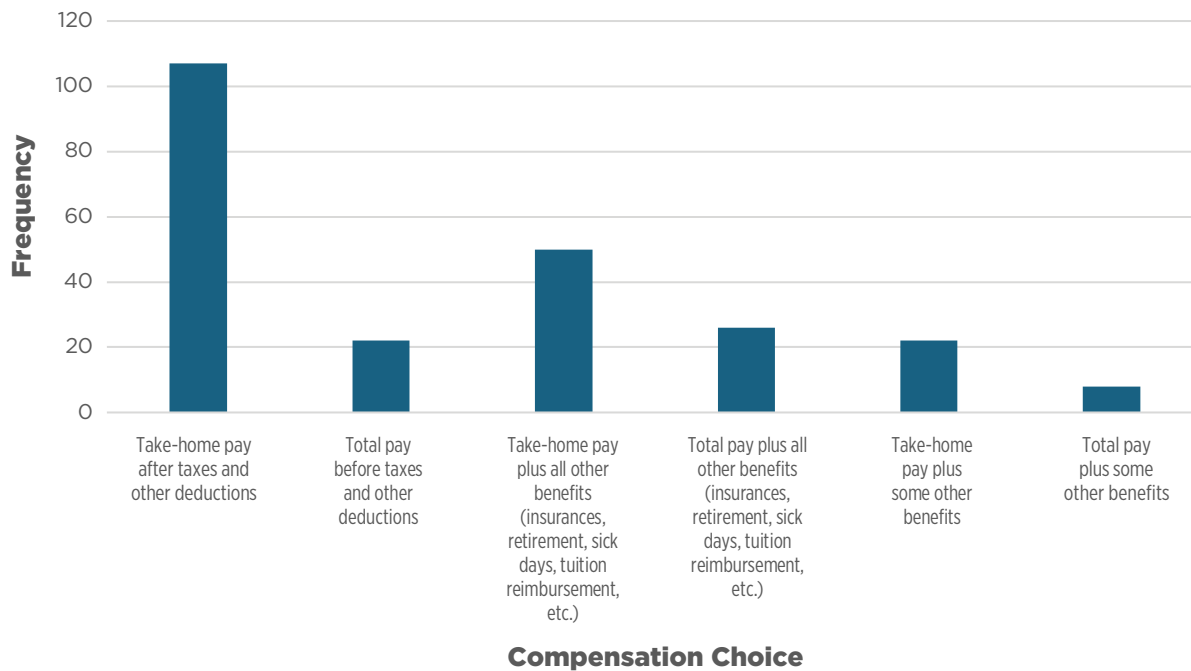


Figure 6c. Educators' views of their compensation, 11-20 years of experience in Illinois

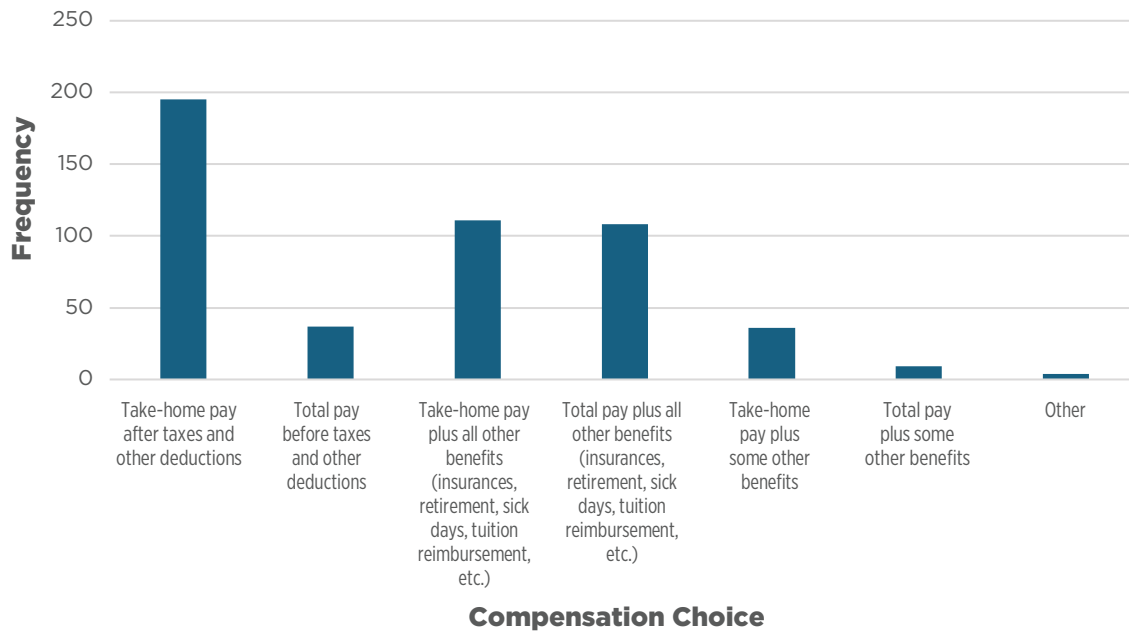


Figure 6d. Educators' views of their compensation, 21-30 years of experience in Illinois

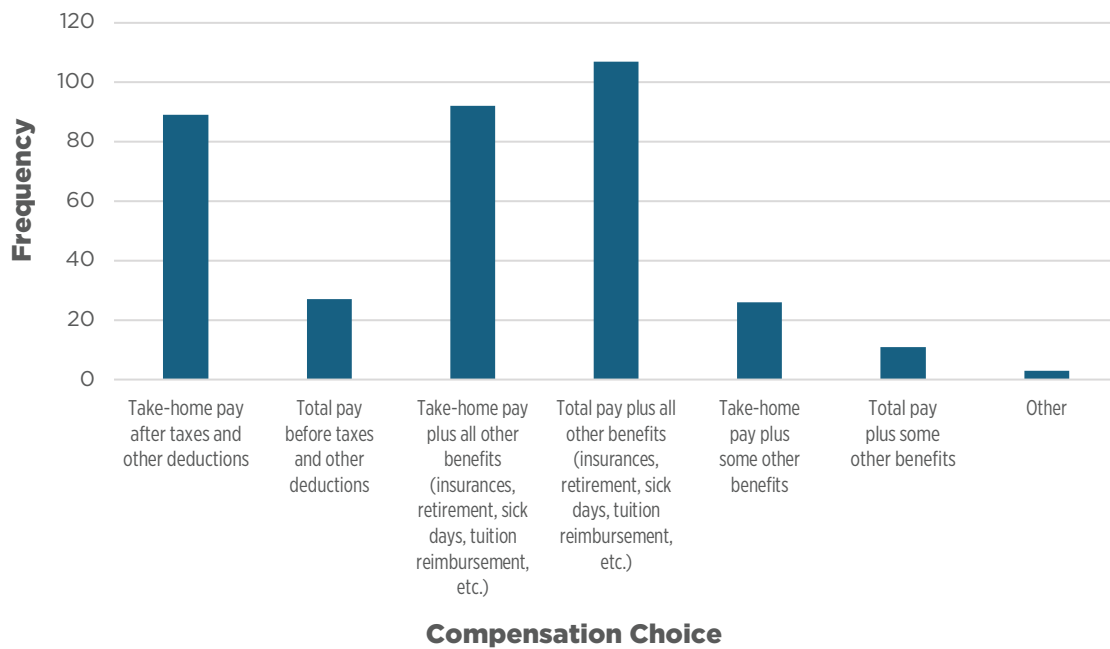
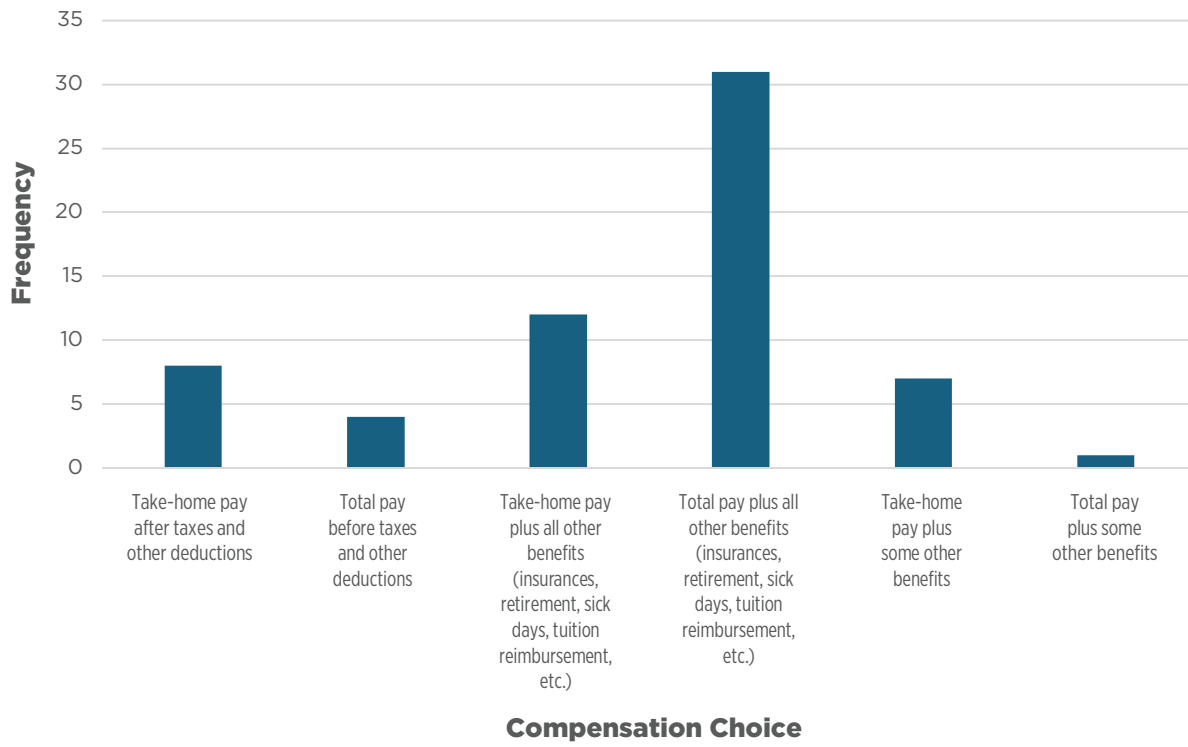


Figure 6e. Educators' views of their compensation, 31+ years of experience in Illinois



As noted earlier, the data suggest that differentiated compensation based on factors such as salary level, experience, role, or employee choice could benefit both educators and the districts that employ them.

This same question was also examined based on highest postsecondary degree earned, which is shown below in Table 5. Respondents with no degree, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree, had similar patterns of responses. In all of these cases, take-home pay after taxes and other deductions continued to be the most identified choice. This follows the pattern previously identified. Those with a master's degree had a slightly more diverse pattern of responses, though it was not dissimilar to the responses from those in the previous categories. Response patterns shifted for those with multiple master's degrees and certificates beyond the master's degree to see higher responses for a range of options, though take-home pay options continued to garner large numbers of responses. Finally, while there were only 66 respondents with doctoral degrees, these results looked the most different from all of the other groups with nearly half of the responses being for the total pay plus all other benefits options and the majority of remaining responses spread evenly among all of the options.

Table 5. Educators' views of their compensation based on postsecondary degree attainment

Postsecondary Degree Attainment	Take-home pay after taxes and other deductions	Total pay before taxes and other deductions	Take-home pay plus all other benefits	Total pay plus all other benefits	Take-home pay plus some other benefits	Total pay plus some other benefits	Other
No degree	12	1	6	7	3	0	0
Associate's	19	2	6	2	2	0	0
Bachelor's	109	13	51	38	27	6	2
Master's	209	52	147	118	46	10	3
Multiple Master's	59	8	37	44	6	5	2
Certificate beyond the Master's	52	12	50	54	14	6	0
Doctorate	11	11	11	29	1	2	1

This analysis is devoid of actual salaries and of the actual costs of necessities like housing, transportation, insurance, food, clothing, and more that educators face as well as any regional differences. What is clear is that for the vast majority of survey respondents, take-home pay is how they defied their compensation, though a deeper inspection revealed that was not true for many clearly defined groups of educators.

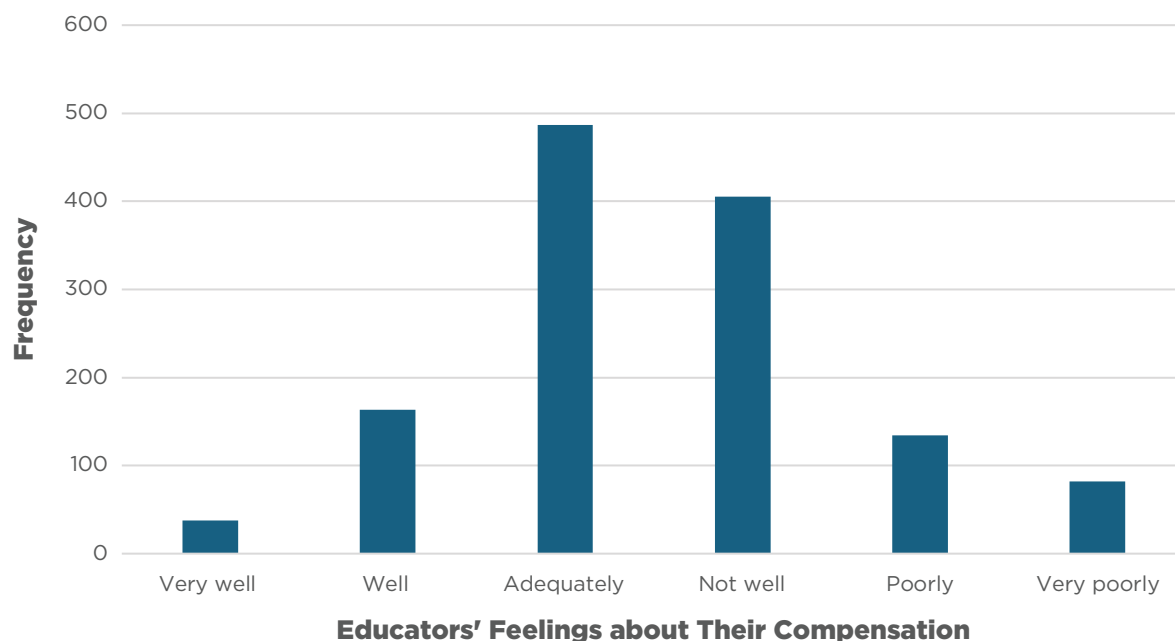
Feelings of Illinois Educators regarding Compensation



The survey asked about how participants defined compensation and how they felt about their compensation. The results regarding participants' feelings about their compensation are presented below. The first of these questions inquired how well-compensated educators felt they were, using a six-point Likert scale (*Very well, well, adequately, not well, poorly, very poorly*).

All responses to how educators feel they are compensated for their work are included in Figure 7. The responses overwhelmingly fall into the middle two categories of this six-point scale with 37.1% of respondents stating that they feel that their pay is *adequate* while 30.9% of respondents feel that they are *not well* compensated for their work. Overall, 47.4% of respondents feel that they are compensated *not well, poorly, or very poorly*, and 52.5% of respondents feel that they are compensated *Adequately, well, or very well*. On the extremes, more respondents feel that they are compensated *poorly* (10.2%) or *very poorly* (6.3%) than feel that they are compensated *well* (12.5%) or *very well* (2.9%).

Figure 7. All respondents' feelings about their compensation as an educator



Responses were also disaggregated by educator type. In the first analysis, responses were organized according to job category: Non-Licensed, Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff, and Administrator. Figures 7a, 7b, and 7c display the responses of these groups to the question of how well compensated they feel that they are.

Figure 7a. Non-licensed educators' feelings about their compensation

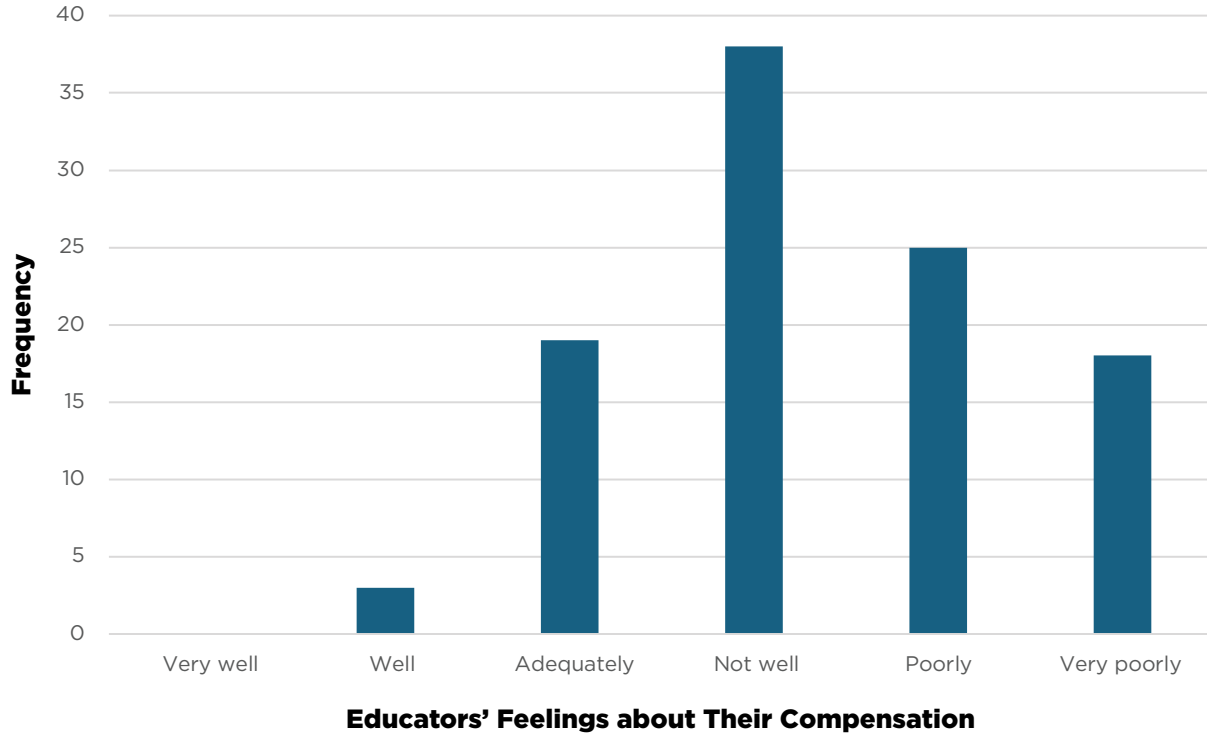


Figure 7b. Teachers or other non-administrator PEL staff's feelings about their compensation

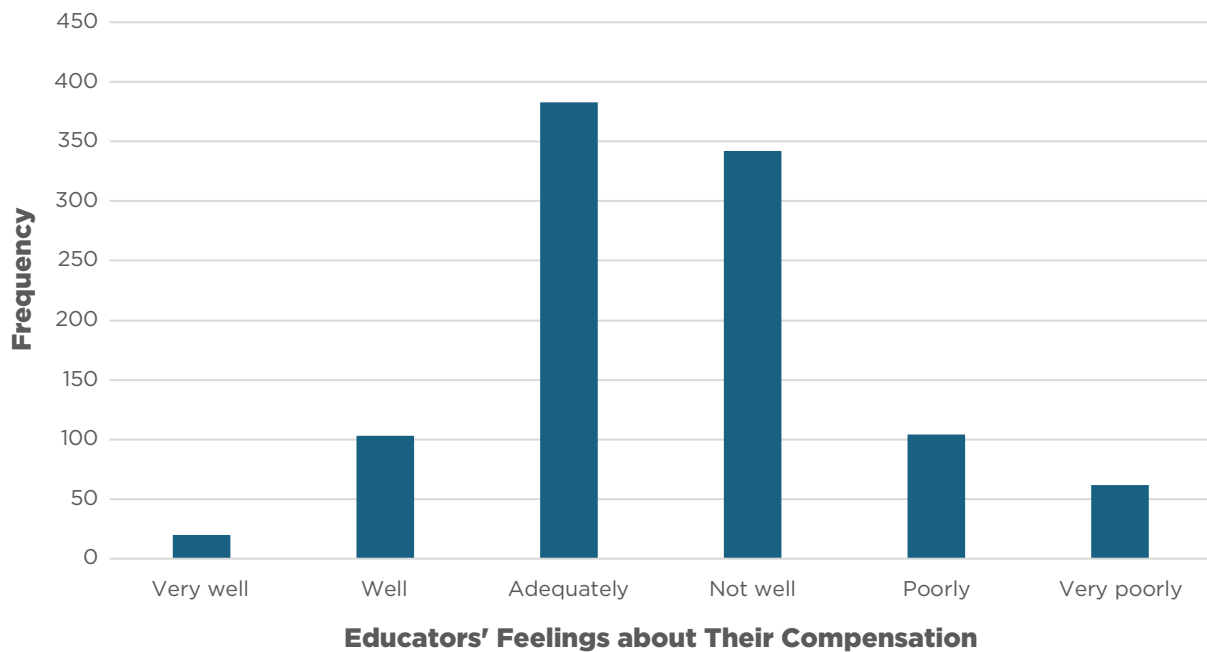
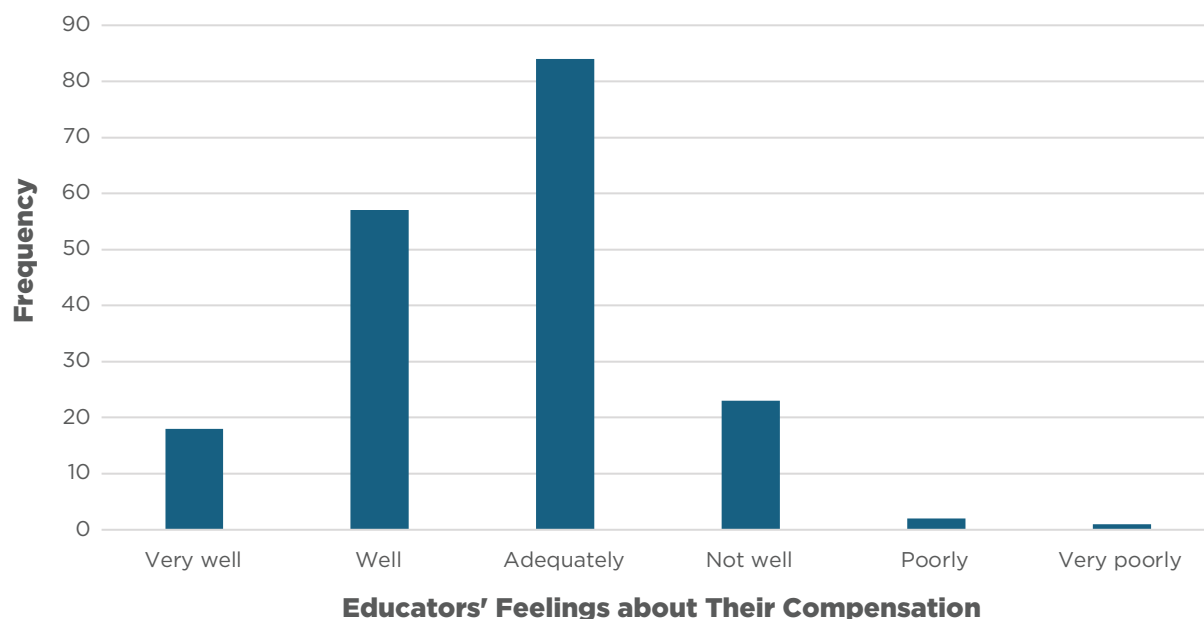


Figure 7c. Administrators’ feelings about their compensation



There are noticeable differences amongst groups. For example, a far greater percentage of administrators feel that they are *adequately*, *well*, or *very well* compensated compared to either of the other groups. On the extremes, very few (3) administrators feel that they are *poorly* (2) or *very poorly* (1) compensated, and similarly, very few (3) non-licensed educators feel that they are *well* (3) or *very well* (0) compensated.

Table 6. Educators’ feelings about their compensation by job category

Educator Category	N	Median
Non-Licensed	103	2
Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff	1014	2
Administrator	185	3
All Respondents	1302	3

This analysis continues with a similar process in order to understand how educators’ feelings about their compensation may vary based on their years of experience. Figure 8 displays the results of how educators feel about their compensation based on their years of experience. Similar patterns to those evident earlier in this report appeared in Figure 8 with educators with less experience (1-4 years or 5-10 years) being more likely to feel that they are compensated not well, poorly, or very poorly and less likely to feel that they are compensated adequately or better. For example, no respondents in the 1-4 years of experience category selected very well to describe how well they feel they are compensated. Overall, the pattern of responses is generally similar across all groups, with the group of 31+ years of experience skewing toward feeling they are well compensated and the 1-4 and 5-10 years of experience groups skewing toward feeling they are not well compensated.

Figure 8. Educators’ feelings about their compensation based on their years of experience in Illinois

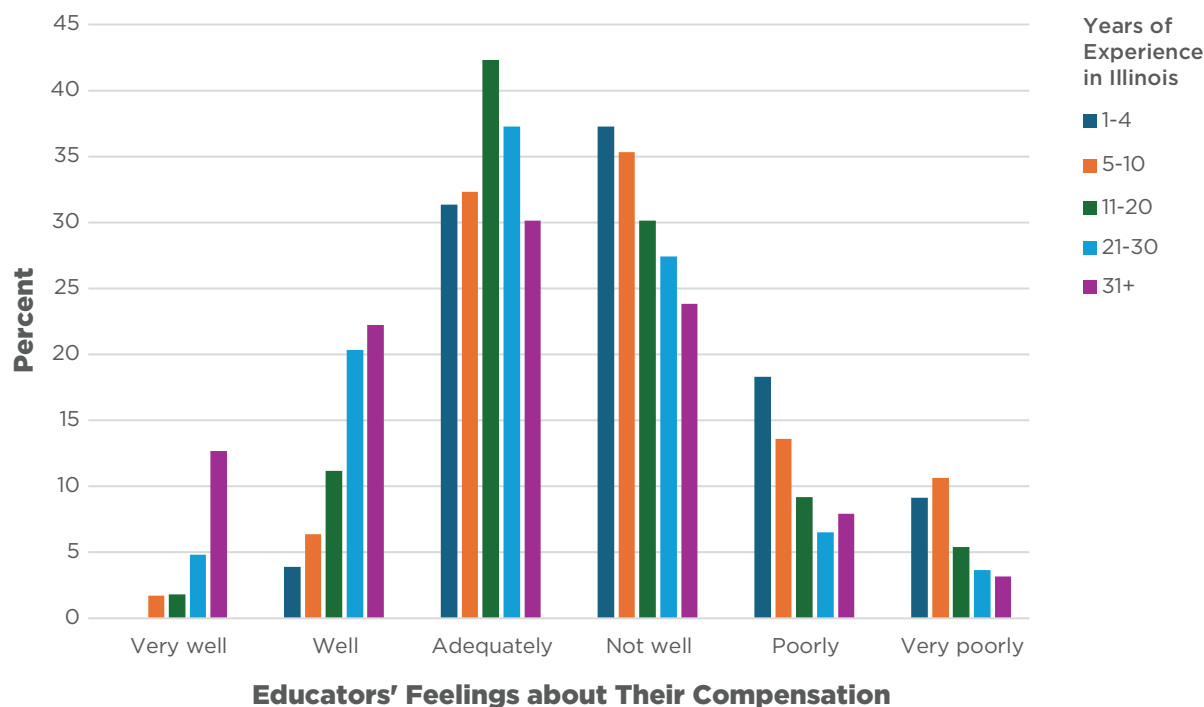


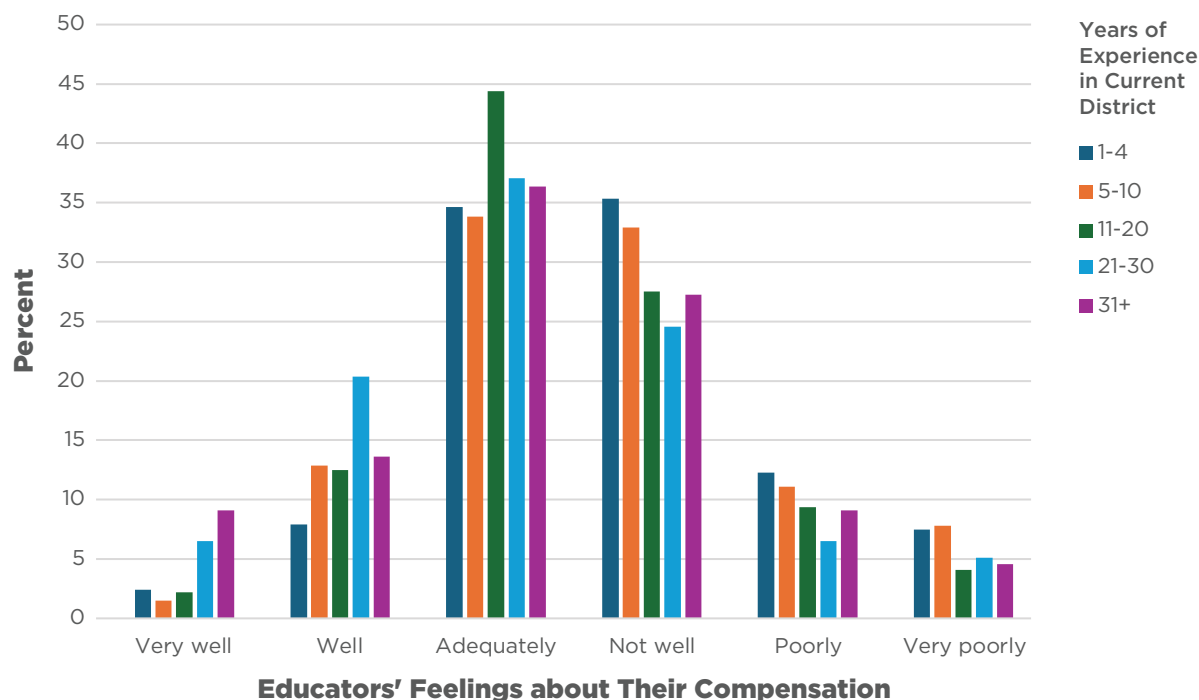
Table 7. Educators’ feelings about their compensation by years of experience in Illinois

Years of Experience in Illinois	N	Median
1-4	153	2
5-10	235	2
11-20	501	3
21-30	354	3
31+	63	3
All Respondents	1306	3

These results raise questions about the need for a more nuanced approach to compensating educators to meet their needs at different points throughout their careers.

This survey also asked about years of experience in the respondents’ current school districts. Educator pay is often tied directly to how long one has worked in their current district with rewards being offered for longevity in the district. While districts often provide some compensation for previous work in a public school (e.g., up to 5 years of experience credited on the salary schedule), there are typically limits to how much experience one can bring with them — particularly for those educators working under a collective bargaining agreement. The pattern revealed in Figure 9 appears very similar to that in Figure 8 with generally similar patterns of responses across all groups, and with those educators with fewer years of experience more frequently feeling less well compensated while those educators with the most years of experience feel more well compensated.

Figure 9. Educators’ feelings about their compensation based on their years of experience in their current school district



As is demonstrated in Table 8, there is one noticeable difference between the respondents’ years of experience in Illinois and their years of experience in their current school districts. The respondents to this survey are far less experienced in their current school district than they are overall in their careers in Illinois. Table 8 shows that 416 respondents are in their first 4 years in their current school district, and in Table 7 only 153 respondents were in their first 4 years as educators in Illinois. Only 22 respondents reported that they had served 31 or more years in their current school district. In short, at least among the over 1,300 respondents to this survey, educators are moving within Illinois to new districts during their careers.

Table 8. Educators’ feelings about their compensation by years of experience in their current school district

Years of Experience in Illinois	N	Median
1-4	416	2
5-10	334	2
11-20	320	3
21-30	216	3
31+	22	3
All Respondents	1308	3

Questions 3, 4, and 5 on the survey were designed to be analyzed in conjunction with one another. These questions asked participants to rate the most important, second most important, and third most important areas of compensation that they would like to see be improved in the context of the reality that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding support. The answers options for each of these questions were identical, and those answer options were:

- Additional salary as take-home pay
- Additional total salary
- Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested
- More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently
- Additional retirement savings options
- Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

Table 9 shows the results for these three questions for all respondents. In the fifth and final column of Table 9, the results for all three questions are totaled. Overall, additional salary as take-home pay was most frequently identified as the aspect of compensation that would be the highest priority of educators who completed the survey for improvement. When looking at just the answers for what the most important aspect was, it was also take-home pay, with 694 of the 1,311 responses (52.9%) identifying it as the top priority. The next most identified responses, additional total salary (162 responses, 12.4%) and faster path to retirement (151 responses, 11.5%) each had less than one-fourth of the responses that take-home pay saw. Overall, there were two aspects of compensation that were identified in nearly the same amount for improvement: faster path to retirement (531 responses, 13.5%) and lower cost health insurance benefits (520 responses, 13.3%). Additional total salary was the fourth most identified aspect of compensation for improvement overall with 426 responses, which is 10.9% of all responses.

Table 9. Most important aspects of compensation for improvement

Aspects of Compensation for Improvement	Most Important	Second Most Important	Third Most Important	Important Aspect Totals
Additional salary as take-home pay	694	201	103	998
Additional total salary	162	153	111	426
Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities	27	98	120	245
Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)	38	106	82	226
Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	117	246	157	520
Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)	13	37	71	121
Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	7	22	55	84
Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested	151	183	197	531
More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently	37	101	145	283
Additional retirement savings options	16	34	66	116
Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)	22	60	102	184
Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)	27	68	96	191

While increasing take-home pay is undoubtedly important to educators, as respondents continued to identify their second and third most important priorities, the diversity of responses across all choices increased significantly. For the second most important aspect of compensation to improve, there were 246 respondents (18.8%) who identified lower cost health insurance with the same quality of benefits, though an additional 201 respondents (15.4%) marked that additional salary as take-home pay was their second most important priority for improved compensation. Answers become even more diverse and even in the number of responses received as one examines the column containing the third most important priorities for improving compensation. The highest response total for the third most important aspect of compensation for improvement was faster path to retirement with 197 responses, 15.1%. From there, lower cost health insurance with the same quality of benefits was the second most frequently identified selection with 157 responses, 12.0%, and the third most frequently identified selection was more robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement with 145 responses, 11.1%. In considering the overall responses across all 12 aspects of compensation, Table 10 lists those in rank order along with the total number of responses for each aspect, which matches that information presented above in Table 9.

Table 10. Rank order of aspects of compensation by total number of responses

Ranking Order	Aspect of Compensation	Total Number of Responses
1	Additional salary as take-home pay	998
2	Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested	531
3	Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	520
4	Additional total salary	426
5	More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently	283
6	Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities	245
7	Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)	226
8	Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)	191
9	Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)	184
10	Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)	121
11	Additional retirement savings options	116
12	Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	84

Based on results identified earlier in this report related to differences in responses between educators in different job categories (Non-Licensed, Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff, and Administrator). Table 11 displays the results of the most important aspect of compensation by job category. Across each of the three job categories, additional salary as take-home pay is the aspect of compensation that is most desired for improvement. While only 36% of administrators marked that answer as their most important aspect of compensation for improvement, that is twice as many responses as marked either of the next aspects of compensation, additional total salary (16.1%) or faster path to retirement (15.1%). The other two job categories identified additional salary as take-home pay in far greater numbers with 55.1% of teachers and other non-administrator staff members working under their Professional Educator Licenses (PELs) identifying this aspect and with 61.2% of non-licensed staff identifying additional salary as take-home pay.

Table 11. Most important aspect of compensation by job category

Aspects of Compensation for Improvement	Non-Licensed	Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff	Administrator
Additional salary as take-home pay	63	559	67
Additional total salary	19	113	30
Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities	5	19	3
Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)	0	31	7
Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	5	93	19
Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)	2	8	2
Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	0	4	3
Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested	4	119	28
More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently	2	21	14
Additional retirement savings options	2	9	5
Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)	0	17	4
Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)	1	22	4

The largest category of respondents is the Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff, and diving into those responses to also consider them based on years of experience in Illinois may yield additional important information. Table 12 displays responses to the question of what is the most important aspect of compensation just for the job category Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff.

Table 12. Most important aspect of compensation for Teachers or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff by Years of Experience in Illinois

Aspects of Compensation for Improvement	1-4	5-10	11-20	21-30	31+
Additional salary as take-home pay	55	114	249	120	19
Additional total salary	16	21	35	35	6
Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities	2	2	10	4	1
Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)	4	6	10	11	0
Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	8	15	21	38	11
Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)	0	0	3	4	1
Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)	0	0	2	2	0
Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested	15	28	40	34	2
More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently	2	2	7	10	0
Additional retirement savings options	1	1	3	3	1
Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)	2	3	9	3	0
Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)	3	4	8	5	2

When examining this data, additional salary as take-home pay continues to be the most frequent response with rates as follows:

- Teachers and Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff — 1-4 years of experience in Illinois: 50.9%
- Teachers and Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff — 5-10 years of experience in Illinois: 58.2%
- Teachers and Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff — 11-20 years of experience in Illinois: 62.7%
- Teachers and Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff — 21-30 years of experience in Illinois: 44.6%
- Teachers and Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff — 31 or more (31+) years of experience in Illinois: 44.2%

Here there are, once again, differences seen in years of experience that have also been evident elsewhere in this analysis, notably that more educators with more than 20 years of experience (in comparison to their colleagues with less than 20 years of experience) look at more aspects of compensation as being of value. At the same time, additional salary as take-home pay remains the largest aspect of compensation that is consistently identified by educators regardless of their years of experience.

In short, based on these and the previous questions, the continued story of this survey is that:

- Additional take-home pay is the most important aspect of compensation for improvement.
- Additional take-home pay is particularly important for those who are making less money (e.g., non-licensed staff, earlier in one's career).

Practical Measures of Compensation



In this report's previous section, there was a consistent focus on educators' feelings about their own compensation. In this section, while this is also heavily based on educators' feelings about their compensation, the questions here seek to understand both educators' varying financial contexts as well as some initial indicators of the actual impact of their compensation.

To begin this analysis, the understanding of who is carrying student loan debt into their career as a fixed expense provides a key context for considering the remaining questions, and their answers, throughout this section. Overall, 34.7% of all respondents (454 respondents) do currently have student loans. It is noteworthy that over half of educators have current student loans through their first ten years of their careers, and even in the group of educators with 21-30 years of experience in Illinois, nearly one-fifth of respondents have current student loans. Having current student loans means that these educators have monthly payments, which lowers the amount of their take-home pay that is available for spending on other expenses. Future research should examine the amount of student loan debt that educators have, and the direct impact of student loans on educators' overall personal finances is another important area of future research.

Table 13. Educators with current student loans based on their years of experience in Illinois

	1-4 years	5-10 years	11-20 years	21-30 years	31+ years
N	153	236	500	355	63
% of Educators with Current Student Loans	54.9	50.4	34.9	19.2	12.7

Table 14 provides a similar display but demonstrates who has current student loans based on their current job category. What is most noticeable here is how similar the job categories are for their percentage of individuals who currently have student loans. With a difference of only approximately 10% between categories, across Illinois, administrators, teachers and other non-administrative PEL staff, and non-licensed staff carry current student loans in remarkably similar percentages.

Table 14. Educators with current student loans based on their job category

	Non-Licensed	Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff	Administrator
N	103	1,014	186
% of Educators with Current Student Loans	26.2	36.6	28.8

Particularly given the degree to which educators in each of the above job categories have current student loans, it is also important to understand the connection between educators who currently have student loans and their postsecondary degrees earned. Table 15 displays this data. This data provides significant context to and support for the data above displaying students based on job category. In each category requiring degrees from universities (Bachelor's and graduate degrees), over one-third of respondents have current student loans. Given the necessity for nearly all educators with PELs to have a four-year degree and for all administrators to have a graduate degree, student loans continue to impact a large portion of educators.

Table 15. Educators with current student loans based on their highest postsecondary degree

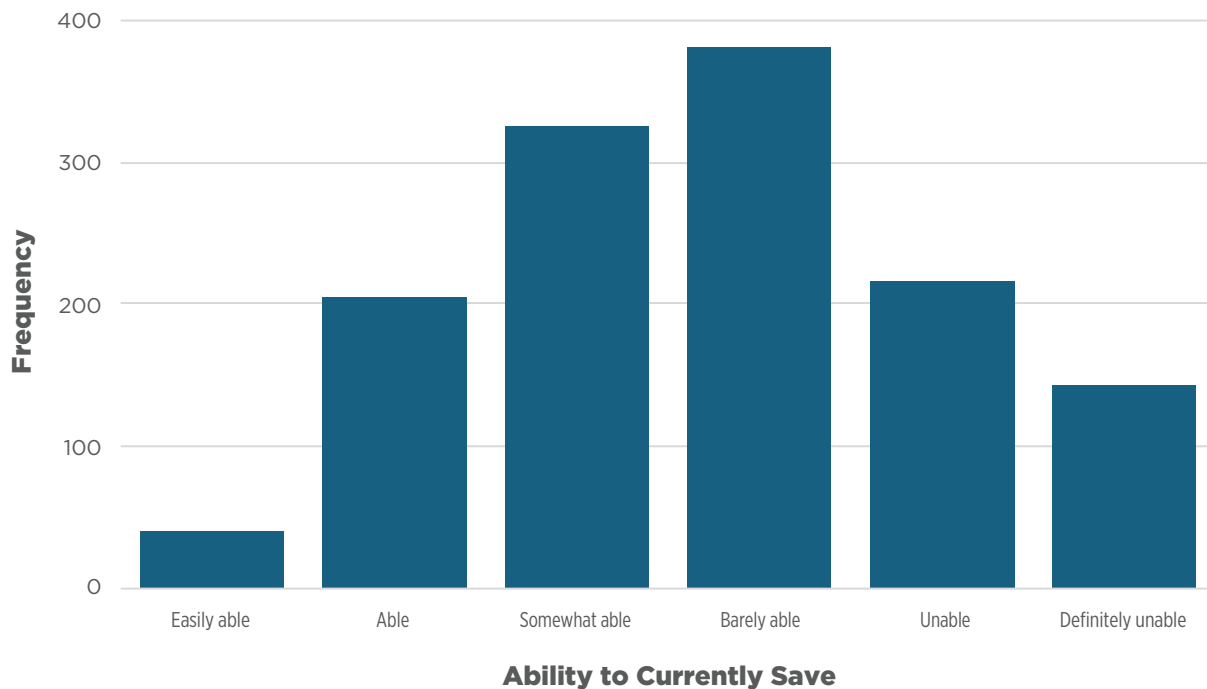
	No Degree	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Multiple Master's Degrees or Beyond*
N	29	32	247	586	415
% of Educators with Current Student Loans	17.2	25.0	37.7	33.6	36.4

*Multiple Master's Degrees or Beyond includes the following survey answers: Multiple Master's Degrees, Advanced Certificate beyond the Master's Degree, or Doctoral Degree

Student loans can be widely acknowledged to be a brake on one’s ability to save given that a portion of your take-home pay is allocated each month to pay outstanding debt, and this effectively decreases one’s real take-home pay. Saving is also important in one’s ability to make large-scale purchases, such as a home or a car, to address unexpected expenses in everything from housing costs to health care, and to be able to pay for large-scale discretionary purchases, such as a multi-week intercontinental vacation or that new bicycle for racing triathlons along with thousands of dollars of aerodynamic clothing and equipment. When examining one’s ability to save, it is important to acknowledge that such a question oversimplifies the complex life and economic decisions that individuals make. Two people with much seemingly in common, including the same salary, same amount of student loans, same family size and structure, may have very different approaches to spending and saving. Additionally, they may or may not even be consciously aware of those realities as they answer a simple question regarding their ability to save. Even prior to examining this data, it is important to acknowledge that this is another area in which additional research is both warranted and welcomed.

Figure 10 displays the responses of all survey respondents in response to the degree to which they are able to save. Only 3.1% of respondents stated that they were easily able to save. In contrast, over three times as many respondents (10.9%) stated that they were definitely unable to save. The answers do skew toward the barely able/unable to save end of the continuum with 56.5% of respondents reporting that they are barely able, unable, or definitely unable to save.

Figure 10. Ability to save, all respondents



Knowing the patterns that have been shown in this study based on respondents' years of experience in Illinois, Figure 11 displays the responses to the question of how easily one is able to save based on these years of experience of working as an educator in Illinois. While there are similarities in the patterns across all areas, there is a noticeable shift in respondents stating that they are more able to save as they have been in their careers longer. Along these same lines, educators in their first ten years of experience state that they are definitely unable or unable to save in far higher percentages within their experience groups. All of these patterns of responses are consistent with the patterns seen earlier in the report with regards to educators' feelings about their compensation overall and how it connects to their years of experience as an educator in Illinois.

Figure 11. Ability to save based on years of experience in Illinois

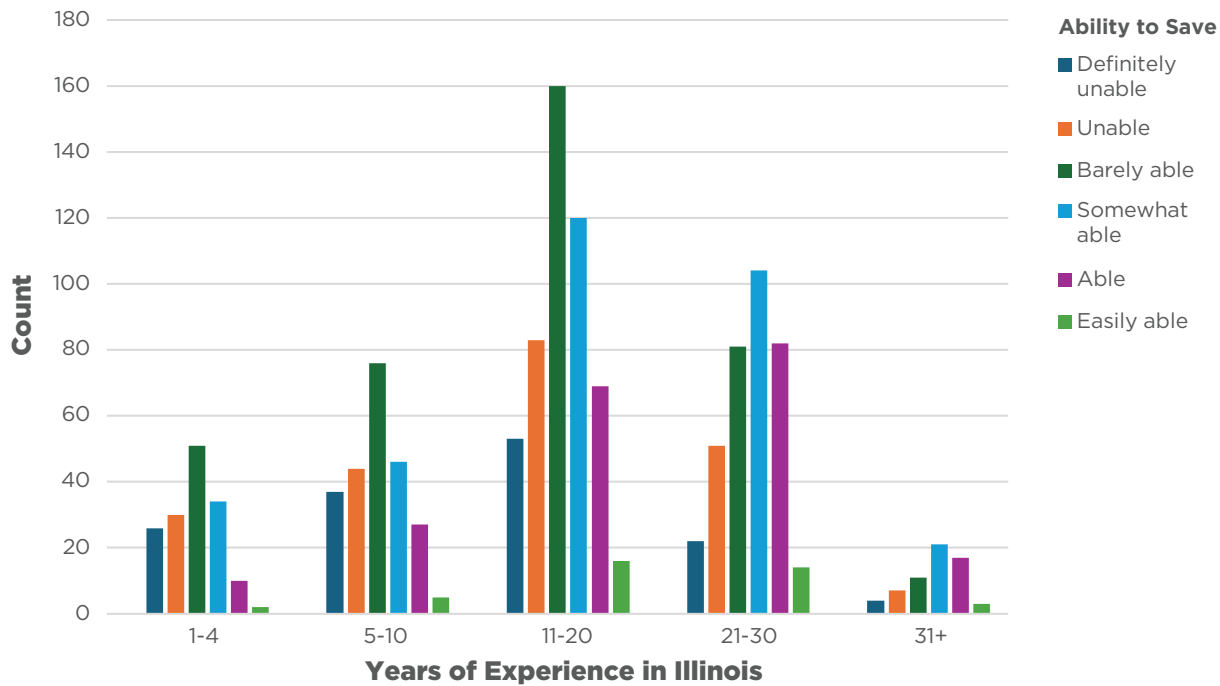
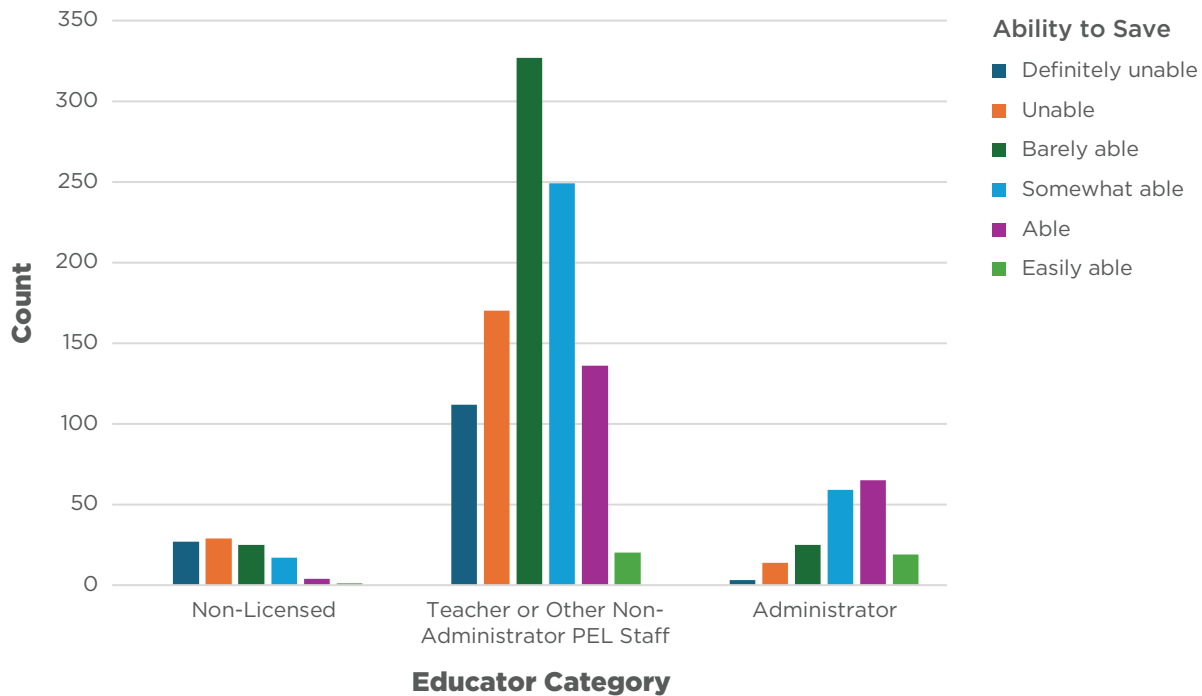


Figure 12 displays responses to educators' answers regarding their ability to save based on one's job category. Unsurprisingly, non-licensed staff, with their typically relatively low salaries, are generally not able to save. 78.6% of non-licensed staff state that they are definitely unable, unable, or barely able to save. While 16.5% of non-licensed staff state that they are somewhat able to save, less than 5% are able or easily able to save. (Of the 103 respondents who are non-licensed staff, only 1 non-licensed staff respondent stated that they are easily able to save.) Alternatively, administrators, with their significantly higher levels of pay, demonstrated more ability to save. 31.7% of administrators reported being somewhat able to save, and 34.9% of administrators reported being easily able to save. At the same time, over one-fifth of administrators reported being barely able, unable, or definitely unable to save (22.7%), though only 1.6% of administrators stated that they were definitely unable to save. With the majority of respondents (1,014) being teachers or other non-administrator PEL staff, their diverse responses mirrored the overall responses displayed above in Figure 10.

Figure 12. Ability to save based on job category



As mentioned earlier, part of the equation of being able to save is clearly how much money one makes and part of this equation is how one spends the money that they do make. This survey did not dive into how educators spend their money, so there is no way of knowing what their lifestyles are really like. When asked if they can afford the lifestyle that they want to live based solely on their school district salary and benefits, the respondents’ answers skewed heavily toward not being able to do so easily. 11.0% reported that they were easily or very easily able to afford their desired lifestyle. 46.5% reported that they can afford their desired lifestyle with careful planning. On the other hand, 42.6% reported that they are either unable to afford their desired lifestyle (21.2%) or are only able to do so with great difficulty (21.4%).

Figure 13. Ability to afford one’s desired lifestyle, all respondents

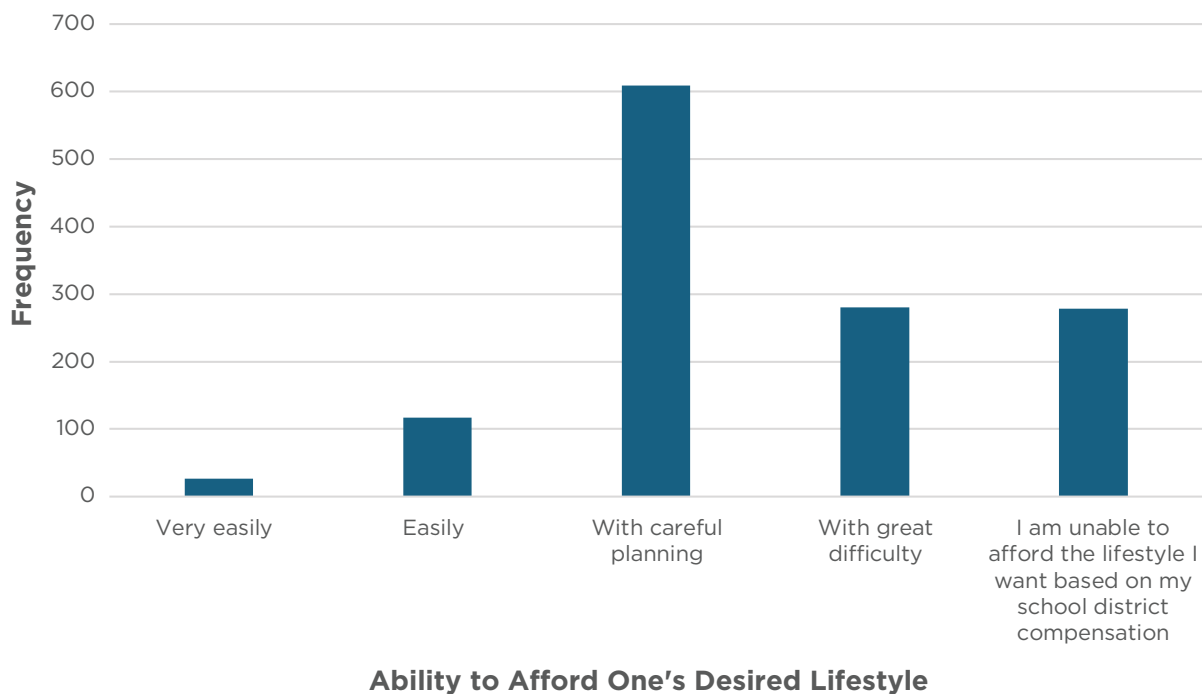


Table 16 shows that the pattern that has been consistent throughout this study continues with this question between different job categories. Between the three categories of job types, there is almost a complete reversal in the experiences of individuals in different roles in school districts in Illinois in their ability to afford their desired lifestyles.

Table 16. Ability to afford one’s desired lifestyle based on job categories

	% Very Easily Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Easily Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Careful Planning to Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Great Difficulty to Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Unable to Afford Desired Lifestyle
Non-Licensed	0.0	1.9	25.2	27.2	45.6
Teacher or Other Non-Administrator PEL Staff	1.0	6.2	47.1	23.4	22.3
Administrator	9.1	28.0	55.9	5.9	1.1

Considering the impact of highest postsecondary degree earned, Table 17 demonstrates a similar pattern. Across all of these views into this data revealing respondents’ feelings about their ability to afford their desired lifestyles, very few educators feel that they are easily able to afford such a lifestyle.

Table 17. Ability to afford one’s desired lifestyle based on highest postsecondary degree

	% Very Easily Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Easily Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Careful Planning to Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Great Difficulty to Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Unable to Afford Desired Lifestyle
No degree	0.0	0.0	27.6	20.7	51.7
Associate’s Degree	0.0	3.1	12.5	28.1	56.3
Bachelor’s Degree	0.8	4.9	38.1	23.9	32.4
Master’s Degree	1.5	8.9	49.2	21.0	19.4
Multiple Master’s Degrees, Advanced Certificate, or Doctoral Degree	1.5	12.5	47.5	20.0	12.1

Table 18 displays the pattern based on years of experience working in Illinois as an educator, and the pattern is consistent with other analyses, both the question of one’s ability to afford one’s desired lifestyle and other data throughout this study.

Table 18. Ability to afford one’s desired lifestyle based on years of experience in Illinois

	% Very Easily Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Easily Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Careful Planning to Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Great Difficulty to Afford Desired Lifestyle	% Unable to Afford Desired Lifestyle
1-4 years	0.7	3.3	39.2	26.8	30.1
5-10 years	0.0	8.5	41.9	20.3	29.2
11-20 years	2.2	8.2	45.5	23.2	21.0
21-30 years	3.1	11.3	52.4	18.6	14.6
31+ years	6.3	17.5	57.1	12.7	6.3

In each case, it is noticeable that, while the percentage increases with more well-paid jobs (due to increased years of experience, increased postsecondary degree attainment, or a move into an administrative position), in all cases there are relatively few educators who feel that they can easily or very easily afford their desired lifestyle. While this data may not be different than other professions, which is beyond the scope of this study, it may also feel like it is different than other professions to educators. This question, and its potential impact on long-term professional engagement and retention, is worthy of additional study.

Additionally, this survey cannot answer what the definitions of such a lifestyle are for educators and whether or not it would be considered viable by the taxpaying public, this data does potentially demonstrate one of the key connections between compensation and retention. That most educators will never feel that it is easy or very easy to afford their desired lifestyle may be a factor that impacts educator retention.

One way that educators can get closer to being able to afford their desired lifestyle and/or improve their savings is to increase their income. In many districts, this can be done as an educator through earning extra-duty stipends by supervising, sponsoring a co-curricular activity, coaching a sport, or directing a show in many districts, and this is an area that has been studied and is worthy of continued study to examine statewide patterns across school districts as well as their impact on educators’ actual take-home pay as well as on educators’ feelings about their compensation as well as in connection to educator retention and student outcomes. Another way that educators may, and often have, closed these savings and lifestyle affordability gaps is by taking on additional work through jobs outside of education either during the summer or even during the school year. While it cannot be known if there is a relationship between those who work additional jobs beyond their role as an educator and those who chose to respond to the survey, nearly half of the educators who responded to the survey, 47.1% stated that they do work another job during the summer. Additionally, nearly one-third of educators who responded to the survey, 30.9%, are working another job during the school year. This survey did not explore what those jobs are, the skills involved in those other jobs, and/or how much money people are being compensated in those roles, and these are all important topics for additional research. It is also important to understand through additional research if educators feel like these additional jobs are additive, subtractive, or have no impact on their work as educators as well as how that may differ between summer additional employment and during the school year additional employment.

Based on the patterns throughout this report thus far, one might expect to see greater percentages of outside employment among those who are in roles where they are likely to be earning less: among newer educators, among non-licensed educators or teachers or other non-administrator PEL staff, and among those with lower levels of postsecondary degree attainment. Table 19 displays the percentage of respondents with outside employment based on years of experience in Illinois. Table 20 displays the percentage of respondents with outside employment based on their job category. Table 21 displays the percentage of respondents with outside employment based on their level of postsecondary degree attainment.

Table 19. Percent of educators engaged in additional employment beyond their school district based on years of experience in Illinois

	% Other Summer Employment	% Other School Year Employment
1-4 years	55.6	33.3
5-10 years	54.7	32.2
11-20 years	47.3	33.1
21-30 years	40.3	27.6
31+ years	33.3	19.0

Table 20. Percent of educators engaged in additional employment beyond their school district based job category

	% Other Summer Employment	% Other School Year Employment
Non-Licensed	57.3	35.0
Teachers or Other Non-Administrator PEL staff	51.8	33.0
Administrator	15.1	17.2

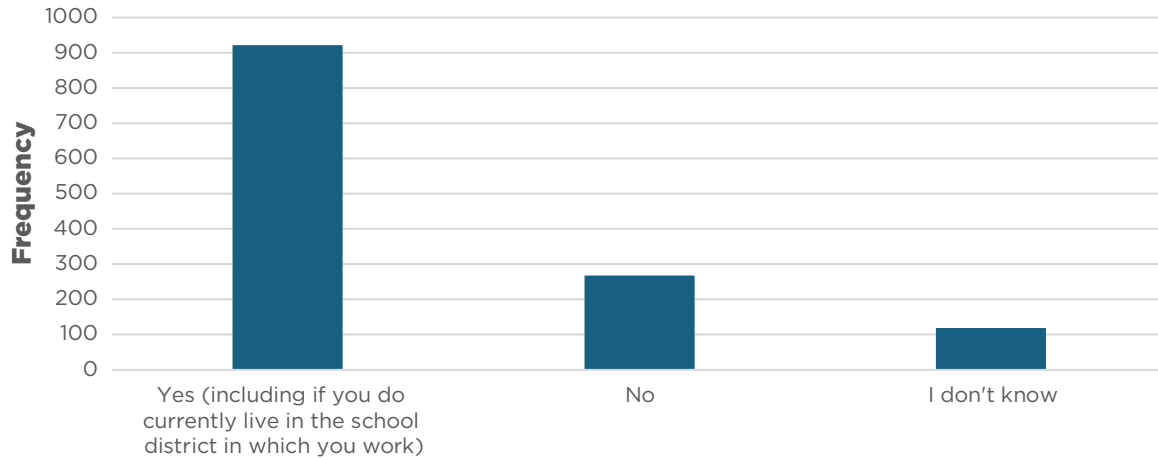
Table 21. Percent of educators engaged in additional employment beyond their school district based on postsecondary degree attainment

	% Other Summer Employment	% Other School Year Employment
No Degree	58.6	55.2
Associate's Degree	62.5	34.4
Bachelor's Degree	56.3	28.7
Master's Degree	45.8	29.1
Multiple Master's Degrees, Advanced Certificate, or Doctoral Degree	41.5	33.3

The patterns in Tables 19, 20, and 21 mirror the patterns throughout the report. As one might expect, percentages of summer employment are higher than percentages of school year employment, and this would be expected given the large number of these educators who are not contracted to work during the summer allowing them more time to work another job. Interestingly, the only exception to this is the 17.2% of administrators who stated that they are working during the school year versus the 15.1% of administrators who are working during the summer. In either case, the percentage of administrators who are working another job in addition to their role as an educator is a perfect example of where it would be helpful to understand what those other jobs are and how much they are making. For example, are these administrators serving as consultants for other school districts and/or working for administrative search firms, are they officiating youth sports, are they running a camp or after-school program, or are they doing something entirely unrelated like working in a retail setting, in a restaurant, or doing bookkeeping for a local company? The critical takeaway is the large numbers of educators who are working other jobs in addition to their roles as educators. While this has traditionally been common for teachers, it remains not uncommon today as this survey demonstrates. The impact of this outside work on people's incomes and on their work as educators is critical to understand and should be the subject of far more additional research, both quantitative and qualitative, across Illinois.

With a large number of educators working jobs in addition to their roles as educators and with many struggling to save or to be able to afford the lifestyle that they would like, the consideration of home ownership, often an adult or family's single greatest expense, is also important to understand. While there are a wide range of reasons that individuals choose where they want to live and there are many educators who would prefer not to live in the school district in which they work, having the ability to afford to live in the school district in which one works can be viewed as a sign of economic empowerment. As a result, the survey question was worded as, "If I wanted to, I could afford to live in the school district in which I work." The survey was also designed with the understanding that the educators completing it may not be aware of the current pricing of different types of homes in the school district in which they work, so an "I don't know" option was also included. Figure 14 shows the responses for all survey respondents. It should be noted that this question did not go so far as to ask whether respondents could purchase a home nor did this question differentiate between types of homes (e.g., apartments, condominiums, townhomes, detached single family homes, etc.). Only 9.1% of respondents answered, "I don't know," and 70.3% answered that they could afford to live in their school district of employment. Over one-fifth of respondents (20.4%) state that they are unable to afford to live in their school district.

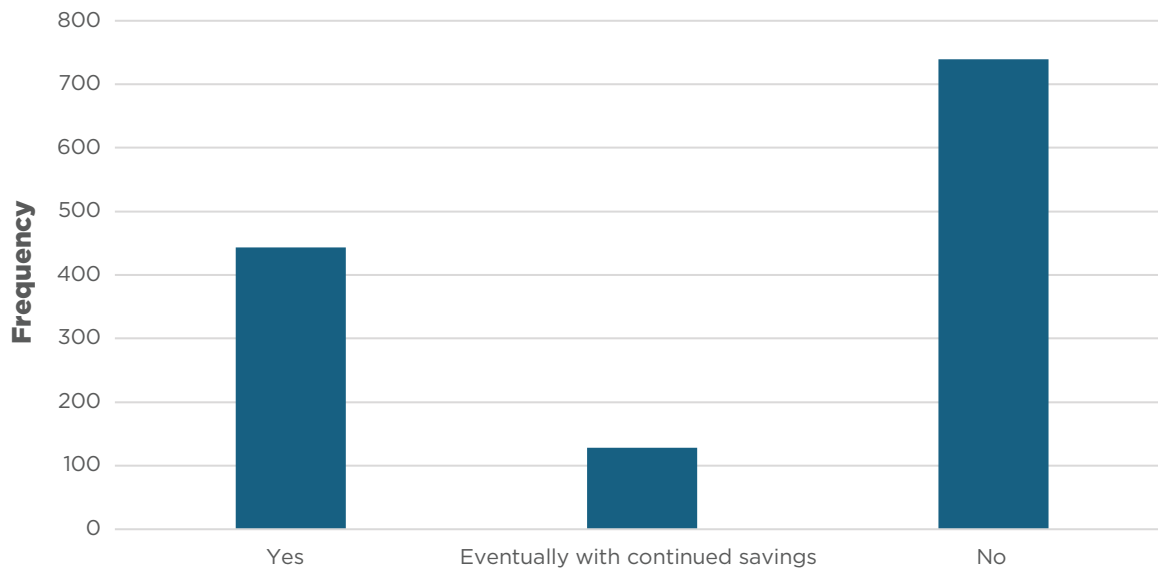
Figure 14. Could afford to live in employer school district, all respondents



If I wanted to, I could afford to live in the school district in which I work.

Moving on to the question of homeownership, respondents were asked if they currently own their home (or would be able to do so if they so chose). This question emphasized that the question of home ownership affordability was “based solely on my salary with the school district,” which, given the number of educators working second jobs, proved to be an important clause. Figure 15 displays the answers to this question from all respondents, and based on this response, home ownership, regardless of location in comparison to their school district, seems to be out of reach for many educators. 56.4% responded that they are not able to own their own home. 9.8% stated that, with continued savings, they would eventually be able to own their own home. Only just over one-third of respondents (33.8%) stated that they do or could own their own home. Home ownership has long been considered a core component of a middle class lifestyle in the United States of America, and based on this data, as well as the current housing market, it would appear that across Illinois access to home ownership is not available to a majority of educators.

Figure 15. Ability to own home on a school district salary, all respondents



I do (or am able to) own my home based solely on my salary with the school district.

Again, based on the consistent patterns throughout this report, one might expect to see greater percentages of being able to live in one’s school district of employment and in home ownership among those who are in roles where they are likely to be earning more: among more veteran educators, among administrators, and among those with higher levels of postsecondary degree attainment. Table 22 displays the percent of respondents who could afford to live in their employer school districts and who own their own home (or can own their home) based on years of experience in Illinois. Table 23 displays the percent of respondents who could afford to live in their employer school districts and who own their own home (or can own their home) based on their job category. Table 24 displays the percent of respondents who could afford to live in their employer school districts and who own their own home (or can own their home) based on their level of postsecondary degree attainment.

Table 22. Percent of educators who do or can live in district and who own or can own their home based on years of experience in Illinois

	Do or Can Live in District	Own (or Can Own) Home
1-4 years	62.1	13.7
5-10 years	65.3	22.0
11-20 years	70.3	32.5
21-30 years	75.5	48.2
31+ years	81.0	55.6

Table 23. Percent of educators who do or can live in district and who own or can own their home based job category

	Do or Can Live in District	Own (or Can Own) Home
Non-Licensed	55.3	6.8
Teachers or Other Non-Administrator PEL staff	70.1	29.0
Administrator	80.1	74.7

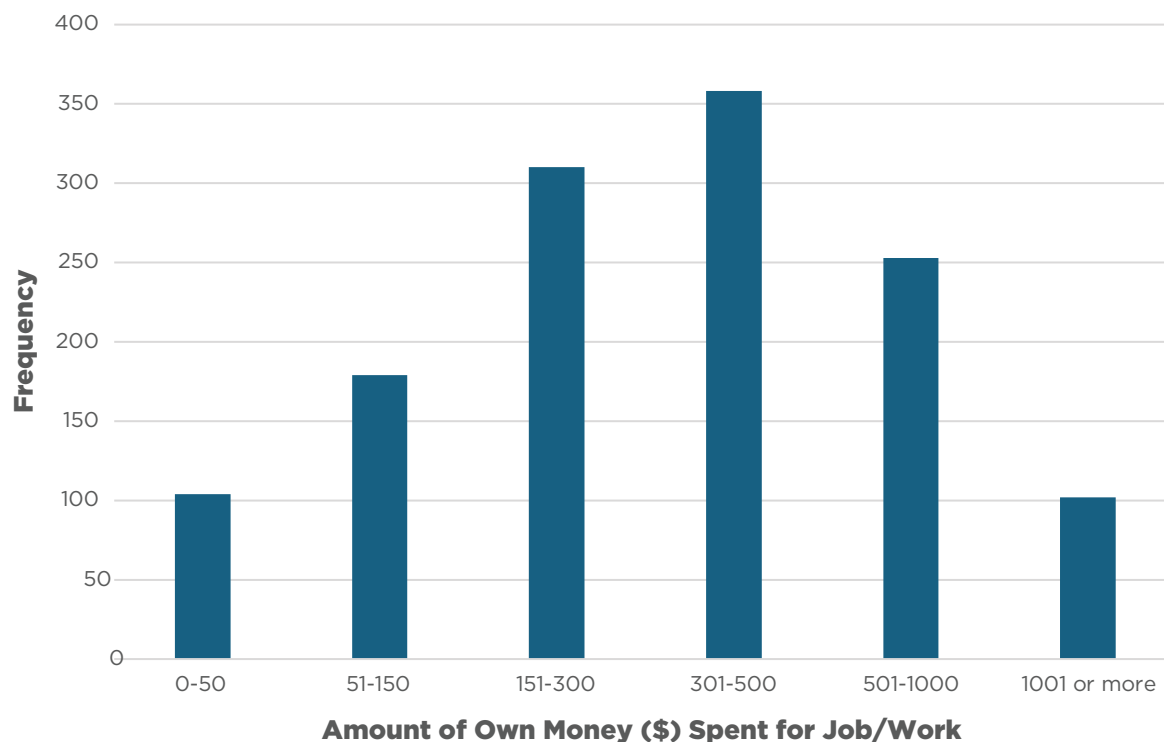
Table 24. Percent of educators who do or can live in district and who own or can own their home based on postsecondary degree attainment

	Do or Can Live in District	Own (or Can Own) Home
No Degree	55.2	13.8
Associate’s Degree	46.9	9.4
Bachelor’s Degree	65.2	16.6
Master’s Degree	71.6	33.7
Multiple Master’s Degrees, Advanced Certificate, or Doctoral Degree	74.5	47.5

While the differences between groups (e.g., new educators versus veteran educators, paraprofessionals versus administrators, or those with no degree versus those with doctoral degrees) are not surprising, Tables 22, 23, and 24 continue to demonstrate just how many educators do not own their own homes. For example, it is both sad and unsurprising that only 6.8% of respondents who work in non-licensed roles stated that they own their homes or can own a home. What is surprising is that over 25% of administrators do not or cannot own a home. Additionally, when only 29% of teachers and other non-administrator PEL staff own a home and only one-third (33.7%) of those with Master’s Degrees own a home, the financial viability of being an educator in Illinois and having a solidly middle class lifestyle is called into question.

On top of what has just been detailed regarding educators' homes and home ownership, education is a field that has routinely relied on its professionals to give of their time beyond the workday and week (e.g., grading, planning, attending student co-curricular events) and even spending one's own money to offset items that are not, or cannot, be accounted for in school and district budgets and purchases. On this survey, educators were asked how much money they spent for their job each year on items such as: school or office supplies, learning/teaching materials, food or clothes for students, etc. Figure 16 displays these results. 27.2% of respondents spend \$500 or more annually, and only 7.9% spend \$50 or less per year.

Figure 16. Amount of personal money spent by educators for work each year, all respondents



Once again, based on the patterns that have been apparent throughout this report, the percentage of educators that stated their different per year personal spending on work-related expenses, such as supplies, learning/teaching materials, or student necessities, are displayed in the following tables. Table 25 provides the data for per year personal spending on work based on years of experience. Table 26 provides the data for per year personal spending on work based on educator job category. Table 27 provides the data for per year personal spending on work based on highest postsecondary degree earned.

Table 25. Per year personal spending (\$) for work — Percent of educators based on years of experience in Illinois

	0-50	51-150	151-300	301-500	501-1000	1001+
1-4 years	13.7	17.0	26.1	19.0	13.1	11.1
5-10 years	9.7	11.0	21.6	29.2	24.6	3.8
11-20 years	6.2	15.2	25.1	27.1	19.0	6.8
21-30 years	6.5	12.7	22.8	30.2	18.1	9.6
31+ years	9.5	9.5	19.0	25.4	25.4	11.1

Table 26. Per year personal spending (\$) for work — Percent of educators based job category

	0-50	51-150	151-300	301-500	501-1000	1001+
Non-Licensed	28.2	25.2	22.3	12.6	5.8	2.9
Teachers or Other Non-Administrator PEL staff	3.8	13.1	24.7	29.6	21.6	7.0
Administrator	18.3	10.2	18.8	23.7	14.0	15.1

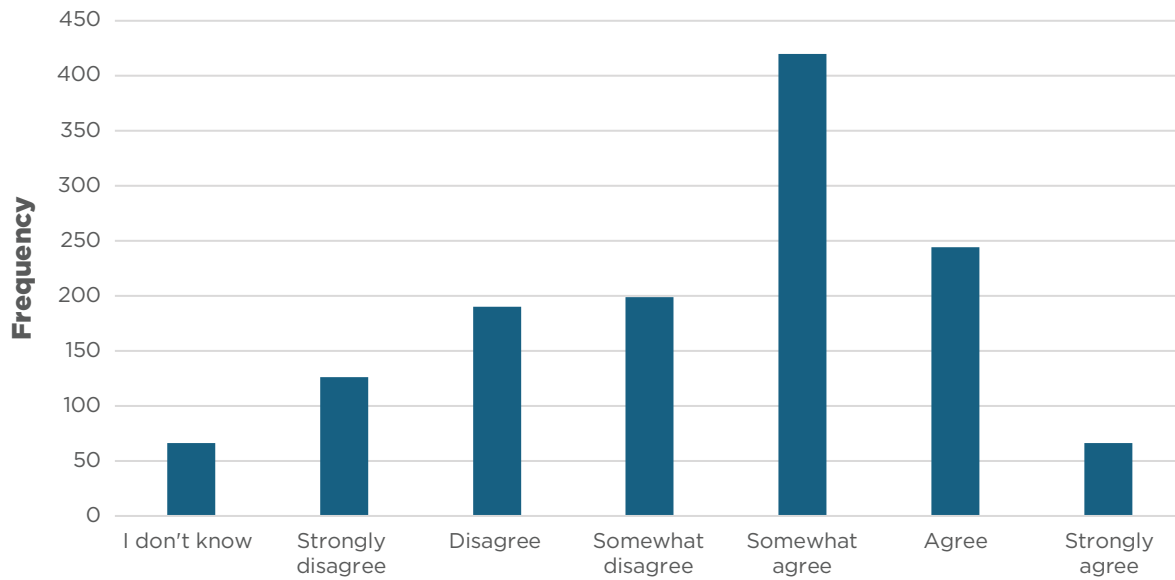
Table 27. Per year personal spending (\$) for work — Percent of educators based on postsecondary degree attainment

	0-50	51-150	151-300	301-500	501-1000	1001+
No Degree	34.5	13.8	31.0	6.9	10.3	3.4
Associate’s Degree	28.1	21.9	18.8	15.6	3.1	6.3
Bachelor’s Degree	6.5	18.2	20.6	29.1	18.2	6.5
Master’s Degree	6.8	13.1	26.7	26.1	20.6	6.5
Multiple Master’s Degrees, Advanced Certificate, or Doctoral Degree	7.0	11.1	21.0	30.4	19.8	10.9

In the case of the dataset for this question of how much personal money educators spend on work expenses each year, the patterns that have existed throughout this study are not as apparent. There is some consistency with this pattern. For example, in the upper-left cell of each of these three tables, there is a fairly high percentage respective to that table of respondents who spent \$0 to \$50 per year. These first rows in this table (No Degree, Associate’s Degree) also represent people who tend to be among the lowest paid. Likewise, the bottom row of Tables 25 and 27 does skew further to the right, or the spending more personal money, than do other rows. This is not as pronounced in Table 26, which sees administrators’ personal spending more evenly spread out across all categories. While purely speculative without further research, administrators often have an understanding of and access to the school or district budget and may understand what funds are available to be spent from existing school district funds, rather than spending their own personal money. Educators like teachers and paraprofessionals typically would not have this understanding unless the principal or school district was educating them as to these available sources of funding and how to access it on behalf of their classrooms and/or students. The questions raised from this data are worthy of further study.

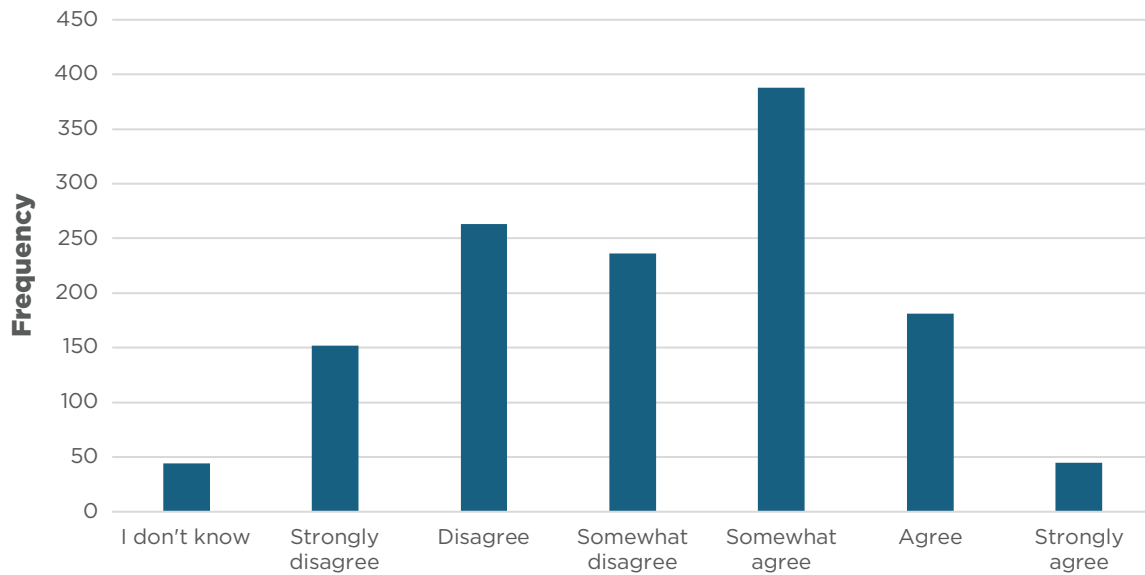
A series of questions were also asked on the survey regarding the degree to which respondents felt that early career educators are fairly compensated, mid-career educators are fairly compensated, and late career educators are fairly compensated. (The ranges for these categories of educators were not specified or defined further in the question, allowing each respondent to think about what that might mean to them as they answered the question.) The figures below display the answers to each of these questions for all respondents. The patterns among all of these figures are fairly similar, though the percentage of respondents who strongly disagree does increase as the survey moves from newer, early career educators to late career educators, which also necessarily shifts the responses across the answer options.

Figure 17. Fairness of compensation — early career educators, all respondents



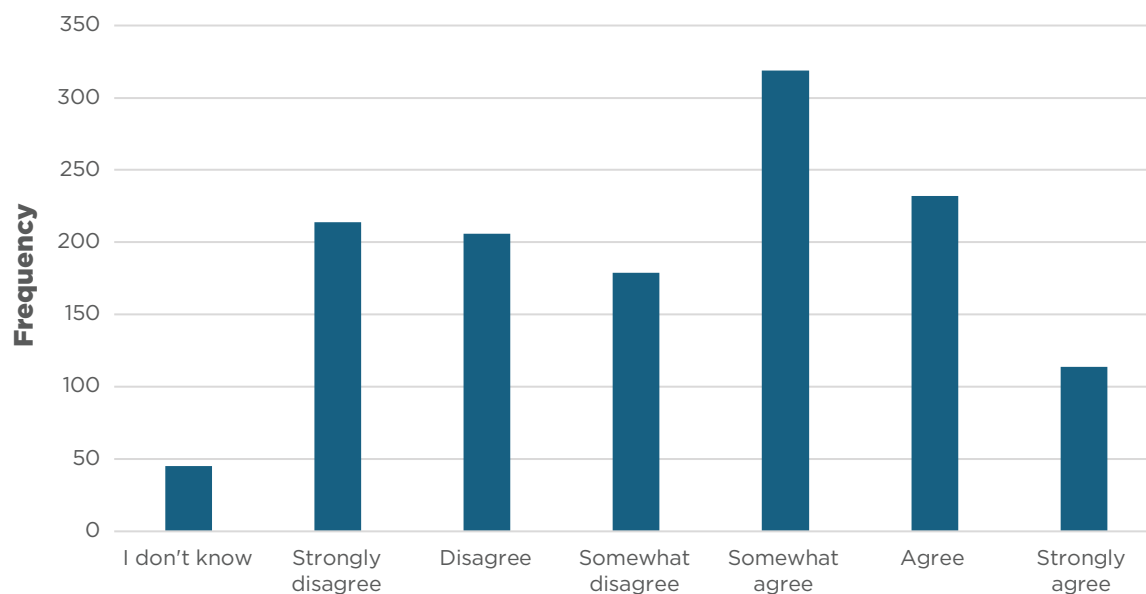
I think that our school district provides fair compensation to newer educators.

Figure 18. Fairness of compensation — mid-career educators, all respondents



I think that our school district provides fair compensation to mid-career educators.

Figure 19. Fairness of compensation — late career educators, all respondents



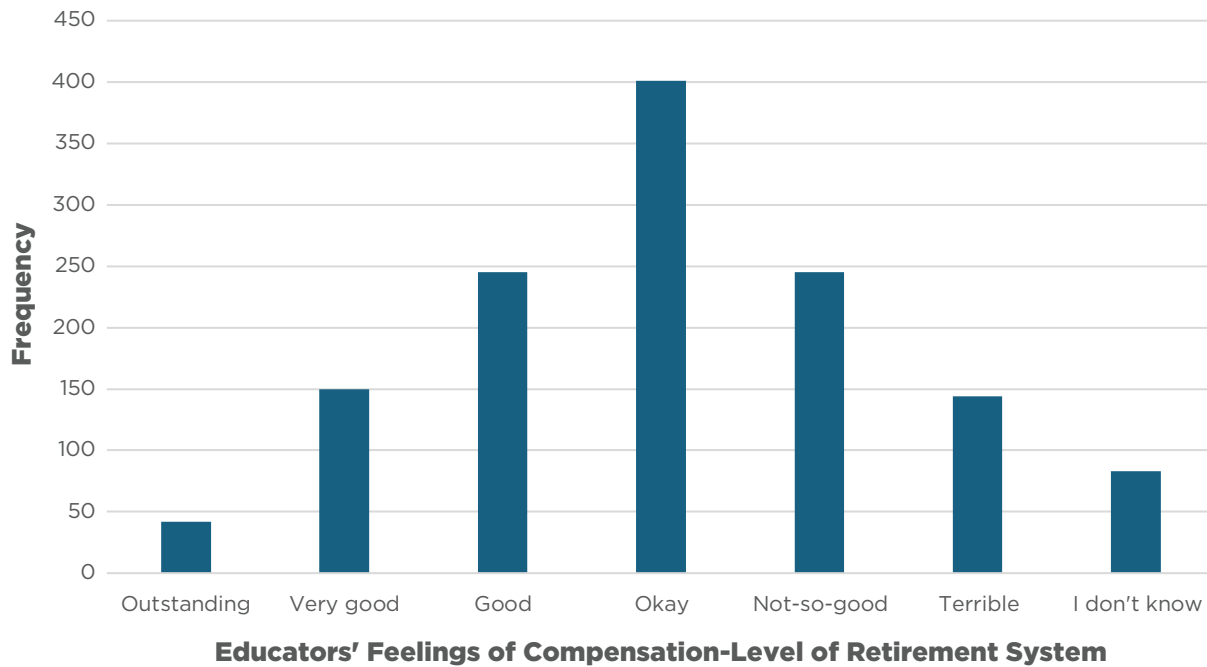
I think that our school district provides fair compensation to very experienced educators.

These questions were included on the survey because frequently during collective bargaining negotiations, the union bargaining team will propose, or often be asked to propose, a salary schedule. While the total amount of money for paying all members of the collective bargaining unit would be fixed at a certain agreed to amount, how that money would be divided up based on years of experience and degrees/credit hours earned would be a critical part of the negotiation process. These questions sought to gain some understanding of the perceived fairness of different educators' compensation and how those perceptions may vary as these funds (e.g., educator pay raises) are divided across different cells in a traditional salary schedule. Given that these funds are not always divided equally across all cells in the salary schedule, there is the potential for such tension.

The final area for data analysis are questions related to retirement. On January 1, 2011, Illinois launched a mandated two-tier system for retirement. Tier I, which applies to those who had already been working, sees their benefits maintained for retirement as guaranteed at the start of their career. Tier II, which applies to those who began working after January 1, 2011, sees a different set of benefits, including a later first possible retirement date if one wishes to retire with full benefits. Since the launch of the new two tier retirement system, the Tier II benefits, and particularly its timeline, have been the source of concern and complaint for many educators. While this survey did not ask respondents for their status as a Tier I or Tier II employee, with the goals of protecting the anonymity of respondents and increasing the likelihood of a higher response rate to the survey, additional research in which that variable is considered is exceedingly important, particularly in order to inform state policy decisions.

Educators were asked about both the quality of compensation with retirement as well as the time-to-retirement. With regards to the quality of compensation in retirement, educators were asked to respond according to a six-point Likert Scale with there also being a seventh option, "I don't know." Figure 20 displays the responses to this question. If one removes the "I don't know" responses initially, the graph presents a fairly normal distribution, skewed toward the not-so-good/terrible. It is important to note that 6.3% of respondents did answer, "I don't know." While Figure 20 accurately displays the feelings of the educators across Illinois who completed this survey, the survey did not test respondents on their actual knowledge of the compensation-level in retirement in Illinois. Additionally, based on job category, while the vast majority of respondents are members of the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS), there are also participants in this survey who are members of the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF), and the survey did not ask participants to identify the retirement system to which they were referring here.

Figure 20. Educators’ feelings about the compensation-level in retirement, all respondents



In examining time-to-retirement, the survey asked two questions, one focused on Tier I and the other focused on Tier II. Figure 21 displays the responses for educators’ feelings regarding time-to-retirement for Tier I educators. Figure 22 displays the responses for educators’ feelings regarding time-to-retirement for Tier II educators. While the initial intent in designing the survey had been to analyze these questions with the same type of disaggregation and analysis that has been done throughout this report, the results in Figures 20 and 21 speak for themselves. While there are a mix of feelings about the time-to-retirement for Tier I educators, the results are, overall, okay to positive with 23.8% of respondents stating that the time-to-retirement for Tier I is okay, and a majority (52.3%) of respondents stating that time-to-retirement for Tier I is good, very good, or outstanding. Overall, over three-fourths of respondents feel that the time-to-retirement for Tier I is okay or better. On the contrary, as can be seen in Figure 22, 57.9% of respondents stated that the time-to-retirement for Tier II is terrible. With another 21.7% stating that the time-to-retirement for Tier II is not-so-good, 79.6% of respondents state that the time-to-retirement for Tier II is either not-so-good or terrible. This is higher than the 76.1% of respondents that stated that time-to-retirement for Tier I is okay or better. While the feelings about time-to-retirement for Tier I educators are generally positive, the feelings about time-to-retirement for Tier II educators are overwhelmingly negative. Whether or not this has an impact on teacher retention should be a top priority for additional research, and this is the subject of major upcoming work for the Illinois P-20 Network and KEEP Illinois.

Figure 21. Educators' feelings about time-to-retirement for Tier I educators, all responses

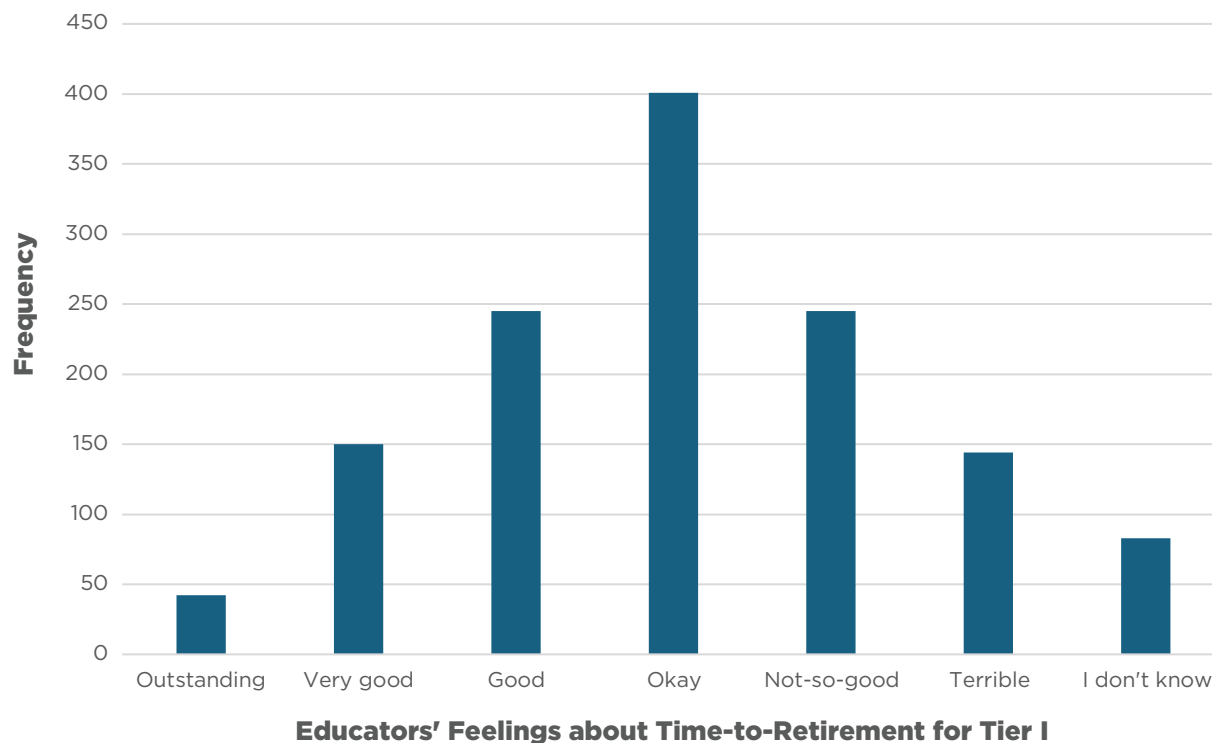
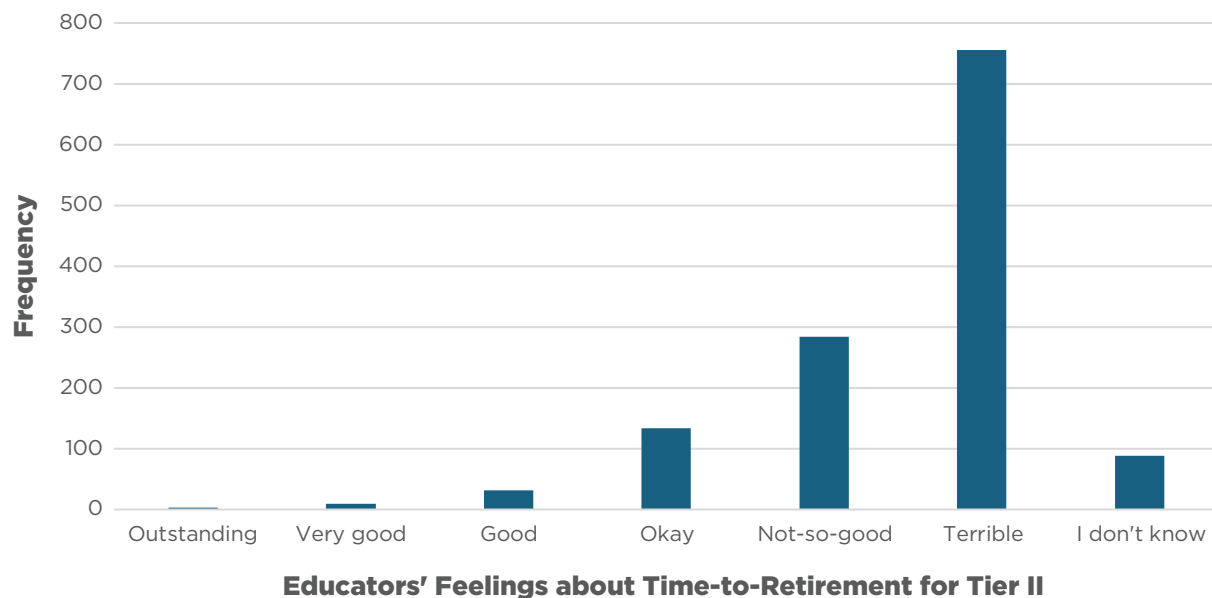


Figure 22. Educators' feelings about time-to-retirement for Tier II educators, all responses



In order to fully solve the educator shortage, addressing educator retention is critical. The results of the Defining Educator Compensation survey provide important direction for local school district leaders, including union leaders, school board members, and school administrators, as well as for state policymakers. Given the unique diversity of Illinois, which has approximately 1/15 of all of the school districts in the United States and districts that range in size from a dozens of students to hundreds of thousands of students across a wide range of communities with their various economies and cultures, studying educator compensation in Illinois can provide both frameworks and instructive results nationally.

State Policy Considerations



At the highest level, the results of this study are unsurprising. Key takeaways include:

- Educators want to be paid more than they are currently paid.
- For early and mid-career educators with less than 20 years of experience, increasing take-home pay in their paychecks is their most important compensation priority.
- For later career educators with more than 20 years of experience and for administrators, improving their overall compensation package is their most important compensation priority.
- Expectedly, for non-licensed educators (e.g., paraprofessionals), increased take-home pay was their most critical consideration.
- The time-to-retirement for Tier II educators is overwhelmingly considered problematic.

Given these key takeaways, there are important implications for potential changes to state policy.

Key state policy considerations:

- Take-home pay is what matters to the vast majority of educators, so it is important for legislators and other policymakers along with leaders of statewide educational organizations to consider what mechanisms can be introduced to increase take-home pay for educators within the confines of existing resources. Solutions like tax credits applied to educators' paychecks to increase their pay do come with real costs as this decreases state revenue. Likewise, making changes to educators' contributions to TRS seems unwise given the current and future load on the state's pension systems. At the same time, based on this study, real increases in take-home pay for educators seems likely to improve educators' feelings about their level of compensation. This is a call-to-action for economists and finance experts to not only come together with educational leaders but to commit to novel and creative solutions that can increase the amount of money in educators' paychecks after taxes and other withholdings while staying within our statewide projected resources in the coming years.
- While less likely to be viable given decreasing revenues and changes to the amount and nature of federal funds coming back to Illinois, educators would certainly welcome additional funding to support increased take-home pay, particularly for early career educators. This policy decision would be designed to minimize the educator shortage through improved compensation. As outlined earlier in this report, once they are 20 years into their careers, educators' feelings about their pay tend to be increasingly positive. Additionally, educators who are in the 5-10 years window of experience in their career tend to feel as negative about their compensation as educators who are in the 1-4 years of experience group (Figure 8 and Table 7). Given the number of educators who leave the profession early in their careers, providing financial incentives for each additional year of service during this window may prove to lower the rate at which educators exit the profession.
- While many responses focused on the need to increase take-home pay, experienced educators and administrators, groups who tend to have higher salaries, did identify the need for improved overall compensation packages. In an effort to boost benefits for educators within existing cost parameters, or potentially even at a lower overall cost to both local school districts and to the state, there are additional policy steps that can be taken to encourage such action. For example, on January 23, 2025, [HB1635](#) was filed in the Illinois General Assembly, and this bill would have allowed individual TRS members to participate in the State's insurance that is managed by the Illinois Department of Central Management Services. While this bill was referred to the Rules Committee and was not heard again during the legislative session, an idea like this may prove to be a compensation win-win. School district insurance cooperatives continue to function and provide greater buying power, particularly to smaller districts, and they may serve to also streamline operations. Again, this is particularly true for smaller districts with fewer staff members overall, including administrative staff. Finding legislative remedies that allow school districts to fully participate in the insurance programming that the State already offers its employees may lead to increased benefits for employees and to decreased costs for school districts (and, possibly, decreased per person costs for the State). Further study is needed into possibly allowing school districts to choose to opt-in to statewide insurance programs, but such a solution may have both direct insurance benefits and secondary positive impacts, such as freeing up additional dollars in local school districts that can be used to increase salaries.

These state policy ideas are simply the tip of the proverbial policy iceberg. Illinois has a well-organized set of professional and interest groups that already collaborate on the full range of educational policy topics. The Illinois P-20 Network is confident that engagement with those leading stakeholder groups based on the data contained throughout this study is likely to yield additional, and better, policy solutions that balance the limited existing resources of the State of Illinois and local school districts, the work of educators throughout Illinois' public schools, and the desire for additional compensation.

Local Considerations for Policy, Practice, and Collective Bargaining



As mentioned at the outset of the previous section, the results of this study are unsurprising. Key takeaways include:

- Educators want to be paid more than they are currently paid.
- For early and mid-career educators with less than 20 years of experience, increasing take-home pay in their paychecks is their most important compensation priority.
- For later career educators with more than 20 years of experience and for administrators, improving their overall compensation package is their most important compensation priority.
- Expectedly, for non-licensed educators (e.g., paraprofessionals), increased take-home pay was their most critical consideration.
- The time-to-retirement for Tier II educators is overwhelmingly considered problematic.

Given these key takeaways, there are important areas in which local school districts can take action. In its ideal form, this study provides a common foundation for school board members, administrators, and collective bargaining unit leaders to consider their limited available resources, this statewide data, local data that they collect (see below), and creative new ways to improve compensation in a way that is meaningful for educators.

Key considerations for local school districts:

- Developing a salary schedule or salary increase protocol should begin with local data collection and analysis. Such data collection and analysis is best conducted when a trusting environment already exists between and among these groups of stakeholders. All parties at the local level, unions, administrators, and school boards, should engage in asking questions of their educators to understand the key financial incentives for different employees to ensure that financial expenditures for compensation are being targeted to the places that they will have the greatest impact for those specific employees within the constraints of available financial resources. Appendix A provides a version of the survey that was used for this study that has been refined for implementing in local school districts. The Local Compensation Priorities Survey can be distributed electronically within a school district, and it can be completed in minutes by educators. Ideally, discussions among the school board, administrators, and union leaders about collecting survey data should begin six months prior to the start of negotiations, and then, the survey should be given three-to-four months prior to the start of negotiations with all groups being able to review the results of the survey approximately six-to-eight weeks prior to the start of negotiations. This allows for time to ask questions and for all parties to fully digest the results and to integrate this knowledge with their existing viewpoints. This entire process can be led by district staff members, or it can be facilitated by an outside entity that is neutral to all parties.
- Based on the results of this study, take-home pay is what matters to the vast majority of educators. Finding ways to enhance take-home pay may be more important than increasing actual salaries or total compensation packages, particularly if educators do not see those benefits in their paychecks. For example, the local survey tool and process that is mentioned above could be very useful in identifying if there are existing benefits that could be reduced or eliminated (such as disability or life insurance, for example) in order to increase take-home pay. While the examples listed here of benefits that could be reduced are typically extremely small in cost (dollars per employee) and would not meaningfully raise salaries, there may be other changes to benefits that could be larger and result in real changes in take-home pay for some or all employees. Given limited (and, in some cases, declining) revenues, it is important to socialize the idea that existing benefits can be eliminated in order to increase salary and/or benefits that are more in-demand from current staff.
- One implication of the results of this study is that, if at all possible and with the knowledge gained from local survey results of their own staffs, school districts should begin to look at more differentiated approaches to compensation. When considering some of the benefits listed in the bullet point above, is it possible to just provide those to a smaller number of employees and to increase salaries for other employees. In reality, the costs of benefits like disability or life insurance are so minimal in many school districts that the increase in pay spread across 24 or 26 paychecks for an employee would be almost unnoticeable. This is why such compensation strategies have not been implemented up until this point. At the same time, transparently working through options such as these may unlock new ideas about compensation, and given limited resources and the challenge of trying to make something out of nothing, it is the creative process and collaboration discussions that may open up new solutions that better align with employees' needs and desires.

Areas for Further Research



As with any statewide research project, this effort has resulted in additional questions for future research.

Early in this report, geographic data on the 228 school districts that were identified was presented. This data was not used for further analysis, and it is a rich source of potentially important data. The reason that this data was not utilized as an additional variable or set of variables is because this is complex data to make sense of in Illinois. Differences between districts within geographic regions are often great given the differences in district type, district size, community type, district funding level, and student demographics. Reexamining the data collected and analyzed in this report through the lens of geography but with an appropriately sophisticated approach is a worthwhile research effort and may prove to be important for identifying trends in educators' feelings about their compensation and potential policy solutions.

As mentioned early in this report, there were specific questions that were intentionally not asked in order to make the survey instrument feel as safe as possible for potential respondents to complete, particularly for those who may be in smaller districts or a part of a group of people that is either a protected class or under some type of potential threat. Examples of these potentially relevant questions that were intentionally not asked include:

- What is your current salary?
- Do you have _____ medical insurance benefits from your current district? (individual, family, or no/none)
- Are you a TRS or IMRF system employee?
- Are you a Tier I or Tier II employee?
- Individual demographic questions, such as:
 - Gender
 - Race/Ethnicity

The hope is that this report provides a highly public baseline upon which additional research can take place into educator compensation and, with this report already published and widely known, participants will, ideally, feel safe to participate in additional studies that can include questions like those listed above. It is also possible that such questions could become the basis for individual, specific quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodology studies that look at one particular question as it relates to educator compensation.

Based on the data presented in Table 1 and the discussion around that data, there are key opportunities for additional research and particularly research that is specific to Illinois. Given the large number of school districts in Illinois, movement between school districts may be even more accessible to Illinois educators than it is in other states, particularly states with large countywide school districts. Such movement should be an important area of further research for scholars in Illinois, and this research could help determine the degree to which such movement relates to educator retention. Key questions to study in researching why educators move between districts during their careers include:

- Which educators move?
- Are there key or typical times in their careers that they make such moves?
- What are the reasons for their moves? Do these connect with the attainment of new degrees or licenses? Are these connected to changes in leadership in either the previous or new district (either administrative or board leadership)?
- Does movement improve job satisfaction?
- Does movement extend career longevity?
- Does movement increase earnings (as it often does for information-based career professionals in other sectors of the economy)?

Based on the data in Table 4, is the question of viewing compensation in terms of take-home pay or in terms of total pay a question based on how much money one is actually taking home or does it relate to differences in perspective based on one's actual position. As a follow-up to this study, this topic could be ripe for further study using part of this survey as the basis for such study along and connecting these responses to people's reported salaries and benefits. A confidential survey collection that would allow for each respondent's answers to be connected to their salary and benefit data would unlock such answers along with other data collection methods,

such as interviews.

As mentioned earlier in the report, both of the publicly available Illinois School Report Card variables used in this study to describe school district finances (Evidence-Based Funding Adequacy Percent and Operational Expense per Pupil) were not statistically significant in describing the odds of educators being more likely to feel more well compensated. Often in research in a wide variety of schooling outcomes in Illinois, such district-level school finance variables have related directly to certain trends and given the fact that such a large percentage of a school district's budget is spent on educators' salaries and benefits, it would have been unsurprising for there to be some type of, at minimum, correlation between variables like the school district's Evidence-Based Fund Adequacy Percent and the feelings of individual educators within that school district about their own compensation. Yet, in this study, such a correlation was not evident. The counter intuitiveness of this lack of correlation is what begs the question of/for additional study at both a statewide level as well as by digging in locally and deeply to specific districts to understand why educators feel as they do about their compensation.

Additional research examining actual, after tax and withholdings, take-home pay for public educators from across the United States may help inform statewide and local solutions for cost-effective and efficient-to-implement strategies for increasing educator take-home pay. Additionally, examining both private sector and public sector employment laws and rules and regulations and their impact on take-home pay.

There also continues to be a place for more detailed, and possibly more invasive or personal, studies into the relationships between the compensation of Illinois educators and their actual finances. Examples of such studies may include:

- Examining educators' years of experience, actual student loan debt, current salaries, and career-to-date salary earnings along with considering differences in their positions/job types, school districts (district type, finances, location, size), and the demographics of both the educators and the students that they serve.
- Examining educators' home ownership status, the value of owned homes, the cost of monthly mortgages, the cost of property taxes and insurance, the price of rent for educators that do not own their homes, the location of educators' homes in comparison to the location of their school district and school, the various impacts of where educators live in relation to their school and how it impacts their professional and personal lives, the relationships between all of these variables and educators' years of experience, their current salaries, their career-to-date salary earnings, educators' demographics, their students' demographics, and key school district information (district type, finances, location, size).
- Examining educators' current salaries and their personal budgets and spending, including both required expenses (housing, food, clothing, insurance, transportation, etc.) and discretionary spending (entertainment, travel, hobbies). Understanding these aspects of educators' lives and spending as it relates to their salaries, their specific jobs, where they work and live, their ages and years of experience, and their family structures, may open up new opportunities for additional research or additional avenues for meaningful compensation for educators (or both).

As outlined earlier in the report in the discussion around Table 13, which focused on the percentage of educators who reported having current student loans, understanding the impact of these loans on educators and on their spending as well as on their personal and professional lives is another area for important additional research. Such research should look at who is taking out loans, if educators are maximizing programs available to them to offset postsecondary costs, the return on investment for individual educators in taking out loans to pay for postsecondary education, and in all of these cases and others, this research should consider a variety of individual factors about educators as well as variables that describe their school districts and students to identify patterns that may exist. From the data collected in this study, a couple of particularly noteworthy follow-up studies may be:

- The impact of student loans on educators in the first ten years of their career on home ownership, savings, engagement in ongoing postsecondary education, and spending generally (including discretionary spending like travel and entertainment).

- The impact of student loans on late career educators with 20 or more years of experience — In this example, it is worthwhile to understand who still has current student loans in this group of educators and why (e.g., loans for graduate school, continued loan expenses from undergraduate education decades earlier, the nature of the student loans and to what degree they may be examples of predatory student loans).

One compensation-related topic that has been studied but that also should be the subject of specific study at this time in Illinois, particularly on a large, statewide scale, is compensation for supervision, sponsoring co-curricular activities, coaching, and/or directing. Understanding why educators engage in these activities, how much time they spend working on these activities and the nature of that work, the impact of their work on supervisory and co-curricular activities with their work on instruction, and how much they are paid for various activities combines to be an important part of the overall work and compensation picture. For example, in high schools, there are individuals making tens of thousands of dollars through supervision and co-curricular assignments in addition to their salary and teaching responsibilities. They are likely working very hard for those additional dollars, and it is also important to understand how this shapes their views of their compensation and their overall work. Continuing to build on the work that has been done nationally with work specific to Illinois and specifically as a follow-up to this study can help inform policymaking at the state level and collective bargaining conversations at the local level.

Also, this research should correspond with research into who is working additional jobs — during the summer and/or during the school year. What type of jobs are those? Are they using their skills as educators or is the work unrelated? How much are they paid? Are there any benefits provided in those additional employment scenarios?

Given that home ownership has been a core component of financial wellness and independence in the United States over the past 80 years (or longer), the study of home ownership patterns among educators is particularly important. Based on the data from this survey, it was not until very late in their careers (31 or more years) that over half of respondents stated that they did own their own homes or could own their own homes, and even then, it was only 55.6% of respondents. Of course, the sample of respondents may have been less likely to include those with solid financial backgrounds including home ownership, but that is unknown without further study. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodology studies of educator home ownership can and should be devised to determine what these patterns are based on actual salary and benefits, educator demographics, the relative wealth and financial status of both school districts and communities, and any potential impacts on student learning. For example, if a higher percentage of educators in a school or district own their own homes, do student outcomes also increase? What impact does where educators' owned or rented homes have on student success? Is retention increased when educators own their homes? How do home ownership rates among educators compare with those of other professions in a particular geographic area or with the same level of postsecondary education?

The intentional choice not to include respondents' retirement system tier (Tier I or Tier II) was a difficult choice as it inhibited this analysis. As mentioned earlier, this choice was made with the goal of promoting anonymity and increasing the overall response rate for the survey. With this baseline survey complete, attention can now turn to additional research that builds upon this to understand how Tier I educators and Tier II educators may feel differently about the compensation topics included in this survey. While this analysis can suggest, with a fair degree of confidence, that the educators with 1-4 years and 5-10 years of experience in Illinois are all Tier II, more specific and explicit research should now be done in this direction. Additionally, understanding the planned career trajectory of Tier II educators is also critical, particularly when it comes to the topic of educator engagement and retention. When in schools throughout Illinois, it is common to hear Tier II educators say, "There is no way I'm teaching until I'm 67." Is this really their plan? Given that this same group of educators, based on this survey, is most concerned with increasing their actual take-home pay as the critical aspect of compensation for them right now, what are the implications for their retirement planning, for compensation, and for retirement planning education? There are a host of questions to continue to ask Tier II educators across Illinois, and as is the case throughout this section, understanding the patterns of those answers across the financial situations of their school districts, across the diverse communities of Illinois, and based on their students will all continue to be critical research moving forward.

Additional retirement system-related research can and should look at how TRS and IMRF compare to other governmental retirement packages nationally. Comparing retirement benefits based on degree attainment or salary between TRS and corporate retirement may also prove to be useful research. While a relatively small group among all teachers in Illinois, this is particularly critical for Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers who have often have significant experience working in business and industry prior to becoming teachers. CTE teachers can also have opportunities to leave their teaching positions to move back into high-wage in-demand positions in their fields. Given that CTE teachers are among the most significant areas of the teacher shortage, understanding their retirement pathways may provide direction to increase the retention rate of CTE teachers and decrease the shortage of CTE teachers (and increase student opportunities for CTE learning experiences).

Given the diversity of people, communities, and school districts across Illinois, detailed research like this in and across Illinois can inform both additional research and policy across the United States and beyond. While this is true across all areas of education, from classroom instruction to school improvement to school business and operational topics, it is particularly notable for educator compensation given the diverse canvas of Illinois school districts and educators on which this research can be done.

Appendix A

Local Compensation Priorities Survey



This survey tool is designed to be given prior to collective bargaining negotiations to understand local compensation preferences. This tool is based on the work done in this statewide study. In its most productive form and in the collaborative spirit of the Illinois P-20 Network's KEEP Illinois group, this should be a joint effort of both school district and local collective bargaining unit leaders. The data should not only be fully accessible to both groups, but ideally, a collaborative analysis of the data can and should also take place. It is recommended to conduct this study approximately four months prior to the start of negotiations to allow for analysis and feedback. A survey window of approximately two weeks with three weekends is recommended to allow for survey completion (e.g., survey launches on a Friday morning at the start of the school day and closes on Sunday night or Monday morning 16 or 17 days later).

Maintaining anonymity is important for an effective internal survey. Part of this will require that the survey does not ask for information that could be helpful in order to protect respondents' anonymity, and this is particularly true in the many small districts in Illinois that have dozens of teachers and other staff rather than hundreds or thousands of teachers and other staff. How staff are organized into collective bargaining units not only impacts the negotiations process itself, but it may also impact how a school district approaches pre-negotiations data collection. There are also certain questions that are more likely to create unnecessary anxiety or other negative feelings for respondents and that are probably unnecessary for collecting data for negotiations, and those should not be asked. Examples of these questions that are not recommended for inclusion are:

- What is your gender?
- What is your age?
- In what school do you work?

Given the diversity of school districts in Illinois, such decisions can, and should, be made on a district-by-district basis. Examples of questions that may or may not be included, and which are not included here in Appendix A are:

- What is your job/role within the district? (Suggested as a close-ended question with a list of jobs and roles from which a respondent will answer)
- Are you a TRS or IMRF employee? (Suggested as a close-ended question)
- Are you a Tier I or Tier II employee? (Suggested as a close-ended question)
- What grade level(s) do you teach? (Suggested as a close-ended question with the ability to select multiple grade levels)

Asking respondents for their number of years of experience can be extremely relevant for negotiations, particularly based on the results of this report, yet it also may compromise anonymity. The inclusion of a question about years of experience should be made with importance placed on preserving anonymity over gathering data on years of experience. Likewise, asking respondents for their highest degree earned is also extremely relevant for negotiations, and this is apparent in this report. At the same time, like years of experience and particularly in smaller school districts, asking about highest degree earned may compromise anonymity. When determining whether or not to include a question asking for the respondents' highest degree earned, preference should be given to ensuring the anonymity of the respondent.

Included below is the sample Illinois P-20 Network KEEP Illinois Pre-Negotiations Survey Sample.

I view my compensation as...

- Take-home pay after taxes and other deductions
- Total pay before taxes and other deductions
- Take-home pay plus all other benefits (insurances, retirement, sick days, tuition reimbursement, etc.)
- Total pay plus all other benefits (insurances, retirement, sick days, tuition reimbursement, etc.)

I am _____ compensated for my work as an educator...

- Very well
- Well
- Adequately
- Not well
- Poorly
- Very poorly

Understanding that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding to support improved compensation, the most important aspect of my compensation that I would like to see improved would be...

- Additional salary as take-home pay
- Additional total salary
- Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- Additional retirement savings options
- Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

Understanding that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding to support improved compensation, the second most important aspect of my compensation that I would like to see improved would be...

- o Additional salary as take-home pay
- o Additional total salary
- o Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- o Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Additional retirement savings options
- o Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- o Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

Understanding that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding to support improved compensation, the third most important aspect of my compensation that I would like to see improved would be...

- o Additional salary as take-home pay
- o Additional total salary
- o Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- o Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Additional retirement savings options
- o Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- o Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

If I wanted to, I can afford to live in our school district.

- Yes (including if you do currently live in the school district in which you work)
- No
- I don't know

In addition to my job with the school district, I currently work another job during the summer.

- Yes
- No

In addition to my job with the school district, I currently work another job during the school year.

- Yes
- No

I do (or am able to) own my home based solely on my salary with the school district.

- Yes
- No
- Eventually with continued savings

I currently have student loans.

- Yes
- No

I think that our school district provides fair compensation to newer educators.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

I think that our school district provides fair compensation to mid-career educators.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

I think that our school district provides fair compensation to very experienced educators.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

I spend \$_____ of my own money on items for my job each year (e.g., school or office supplies, learning/teaching materials, food or clothes for students, etc.).

- 0-50
- 51-150
- 151-300
- 301-500
- 501-1000
- 1001 or more

Appendix B

Survey



KEEP Illinois — Defining Educator Compensation Survey

KEEP Illinois seeks to promote educator engagement, which we define as a world in which educators stay in the profession and are able to grow and flourish throughout their careers. Educator retention and policies and practices that support educator retention are the minimum basis for such an environment. KEEP Illinois has identified key factors in the research that promote educator retention. Among those factors, educator compensation continually appears as being critical. KEEP Illinois is comprised of nearly 100 educators from across Illinois who are volunteering to be a part of this effort. Additional KEEP Illinois volunteers are always welcome! This survey seeks to further define educator compensation in Illinois and the conditions of educator compensation in school districts throughout Illinois. With this highly localized dataset to Illinois, KEEP Illinois seeks to identify areas in which new and/or improved policies and/or practices can be implemented in order to improve compensation and, as a result, to improve educator engagement and retention (which, in turn, should also improve student success). Participation in this short but important survey from educators across Illinois and its widely varying school districts and communities is critical to this effort. We need to hear from all types of educators working with students of all ages in school districts large and small across Illinois. While this survey does ask for personal information, it is completely anonymous. You can choose not to participate at all, and you can stop your participation at any time. If you do have any questions about this survey, please contact Jason Klein. Thank you, in advance, for taking this survey. Please share with your educator friends and colleagues and ask them to do the same — KEEP Illinois website.

I view my *compensation* as...

- Take-home pay after taxes and other deductions
- Total pay before taxes and other deductions
- Take-home pay plus all other benefits (insurances, retirement, sick days, tuition reimbursement, etc.)
- Total pay plus all other benefits (insurances, retirement, sick days, tuition reimbursement, etc.)
- Take-home pay plus some other benefits
- Total pay plus some other benefits
- Other _____

I am _____ compensated for my work as an educator...

- Very well
- Well
- Adequately
- Not well
- Poorly
- Very poorly

Understanding that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding to support improved compensation, the **most important** aspect of my compensation that I would like to see improved would be...

- o Additional salary as take-home pay
- o Additional total salary
- o Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- o Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested
- o More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently
- o Additional retirement savings options
- o Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- o Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

Understanding that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding to support improved compensation, the **second most important** aspect of my compensation that I would like to see improved would be...

- o Additional salary as take-home pay
- o Additional total salary
- o Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- o Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- o Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- o Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested
- o More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently
- o Additional retirement savings options
- o Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- o Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

Understanding that school districts are unlikely to see an injection of new funding to support improved compensation, the **third most important** aspect of my compensation that I would like to see improved would be...

- Additional salary as take-home pay
- Additional total salary
- Increased pay for supervision or extracurricular activities
- Improved health insurance benefits (better benefits)
- Lower cost health insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- Improved dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (better benefits)
- Lower cost dental/vision/disability/life insurance benefits (same quality of benefits)
- Faster path to retirement with the same current level of benefits when fully vested
- More robust retirement earnings with the same length to retirement as exists currently
- Additional retirement savings options
- Additional compensation avenues (e.g., employer provided day care, housing incentives, other)
- Professional learning compensation (e.g., tuition reimbursement, paid memberships to professional organizations, conference attendance)

I am _____ to save money given my current salary and my existing housing/food/clothing/transportation costs.

- Easily able
- Able
- Somewhat able
- Barely able
- Unable
- Definitely unable

I believe that neighboring school districts to where I work compensate educators in my role with my level of experience and education _____ than the district in which I work.

- Significantly more
- More
- About the same
- Less
- Significantly less

If I wanted to, I could afford to live in the school district in which I work.

- Yes (including if you do currently live in the school district in which you work)
- No
- I don't know

I am generally able to afford the lifestyle I want to live based solely on my salary and other benefits from my school district.

- Very easily
- Easily
- With careful planning
- With great difficulty
- I am unable to afford the lifestyle I want based on my school district compensation

In addition to my job with the school district, I currently work another job **during the summer**.

- Yes
- No

In addition to my job with the school district, I currently work another job **during the school year**.

- Yes
- No

I do (or am able to) own my home based solely on my salary with the school district.

- Yes
- No
- Eventually with continued savings

I currently have student loans.

- Yes
- No

I think that our school district provides fair compensation to newer educators.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

I think that our school district provides fair compensation to mid-career educators.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

I think that our school district provides fair compensation to very experienced educators.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

From the standpoint of compensation-level in retirement, I think that the retirement system is...

- Outstanding
- Very good
- Good
- Okay
- Not-so-good
- Terrible
- I don't know

From the standpoint of how long educators need to work until retirement for Tier I educators, I think that the retirement system is...

- Outstanding
- Very good
- Good
- Okay
- Not-so-good
- Terrible
- I don't know

From the standpoint of how long educators need to work until retirement for Tier II educators, I think that the retirement system is...

- Outstanding
- Very good
- Good
- Okay
- Not-so-good
- Terrible
- I don't know

I spend \$_____ of my own money on items for my job each year (e.g., school or office supplies, learning/teaching materials, food or clothes for students, etc.).

- 0-50
- 51-150
- 151-300
- 301-500
- 501-1000
- 1001 or more

Optional — Given the current realities of school funding **in your school district**, what is one idea you have for improving educator compensation **in your school district**?

Optional — Given the current realities of school funding **across Illinois**, what is one idea you have for improving educator compensation **across Illinois**?

My current role as an educator is...

- Classroom Teacher - general education, multilingual, special education
- Classroom Teacher - elective/exploratory/special area - physical education, CTE, performing arts, fine arts, etc.
- Instructional Paraprofessional
- Instructional Coach, Librarian, Curriculum Coordinator, Teacher on Special Assignment, or other Schoolwide/Districtwide instructional role
- School counselor
- Clinician (School psychologist, social worker, speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, etc.)
- Building-level Administrator
- District-level Administrator
- Other PEL staff
- Other non-PEL staff

I have ___ number of years of experience in education **in Illinois**.

- 1-4
- 5-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31+

I have ___ number of years of experience in education **in my current school district**.

- 1-4
- 5-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31+

(Select the option that best describes your level of postsecondary completion) The highest postsecondary degree that I have earned is...

- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Multiple Master's Degrees
- Advanced Certificate beyond the Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- No postsecondary degree

I would describe my school district as...

- o Rural
- o Small town
- o Large town/small city
- o Suburban
- o City

Selecting your school district will allow us to analyze these results based on key district factors that are publicly available on the ISBE Illinois Report Card website, ranging from the adequacy of school funding to student and educator demographics. Being able to connect the answers of educators to different types of school districts and different locales across Illinois may lead to important discoveries for more targeted, effective policy and practice changes. Some choices of school types that are not public school districts appear at the top of the list with an asterisk (*), and those choices are followed by the full list of Illinois school districts written as they appear on the ISBE Illinois Report Card website. **This data will not be reported by school district. This question will simply allow the research team to conduct more sophisticated analysis of the survey responses.**

- o Please select from the list below>>>
- o *Special Education Cooperative (or similar)
- o *Area Career Center
- o *Regional Safe School
- o *Public Charter School
- o *Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice School
- o *Statewide Illinois Public School (e.g., IMSA, Illinois School for the Deaf, Lab School, etc.)
- o *Other public school in Illinois
- o *Each school district listed by the Illinois State Board of Education was listed in alphabetical order from this point on in the pull-down menu.*



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

P-20 Research and Data Collaborative

Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development

KEEP ILLINOIS

Keeping Educators Engaged Professionally

