

Bargaining for Innovation

An Analysis of Collective
Bargaining Agreements
in Illinois Public
School Districts

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Executive Summary

More than two million children attend over 3,800 public schools in 852 local school districts across Illinois. Nearly all of these districts have collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), privately-negotiated contracts between the districts and teachers' unions that determine the terms and conditions of employment. While labor agreements establish enforceable terms upon the employees and the school districts, they can also be flexible enough to provide opportunities for collaborative innovation.

An analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements across Illinois— nearly two-thirds of all PreK-12 school district CBAs— provides an understanding of Illinois' large and dynamic public education system.

- Although school districts receive \$18 billion per year from local property taxes, the average district has just 77 percent of the necessary funding.
- The average district's spending on instruction is \$6,725 per student.
- The new \$40,000 minimum salary will boost earnings for nearly 10,000 public school teachers, helping to address the large and growing teacher shortage in the state.

School district CBAs contribute to a highly-educated, professionalized teacher workforce in Illinois.

- Fully 99 percent of all full-time public school teachers in Illinois have college degrees, including 58 percent who have earned master's degrees.
- The average full-time public school teacher earns a salary of \$64,485 per year, helping to attract and retain qualified professionals.
- 60 percent of CBAs establish professional development requirements for teachers and 55 percent pay teachers to meet their professional development goals.

There is substantial variation in CBA working conditions, innovation, and flexibility across Illinois' school districts.

- Most teacher contracts provide collaborative opportunities to make the best educational decisions for students.
- Fully 87 percent of school districts have planning periods to prepare for instruction.
- Most districts (73 percent) allow teachers the flexibility to change schools within their district.
- Teachers in 16 percent of districts have academic freedom in their CBAs to discuss controversial topics.
- At least 27 percent of districts have memoranda of understanding (MOUs), demonstrating that districts have flexibility to negotiate with teachers' unions to modify CBAs to address concerns.
- 74 percent of local school districts in Illinois have a moderate-to-high degree of workplace flexibility.

Collective bargaining agreements in Illinois' public schools are dynamic, reflecting both the needs of teachers and the financial and strategic challenges faced by local school districts across the state.

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About the Project for Middle Class Renewal

The Project for Middle Class Renewal’s mission is to investigate the working conditions of workers in today’s economy and elevate public discourse on issues affecting workers with research, analysis, and education in order to develop and propose public policies that will reduce poverty, provide forms of representation to all workers, prevent gender, race, and LGBTQ+ discrimination, create more stable forms of employment, and promote middle-class paying jobs.

Each year, the Project will be dedicated to a number of critical research studies and education forums on contemporary public policies and practices impacting labor and workplace issues. The report that follows, along with all other PMCR reports, may be found by clicking on “Project for Middle Class Renewal” at illinoislabored.org.

If you would like to partner with the Labor Education Program in supporting the work of the Project or have questions about the Project please contact Robert Bruno, Director of the Labor Education Program, at (312) 996-2491.



About the Illinois Economic Policy Institute

Founded in 2013, the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) is a nonprofit organization which uses advanced statistics and the latest forecasting models to empower individuals, policymakers, and lawmakers to make informed choices on questions of public policy. ILEPI provides timely, candid, and dynamic analyses on issues affecting the economies of Illinois and the Midwest.

ILEPI is committed to providing rigorous and methodologically sound analyses that advance high-quality jobs, foster accountable government, and positively contribute to the policy dialogue. To learn more about ILEPI, visit www.illinoisepi.org or call (708) 375-1002.



Introduction

Education improves people's lives and positively transforms the economy. Access to quality education can break the cycle of poverty, reduce inequality, spur innovation, and cultivate a talented and productive workforce (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Clotfelter et al., 2008; Howard, 2003). A well-educated workforce builds the foundation for shared economic prosperity across the United States (Berger & Fisher, 2013).

In Illinois, public education is the primary way to develop children and train young people for the skills they need as adults to find a good job, live a fulfilling life, and increase economic prosperity. More than two million children attend over 3,800 public schools in Illinois. These schools are distributed across 852 local school districts, each with its own governing structure and dynamics for labor and employment relations. Nearly all of these districts have collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), which are private contracts that are negotiated between the districts and labor unions—acting as workers' representatives—that determine the terms and conditions of employment, such as class size, salaries, and workplace flexibility.

Collective bargaining is a process of negotiation between employers and a group of employees with a "community of interest" to reach a binding written contract. In public schools, the purpose of collective bargaining is to establish a common standard under which all teachers are treated fairly and equally by school boards, district officials, principals, and the community. Collective bargaining is a method for formalizing labor-management relations, with workplace decisions made jointly by teachers and the district's administration, rather than unilaterally by one party. This process places public schools among the most democratic workplaces in Illinois, with workers having a voice in decisions over working conditions and having the ability to elect

representatives to bargain on their behalf. As a result, not all CBAs are the same. In fact, there is substantial variation in working conditions and academic flexibility across Illinois' school districts.

This joint study by the Project for Middle Class Renewal (PMCR) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) evaluates 543 collective bargaining agreements across Illinois, representing nearly two-thirds of all school district CBAs. The analysis provides an understanding of how the contents of teacher labor contracts contribute to innovation and collaboration within Illinois' large public education system. What are common characteristics of Illinois' school districts and how are they different? What is the market for public school teachers? What are the working conditions in public schools for teachers, what measures contribute to innovation, and which districts provide the most educational flexibility? This report explores each of these questions.

Data and Methodology

The Project for Middle Class Renewal (PMCR) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) obtained the unique collective bargaining agreements for 543 school districts across Illinois. The Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers provided a database of contracts. These complete documents contain the terms and conditions of employment for 86,685 teachers, 67 percent of all full-time equivalent public school teachers in Illinois, who collectively educate nearly 1.39 million students, 66 percent of all public school students in Illinois (ISBE, 2018a). Information comes from an analysis of the 543 unique collective bargaining agreements—also referred to as CBAs or contracts—as well as from the *Illinois Report Card*, a resource with data compiled and released by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE, 2019a). Overall, with a sample

size of 543 observations from a total of 852 school districts, the margin of error for this report is ± 2.5 percent.

There are some limitations to the data. Some school districts did not have information available for all indicators. This includes, for example, data on whether a CBA provides a minimum pay for new teachers or the number of teacher “institute days.” When not specifically mentioned in a district’s CBA these and other metrics were marked “not applicable” in the dataset, reducing the sample size and slightly increasing the margin of error. In some cases, school districts may also have negotiated or unilaterally adopted practices not reflected in the labor agreement.

School Districts and Collective Bargaining Agreements

The 543 school districts evaluated in this report represent all PreK-12 grades. In total, 41 percent were consolidated PreK-12 districts, 4 percent were consolidated K-12 districts, 33 percent were PreK-8 districts, 9 percent were K-8 districts, and 11 percent of school districts were high school districts. The remaining districts were variations of K-5, K-6, Grade 6-12, and Grade 7-12 districts (Figure 1). While the average school district had an enrollment of 2,566 students, the median had 936 pupils.

Figure 2 shows that teachers in 356 of the 543 school districts evaluated (66 percent) were represented by the Illinois Education Association-National Education Association (IEA-NEA), a union of 137,097 dues-paying members as of 2018 (OLMS, 2019). Teachers in 133 school districts reviewed (24 percent) were represented by the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), a union of 93,968 dues-paying members as of 2018 (OLMS, 2019). A total of 90 contracts (17 percent) included non-certified workers, such as paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodians,

cafeteria workers, and support staff, while the rest covered only certified teaching and licensed personnel (83 percent). The average length of the CBAs reviewed was 3.1 years (Figure 3).

School District Funding and Finances

The State of Illinois has one of the most regressive education funding systems in the country. Due to years of underfunding by state lawmakers, local property taxes are the primary source of revenue for Illinois’ public schools (Manzo et al., 2017). Across the nation, states provide on average 46 percent of the funding for public schools and local sources comprise 45 percent of school funding, while the federal government accounts for the remaining 9 percent (Educational Financial Branch, 2015). School funding is skewed towards local sources in Illinois, with property taxes comprising 63 percent of all elementary and secondary education revenue and the state government only covering 24 percent (Civic Federation, 2017; ISBE, 2018b). Consequently, Illinois ranks 50th in the nation in the percentage of public school revenues coming from the state.

In total, Illinois’ public school districts received nearly \$18 billion from property taxes and other local sources in 2016 (Census, 2018). Due to low state aid, many working-class and middle-class homeowners pay high property taxes to support their schools (Habans & Bruno, 2018). For example, according to Illinois Department of Revenue data, working-class homeowners paid 10 percent of their incomes in property taxes on average, while those with annual incomes over \$500,000 paid 2 percent or less towards property taxes (Bruno & Manzo, 2019). By relying on a tax that disproportionately affects working-class and middle-class families and low-income renters (as landlords pass on property tax burdens in the form of higher rents), Illinois’ education system is

FIGURE 1: SCHOOL DISTRICT SAMPLE SIZE BY DISTRICT TYPE (GRADES COVERED), 2017-18 SCHOOL YEAR

District Type: Grades Covered	Number of Districts	Share of Districts
Consolidated: PreK-12	222	40.9%
Consolidated: K-12	24	4.4%
Elementary and Middle: PreK-8	179	33.0%
Elementary and Middle: K-8	49	9.0%
Elementary: K-5 or K-6	3	0.6%
Middle: 6-8	2	0.4%
Middle and Secondary: 6-12 or 7-12	2	0.4%
Secondary: 9-12	62	11.4%
Total	543	100.0%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

FIGURE 2: TEACHERS UNION REPRESENTATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18

Collective Bargaining Representative Union	Number of Districts	Share of Districts
Illinois Education Association (IEA-NEA)	356	65.6%
Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT-AFT)	133	24.5%
Independent or Other Union	10	1.8%
Unknown, N/A, or No Union	44	8.1%
Total	543	100.0%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

FIGURE 3: INFORMATION ON CONTRACT COVERAGE AND DURATION, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18

Collective Bargaining Agreement Information	Value
Percent of CBAs that Include Non-certified Workers	16.6%
Average Length of CBA in School Years	3.1 Years

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

particularly regressive. Consequently, recent research has found that low-income districts received 22 percent less in state and local funding than affluent districts in Illinois, or 78 cents on the dollar (Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018). Low-income communities in Illinois are more likely to have underfunded public schools.

To address this systemic problem, Illinois adopted the "evidence-based funding model" in August 2017. Previously, state financial aid to schools was both inadequate and inequitable in distribution. Under the evidence-based funding model, each school district is funded based on the district's local financial capacity to meet established spending targets (ISBE, 2018c). The evidence-based funding model invests more money in

Illinois' most under-resourced students to enhance student achievement and improve graduation rates (Baker, 2018; Lafortune et al., 2018; Dynarski, 2017).

However, the need for adequate and sustainable funding remains high, with many schools below the "Adequacy Target" required to provide high-quality education (ISBE, 2019a). On average, school districts in Illinois receive just 77 percent of their needed funding and there are wide disparities in resources (Figure 4).

In the 2017-18 school year, out of the 543 school districts in the sample, only 78 school districts had budget surpluses (14 percent) and only 79 had a funding adequacy of over 100 percent, including just 11 districts that are 150 percent funded or

better (2 percent). By contrast, 121 school districts were less than 60 percent funded and about half (N= 268 districts) had between 61 percent and 80 percent of the funding required (Figure 5).

It is important to understand how spending per student is allocated to various school expenditures, such as transportation, teaching staff, and student resources. The most important factor is the investment in instructional activities, which includes only the activities that directly deal with teaching students or the interaction between teachers and students (ISBE, 2018b). A recent study found that every \$1,000 increase in instructional expenditures per pupil is associated

with a 1.5 percentage-point increase in the share of students who meet or exceed expectations in English-Language Arts (ELA) and Math scores at all grade levels (Habans & Bruno, 2018). Another study found that increasing per-pupil spending by 10 percent increases the probability of high school graduation by 7 percentage points for all students, and by 10 percentage points for low-income children in particular (Baker, 2018).

The average per-student spending on instruction is \$6,725 across Illinois (Figure 6). A total of 36 districts (7 percent) spend \$10,000 or more on instruction per student. These districts are mainly located in the affluent suburbs of Chicago.

FIGURE 4: FINANCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18 SCHOOL YEAR

Financial Characteristic of School Districts in Sample	District Average	Median District
Funding Adequacy (%)	77.0%	69.0%
Per-Student Spending on Instruction	\$6,724.71	\$6,261.00

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 school district collective bargaining agreements and *Illinois Report Card* data (ISBE, 2019a).

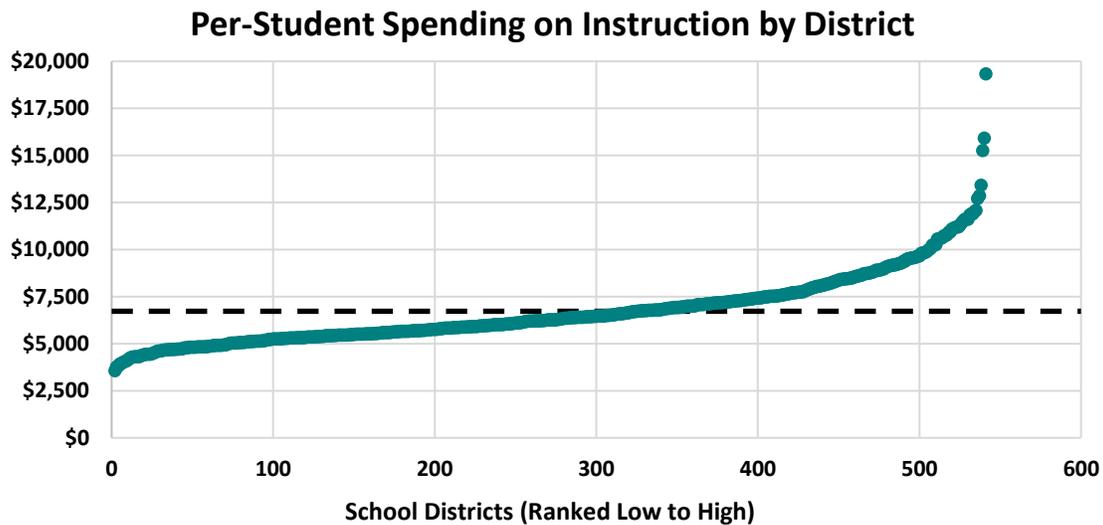
FIGURE 5: BUDGET SURPLUS OR DEFICIT OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18 SCHOOL YEAR*

Budget Situation of School Districts in Sample	Number of Districts	Share of Districts
Districts with Surplus	78	14.4%
Districts with Deficit	463	85.4%
Districts Only 50% to 60% Funded	121	22.4%
Districts 61% to 80% Funded	268	49.5%
Districts 81% to 100% Funded	73	13.5%
Districts 101% to 150% Funded	68	12.6%
Districts Over 150% Funded	11	2.0%
Total School Districts*	541	100.0%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 school district collective bargaining agreements and *Illinois Report Card* data (ISBE, 2019a).

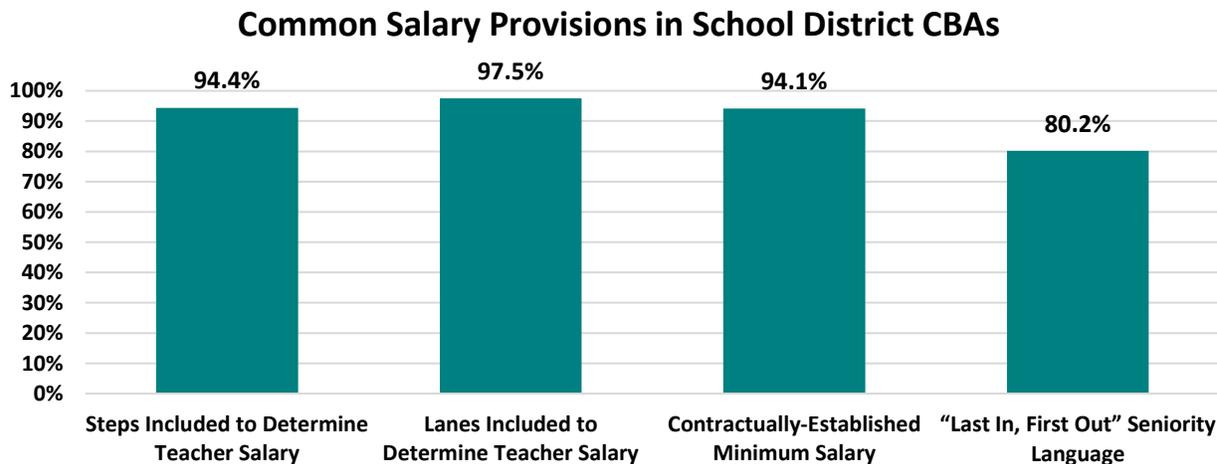
*Financial data was unavailable for two of the 543 school districts in the sample. Chicago Ridge School District No. 127-5 has the lowest school funding adequacy, at 50% funded.

FIGURE 6: AVERAGE DISTRICT SPENDING ON INSTRUCTION PER STUDENT, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18



Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 543 school district collective bargaining agreements and *Illinois Report Card* data (ISBE, 2019a).

FIGURE 7: SALARY PROVISIONS IN CBAs, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18



Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements. The number of school districts with available information is N= 520 for the steps provision, N= 521 for the lanes provision, N= 543 for the minimum salary language, and N= 541 for the seniority language.

Teacher Salary Schedules

Most public school teachers in Illinois earn incomes in accordance with collectively-bargained salary schedules that include base pay and “step” and “lane” incremental payments. “Steps” are determined by the number of years of service as a teacher while the level of educational attainment and professional development defines “lanes.”

Fully 94 percent of the sampled collective bargaining agreements at Illinois’ public school districts have steps (N= 491) and 98 percent have lanes (N= 508). Since salaries are typically dependent on this matrix-like system, most school districts have a minimum pay for newly hired teachers. A contractual minimum salary is established in 94 percent of school districts (N= 511) in the sample (Figure 7).

Full-time teachers in Illinois must complete a probationary period to be eligible for tenure based on seniority. Under current law, teachers can achieve tenure after four consecutive school years if they receive “proficient” overall evaluation ratings in their most recent school years and in either their second or third years of service. Approximately 80 percent of school district CBAs (N= 434) have seniority language which stipulate a “last in, first out” policy in which teachers with the least experience face layoffs first during budget shortfalls.

In 2019, Illinois passed House Bill 2078 to gradually increase the minimum salary for public school teachers to \$40,000 per year. The new law, which was signed by Governor J.B. Pritzker in August 2019, increases the minimum salary to \$32,076 in the 2020-21 school year, \$34,576 in 2021-22, and \$37,076 in 2022-23 before reaching \$40,000 (Miller, 2019; WIFR, 2019). In 2018, a previous version of the bill, Senate Bill 2892, was passed by the General Assembly but vetoed by then-Governor Bruce Rauner, who maintained the

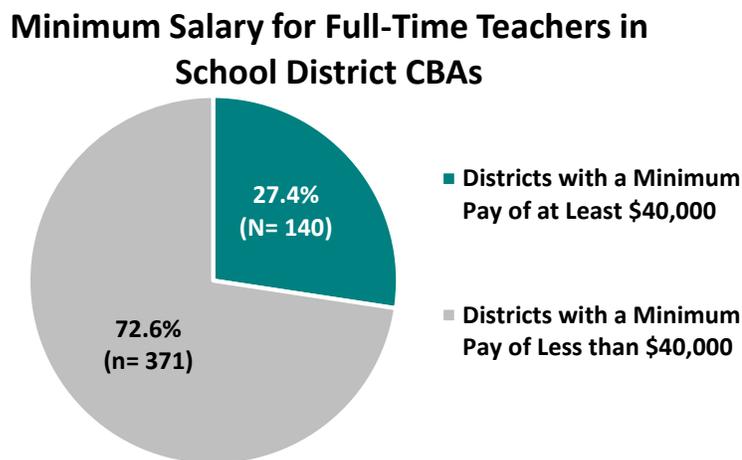
\$9,000 minimum salary established in July 1980 (Keller, 2018).

Fully 511 of the 543 school districts examined included minimum salary language in their collective bargaining agreements. Of these, only 140 school districts (27 percent) paid a minimum salary of at least \$40,000 under the current contracts. The remaining school districts (73 percent) had minimum annual salaries below \$40,000, including as low as a \$21,205 starting salary per year (Figure 8).

Teacher Characteristics and Salary Data

This section of the report uses “Educator Employment Information” data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2015-16 school year, the latest year for which data were available prior to a 2019 revision.¹ According to ISBE, there were nearly 120,000 full-time public school teachers in Illinois in the 2015-16 school year.

FIGURE 8: MINIMUM TEACHER’S SALARY IN CBAs, \$40,000 THRESHOLD, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18



Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

¹ All previous and following sections use data from the 543 Illinois school districts based on collective bargaining agreements in place during the 2017-18 school year.

Approximately 76 percent of full-time public school teachers are women; 24 percent are men. In addition, about 84 percent of full-time public school teachers in Illinois are white, 6 percent are African American, 6 percent are Latinx, and 1 percent are Asian (Figure 9).

The racial composition of the state's teaching workforce does not reflect the demographics of the student population. According to the *Illinois Report Card*, African Americans made up 17 percent of student enrollment while Latinx students accounted for 26 percent and white student comprised 48 percent of the student body at Illinois' public schools.

On average, full-time public school teachers in Illinois earned a salary of \$64,485 during the 2015-16 school year (Figure 9). Educational attainment is highly correlated with earnings. Teachers with bachelor's degrees (41 percent of all full-time public school teachers) earned an average salary

of \$52,060 while those with master's degrees (58 percent) earned \$72,732 per year on average, about 40 percent more than their counterparts with bachelor's degrees. While fewer than 1 percent of teachers have earned doctorate degrees, these teachers earned an average salary of \$87,377 over the year, about 68 percent more than teachers with bachelor's degrees.

High school teachers also earned higher salaries than their elementary school counterparts (Figure 9). The average salary of full-time teachers in Illinois' public high schools was \$70,105 during the 2015-16 school year. By contrast, the average salary for full-time elementary school teachers was \$62,490 annually. High school teachers thus earned \$7,615 more, or 12 percent more, on average. However, public kindergarten and preschool teachers earned lower average salaries, \$59,796 and \$53,932 respectively, than both high school and elementary school teachers.

FIGURE 9: AVERAGE SALARY OF FULL-TIME PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ILLINOIS, BY GROUP, 2015-16

Full-Time Teachers in Illinois: By Education, Gender, Race, and Grade	Number of Teachers	Share of Teachers	Average Salary	Teachers Earning Less than \$40,000: Number and Percent	
All Full-Time Public School Teachers	119,378	100.0%	\$64,485	10,968	9.2%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>					
Teachers with Bachelor's Degrees	48,626	40.7%	\$52,060	9,614	19.8%
Teachers with Master's Degrees	69,527	58.2%	\$72,732	1,292	1.9%
Teachers with Doctorate Degrees	618	0.5%	\$87,377	5	0.9%
<i>Gender Identification</i>					
Female Teachers	91,339	76.5%	\$63,594	8,560	9.4%
Male Teachers	28,209	23.6%	\$67,406	2,408	8.5%
<i>Racial or Ethnic Background</i>					
White Teachers	100,509	84.2%	\$63,916	9,743	9.7%
African American Teachers	6,662	5.6%	\$70,449	264	4.0%
Latinx Teachers	6,901	5.8%	\$67,713	267	3.9%
Asian Teachers	1,705	1.4%	\$68,150	86	5.0%
<i>Grades Taught</i>					
Elementary and Middle School Teachers	76,611	64.2%	\$62,490	7,237	9.4%
High School Teachers	36,191	30.3%	\$70,105	2,819	7.8%
Kindergarten Teacher	4,298	3.6%	\$59,796	440	10.2%
Pre-Kindergarten Teachers	2,290	1.9%	\$53,932	468	20.4%

Source(s): *Educator Employment Information* from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2015-16 school year (ISBE, 2018d).

As of the 2015-16 school year, about 9 percent of full-time public school teachers earned less than \$40,000 per year. The share of teachers earning less than \$40,000 was much higher for those with only bachelor's degrees (20 percent) than those with master's degrees (2 percent). Fully 20 percent of pre-kindergarten teachers and 10 percent of kindergarten teachers also earned less than \$40,000 per year. About one-in-ten white teachers (10 percent), who were more likely to be employed in rural and downstate Illinois, earned less than \$40,000 compared with just one-in-25 African American and Latinx teachers (4 percent), who were more likely to be employed in Chicago and its neighboring suburbs. In total, the data indicate that about 10,000 full-time public school teachers in Illinois (9 percent) will see pay increases due to the minimum salary hike to \$40,000 (Figure 9).

Teacher Fringe Benefits

Most public educators outside of the City of Chicago are covered by the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) in Illinois. The TRS is funded by a combination of state and employee contributions, and has over 160,000 contributing members. The member contribution rate for both Tier I and Tier II members into the defined benefit pension plan as of 2016 was 9.0 percent. As of June 2018, the TRS had \$52 billion in assets and \$127 billion in long-term obligations for a funded ratio of 41 percent— well below the goal of a 90 percent funded ratio (TRS Illinois, 2019). While the TRS has been underfunded for decades, it is important to note that teachers have never missed a payment. The system has a low funded ratio because the state has routinely failed to make adequate payments.

Tier I members who contributed to the TRS system prior to January 2011 can retire at age 60 with at least 10 years of service or at age 62 with at least 5 years of service. Tier I members receive a

retirement income that is based on the average of the teachers' four highest consecutive salaries during their last 10 years of service. Tier II members who first contributed to the TRS system on or after January 1, 2011 can retire with full benefits at age 67 with 10 years of service or age 62 with annual incomes reduced 6 percent for each year under age 67. Tier II members have a cap on the salaries used to calculate retirement income, have longer vesting requirements, and have a limit on the cost-of-living adjustments. Both Tier I and Tier II public educators in Illinois do not receive Social Security (TRS Illinois, 2015).

In addition to pensions, Illinois' public school teachers are typically covered by health insurance plans. On average, school districts in Illinois cover 89 percent of the premium costs for a single individual and 73 percent for a family (Figure 10). This is slightly better than the national average: In March 2017, employers paid 84 percent of the premium costs for single-coverage health insurance and 66 percent of the premium costs for family-coverage health insurance for all teachers across the United States (BLS, 2017).

In 34 percent of CBAs (N= 186), teachers pay a percent of monthly premiums, while 9 percent (N= 51) have contracts require them to pay a percent of their salaries to health insurance. The majority of CBAs (56 percent; N= 306) did not specify the method of teacher contributions.

Similar to changes nationally, health insurance costs have risen for Illinois teachers. Importantly, premium contributions have reduced teacher take-home pay. From 1991 to 2008, teachers paid approximately 17 cents in higher premium copayments for every dollar increase in the cost of individual health insurance. They also contributed an additional 46 cents in premium copayments for each dollar increase in the cost of family coverage (Lubotsky & Olson, 2015).

The Illinois School Code mandates that school districts grant their full-time teachers no less than

ten days of paid sick leave each academic year. Therefore, contractual language such as “paid sick leave,” “sick leave with full pay,” and “sick leave without loss of pay” was common. Agreements, however, differed on how annual unused sick days were treated. According to the School Code, if a full-time teacher does not use the “full amount of annual leave thus allowed, the unused amount shall be allowed to accumulate to a minimum available leave of 180 days at full pay.”

Fully 37 percent of the school districts in the sample (N= 203) have unlimited paid sick leave for full-time teachers that accumulates based on years of service. Another 61 percent of contracts (N= 330) have accumulative paid sick leave with a maximum number of days. Agreements typically stated that “unused sick leave days may accumulate to a maximum of ... days and years of experience in the school.” For these districts, the maximum number of sick days that can be banked over a career is 346 days on average (Figure 10).

Finally, many school districts in Illinois allow teachers to take paid leave to participate in union activities. Approximately 58 percent of school district CBAs provide some sort of association leave for teachers. While the number of days off for union leave varies in these districts, teachers are provided an average of 6 days of paid leave for union affairs (Figure 10).

Teacher Educational Attainment and Professional Development

Teachers in Illinois are among the best-educated workers in the nation. Over 58 percent of full-time public elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers in the state have earned master’s degrees. An additional 41 percent of full-time public school teachers have earned bachelor’s

degrees. In total, 99 percent of all public educators have earned at least a four-year college degree (see Figure 9).

Additionally, teachers in Illinois are required to attain between 40 and 120 hours of “professional development” within a five-year cycle as a condition of license renewal (ISBE, 2019b). Teachers participate in professional development activities to learn new skills and apply modern techniques to improve their performance as educators. Research has found that teacher quality is an important factor in improving student achievement outcomes. For teachers and school districts to be effective, they must continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices.

Individual teacher professional development opportunities can come from jointly negotiated or union provided sources. School administrations will usually approve teacher professional development activity offered by approved providers to advance the staff members’ contribution to the district. Both the IEA and the IFT have professional development centers that also provide their members with professional development opportunities.²

In total, 60 percent of Illinois’ school district CBAs (N= 328) establish professional development requirements for teachers and 55 percent (N= 296) reimburse teachers for the cost of training needed to meet these standards, typically through courses or seminars every few years.

Teachers and districts also use “institute days” and “school improvement days” to discuss and develop solutions to problems within schools and to participate in professional development activities on new curricula, technologies, and techniques in their specific areas.

² For the IEA, see ieanea.org/professional-development. For the IFT, see ift-aft.org/news/professional-development.

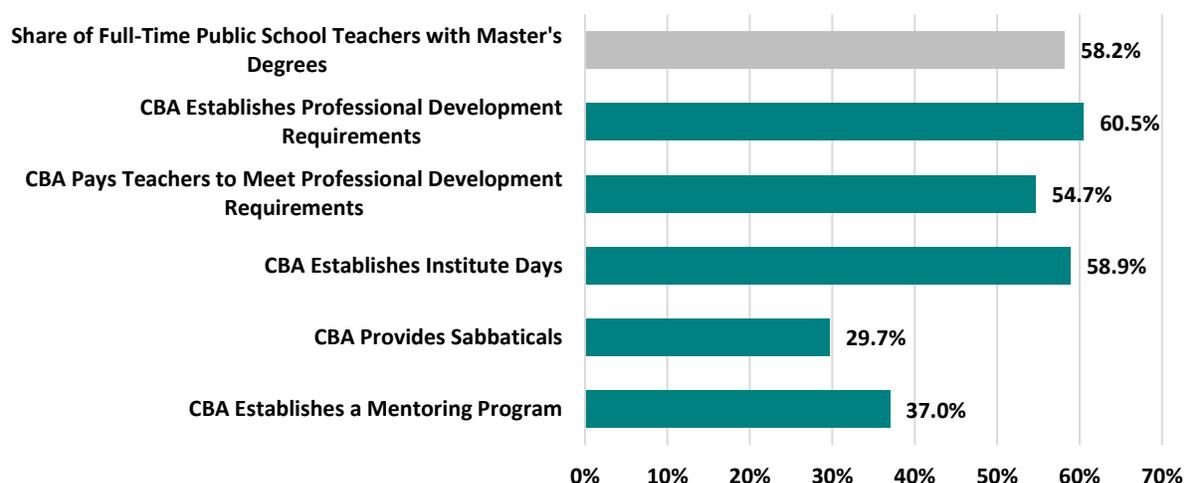
FIGURE 10: CONTRACTUALLY-ESTABLISHED BENEFITS AND LEAVE IN CBAs, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18

Type of Benefit in School District CBAs	Number of Districts	Value
<u>Health Insurance Coverage</u>		
Premium Costs Covered by Employer: Single	488	89.1% of Premium
Premium Costs Covered by Employer: Family	229	73.1% of Premium
<u>Paid Sick Leave Benefits</u>		
Districts with Unlimited Accumulated Sick Leave	203	37.4%
Districts with a Cap on Accumulated of Sick Leave	330	60.8%
Maximum Number of Paid Sick Days (Average)	330	345.9 Days
<u>Association Leave Benefits</u>		
Districts with Paid Leave for Union Activities	316	58.2%
Number of Paid Association Leave Days (Average)	316	6.3 Days

Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

FIGURE 11: TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVISIONS IN CBAs, SAMPLE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Professional Development Provision in School District CBAs



Source(s): *Educator Employment Information* from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2015-16 school year (ISBE, 2018d) and authors’ analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

About 59 percent of school district CBAs in Illinois (N= 320) included a clause dealing with institute days (Figure 11). The Illinois School Code permits “days of teachers’ institutes” to be included in a district’s school year calendar. With school board approval, the district’s administration typically sets the number of days and their content. On these days, students are not in classes, but

teachers are required to attend. Illinois law requires a minimum school term of at least 185 days in order to ensure at least “176 days of actual pupil attendance.” Scheduled institute days allow the districts to provide training while also meeting the minimum required teaching days.³ School districts examined averaged 3.7 institute days with a median of 4 days.

³ The regional superintendent of schools approves school district calendars.

A second platform for delivering scheduled in district-wide professional development are “school improvement days” (SIP). Like institute days, students are not in attendance while teachers come to school for training. The district customarily determines school improvement days, but depending on the labor-management relationship, the union may have a voice in negotiating the subject matter and number of school improvement days.⁴ School improvement day language appears in 20 percent (N= 111) of the CBAs reviewed.

Other opportunities for professional development are less common in Illinois. A sabbatical usually refers to extended leave or a career pause for a full-time employee, with the guarantee that one’s position will be open when his or her leave is complete. For teachers, a sabbatical is often used to achieve educational attainment goals. About 30 percent of school district CBAs in Illinois (N= 161) provide sabbaticals to teachers. In addition, just 12 percent (N= 57) of school districts provide some level of teacher pay during a sabbatical.

An additional negotiated mechanism for investing in the long-term quality of the teaching staff is a formal mentoring program. While not widespread, 37 percent of school district CBAs (N= 201) include a mentoring program for experienced teachers to support new teachers in years one through three (Figure 11).

Teacher Dependability and Performance

A low teacher retention rate can be costly for school districts, especially in years where there is a shortage of quality teachers. In the 2017-18 school year, teacher retention averaged 87 percent across Illinois. This means that approximately 87 percent of full-time teachers

⁴ The contract language reviewed cannot determine the extent of teacher input. However, the authors were able to

returned to the same school or school district, while 13 percent of teachers either left their positions and went to different school districts or left the profession entirely, lower than but statistically similar to the 14 percent national rate (García & Weiss, 2019). The bottom one-quarter of Illinois school districts had teacher retention rates of 84 percent or below while the top quartile had teacher retention rates of 91 percent or above (Figure 12).

Teachers are evaluated on performance and effectiveness. Research has found that a well-designed teacher evaluation program can have direct and lasting effects on teacher performance and professional development (Taylor & Tyler, 2012; Hinchey, 2010). Under the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) signed into Illinois law in 2010, both student growth and professional practice are measured and evaluated in school districts, with trained evaluators rating teachers as “excellent,” “proficient,” “needs improvement,” or “unsatisfactory” based on classroom observations and student academic data (ISBE, 2018e). Teachers without tenure must be evaluated every year, while teachers with tenure are evaluated every two years. Teachers may be evaluated more frequently if previously rated as “needs improvement” or “unsatisfactory.” In total, 98 percent of teachers were rated as either “proficient” or “excellent” in the 2017-18 school year. Many districts had perfect 100 percent proficiency ratings (Figure 12).

Workplace Innovation, Flexibility, and Collaboration in School Districts

Management consultant Edward Deming famously lamented that the “failure to use the abilities of people was the greatest waste in

identify one school district CBA where the union set the subject matter and number of SIP days.

America” (Deming, 1982). Education is a prime sector to measure Deming’s value of incorporating worker voice into human resource practices. The CBA is a very accommodating vehicle for creating inclusive and innovative approaches to educational decision-making that aligns a district’s strategic, tactical, and operational goals.

Each school district has expectations for full-time public school teachers laid out in CBAs. Teachers are expected to be at work at a certain time and work for a certain amount of days. The average length of the school day is 7.5 hours in Illinois, with most teachers arriving between 10 and 40 minutes prior to the students. Illinois schools typically start between 7:45 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. and end between the hours of 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Start and end times vary by elementary, middle, and high schools, but the average start time is 8:10 a.m. (Taie et al., 2017). Teachers get an average of 32 minutes for a duty-free lunch break, with a median of 30 minutes. The average length of the school year is 182 days, with a median of 180 days (Figure 13). These days include both student attendance days as well as teacher institute and school improvement days. There are also a number of contract provisions that enable creative and collaborative problem solving. These contract elements address the teachers’ effectiveness in responding to student concerns. Summarized below are examples of nine such prominent features of teacher CBAs.

School Improvement Days

As stated previously, “school improvement days” are scheduled in district-wide professional development days like institute days where teachers attend school for training. The district determines student improvement days, but the union may negotiate the subject matter and number of school improvement days. This language appears in 20 percent (N= 111) of the CBAs reviewed.

Planning Periods

Teachers and administrators negotiate planning periods to promote a healthy school environment for students, teachers, and supervisors. Planning periods are the only time during the school day in which teachers can prepare for instruction without students in the classroom. Approximately 87 percent of Illinois’ school districts (N= 473) have planning period language written into the contract (Figure 14). However, 55 percent of the sampled contracts (N= 298) provided the number of daily minutes of plan time. On average, CBAs provide teachers with 41 daily minutes of plan time. The range of daily prep time went from a low of 20 to a high of 115 minutes.⁵

Professional Learning Committees

While teachers and districts commonly negotiate personal planning time per day, some school districts set aside time for collaboration with other teachers (Jarmolowski, 2017). Teachers serve on a number of school-based and district-wide committees. These committees have different

FIGURE 12: TEACHER PERFORMANCE METRICS, AVERAGE AND RANGE, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18

Teacher Metrics for Sample School Districts	Average District	Bottom Quartile	Top Quartile
Teacher Retention Rate	87%	84%	91%
Teacher Proficiency Rate	98%	98%	100%

Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

⁵ A sample of teacher planning time at large school districts across the country is available in the *Teacher Contract Database* (NCTQ, 2018).

charges and operate at either grade-, school-, or district-levels. School-level groups usually involve teachers across grade levels or disciplines, while district-level groups include teacher representatives as well as principals, vice principals, or administrators.

Common planning time is scheduled time during the school day for teams of teachers to share their expertise and improve student performance. These teams are often called “professional learning committees” (PLCs).

PLCs are grounded in a belief that learning requires teacher collaboration. Here is how one contract explains it: “Improving the academic performance of students is continuous job embedded learning for teachers in a collaborative structure ... Teachers will participate in PLCs and develop an interdependent culture focused on learning, collaboration and results. These collaborative teams also will use data, professional experience and best practice to ensure the success of all students.”

Nearly half, or 46 percent, of the Illinois’ school districts (N= 250) have professional learning committees in their CBAs for teachers to work collaboratively (Figure 14).

District Leadership Teams

In addition to PLC, school districts may also utilize building leadership or district-wide leadership teams (also known as “committees” or “councils”) consisting of bargaining unit members, district administration, and school staff.⁶ A review of the 543 CBAs found only 3 percent of them (N= 17) had language regarding joint district leadership teams.⁷ The leadership teams that exist vary significantly in purpose, makeup, and operations.

Most included the union leadership of certified and non-certified staff, such as “... the President of

the Association and one (1) Association member appointed by the Association President from each attendance center.” However, not all did. One contract deferred all committee appointments to the superintendent. All but one committee had school representation and three district-wide teams called for a “Parent” or “Community” representative.

Exact team size was not always determinable and was in part a product of school enrollment. Language like the following was not uncommon: “[T]he parties agree that the Superintendent, Association president, and any additional representatives designated by the district and the Association respectively, shall regularly meet in formal and informal avenues,” or “The District Leadership Team (DLT) will consist of a balanced amount of administrators, board members, parents, certified and non-certified staff.” Nonetheless, a number of CBAs precisely identified membership, with size varying from as small as five to as large as 19.

It was rare to find term limits on team membership. More common was language like “the term of service of the members of the Team will be for so long as they hold their respective positions.”

There are substantial differences in the committees’ stated purposes. For example, leadership teams were formed “for the purpose of setting short and long term direction for the District in the areas of buildings, instruction, personnel, and innovative school district improvements, culture, climate, and legislative issues.” Another CBA summarized its systemic collaboration as a “mission of the Board, the Administration, the Support Staff and the Association to be advocates for children and to provide the highest quality educational programs and services through a program of continuous

⁶ A few additional contracts established school-based joint labor-management committees.

⁷ It is possible that more school districts have system-wide teams than is captured in the CBAs.

improvement.” Yet another functioned as a supra-coordinating body to “Align the work of all District Committees, Task Forces, and School Leadership Teams (SLTs) to support and carry out the Strategic Plan’s Goals and Strategies.”

In some cases, the district team’s charge is very narrow. For instance: “Provide an open forum to discuss the need for professional development as it relates to District initiatives and programs.” In another case, the direction was to make “recommendations for changes in curriculum and instructional processes and procedures as indicated by analysis of student assessment data.” In other districts, the role of the committee is simply “to monitor the progress of the district’s strategic plan.” Some CBAs include district-level collaborations “to discuss educational issues and professional concerns that relate to staff, which are not grievances or subjects already covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement.”

CBA clauses also pointedly stressed that joint teams or councils existed to include teacher voices in strategic and tactical decisions making. Below is a good example:

“Teachers shall have a voice in the decisions that affect the quality of education for students... District Leadership Council serves as a conduit for discussion of operational conditions affecting the schools such as, but not limited to: student teacher ratios, school calendar, aide allocation, curriculum, instructional strategies, and best practices.”

Contract language also addressed when teams would meet. While most agreements established monthly schedules, they were largely silent on times of the day. Typical was the following: “Meetings shall be scheduled either within the employee’s workday or outside the workday based on the components of the agenda.” However, one district CBA noted that “[t]eachers are given release time for any portion of a meeting

during school time.” In every case, meeting agendas were “mutually agreed upon by both parties (i.e., the administration and the union).”

Only two CBAs mentioned any compensation for committee service. One provided that members “will be compensated at their standard rate for time that extends beyond contractual hours,” while another specified compensation amounts: “Team members other than Administrators shall be paid \$100.00 for each two-hour meeting attended, or \$50.00 for each one-hour meeting attended.”

Class Size

While the evidence on the relationship between class size and student achievement is mixed, there is good reason to believe that smaller class sizes are valuable during the early years of a child’s education (Jepsen, 2015; Chingos & Whitehurst, 2011; Thomson-DeVeaux, 2014). When students have more one-on-one time with their teachers, they can ask more questions and receive more attention with fewer distractions in the classroom. Across Illinois, the average class size is 19 students per teacher.

While some states have passed legislation to limit class sizes in public schools, Illinois does not have requirements on class size. However, 48 percent of school districts (N= 257) have class size language in their collective bargaining agreements (Figure 14).

Roughly half (51 percent) of the contracts with class size language set maximums. A much smaller number (N= 12) set class size ranges (e.g., 24 to 30 students). The remaining 44 percent of CBAs with class size language leave it up to the school board, administration, or a committee to determine the maximum or “correct” number of students in each class. These contracts have language on making sure class sizes are reasonable, but do not give a specific number or range. The following is an example:

FIGURE 13: WORKING HOURS EXPECTATIONS, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18

Working Conditions: Hours in the Classroom	Average District	Median District
Length of the School Day	7.5 Hours	7.5 Hours
Duration of Lunch Break	31.9 Minutes	30.0 Minutes
Length of the School Year	182.0 Days	180.0 Days

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

FIGURE 14: WORKPLACE COLLABORATION AND FLEXIBILITY, SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE SAMPLE, 2017-18

Working Conditions: Collaboration and Flexibility	Number of Districts	Share of Districts
CBA Has School Improvement Day Language	111	20.4%
CBA Establishes Planning Periods	473	87.1%
CBA Establishes Professional Learning Committees	250	46.0%
CBA Establishes District Leadership Teams	17	3.1%
CBA Has Policy on Maximum Class Size	257	47.3%
CBA Permits Within-District School Transfers	394	72.6%
CBA Has "Academic Freedom" Clause	89	16.4%
CBA Has Procedures for Parent Complaints	192	35.4%
CBA Has a Memorandum of Understanding	148	27.3%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts.

"The Board and administration will attempt to balance and maintain desirable class size average, subject to space availability, installation of experimental or innovative programs and budgetary limitations. A teacher believing his/her class size to exceed desirable averages, or not to be in the best interest of the students, will request a conference with the building administrator. Any decision concerning class size will be made by the Board of Education."

Intra-District Reassignment

In most school districts, teachers have the opportunity to change positions, grade levels, and schools within the district. Most teacher transfers are voluntary, while some are involuntary due to decisions by the school board, superintendent, or principal, per their CBAs. About 73 percent of school districts in Illinois (N= 394) allow teachers the option to move in-district (Figure 14).

Academic Freedom

While all public school teachers have some freedom to discuss controversial topics at their professional discretion, only academic freedom clauses in collective bargaining agreements can fully protect educators in expressing their opinions without being subject to discipline or termination (Uerling, 2000). In Illinois, teachers in just 16 percent of school districts (N= 89) have academic freedom clauses in their contracts (Figure 14).

Dealing with Parental Concerns

Conversely, twice as many school district CBAs— but roughly only a third— include teachers in a process for responding to parental concerns. Procedures for handling parent and community complaints about teachers and teaching personnel are included in 35 percent of the CBAs analyzed (N= 192) (Figure 14). In most of these school districts, the complaint process involves administrators, the parent or community member, and the teacher meeting to discuss and resolve the issue, with no action taken without

first attempting a parent-teacher-principal conference.

Memoranda of Understanding

Many CBAs contain some type of provision for waivers or memoranda of understanding (MOUs).⁸ The contract typically outlines the process by which a school, the district, or the union can request waivers from the contract. A waiver request usually requires the approval of a certain percentage of the school staff, as well as the union representative and school principal.

An MOU is a formal agreement between two parties. MOUs signal the intention of all parties to move forward with a contract, describes the project on which the two parties are agreeing, and defines the roles and responsibilities of each party. Teacher CBA appendixes typically include MOUs and they usually pertain to teacher salaries, benefits, committees, school day schedules, and retirement plans (Figure 15).

Out of the 543 contracts reviewed, 148 had memoranda of understanding (27 percent). Most of these contracts had more than one MOU and had multiple subject matters. Contracts with multiple MOUs are counted multiple times in Figure 15 when distinguishing the subject matter of the MOUs.

In addition, 27 CBAs had MOUs but the content was unavailable because they were in an appendix that was not provided to the researchers. It could be determined that these CBAs did have MOUs but the content, subject matters, and scope were unknown (Figure 15).

Innovation and Flexibility Index

How much workplace innovation and flexibility does a CBA permit and how does it contribute to creative joint responses to educational needs?

Figure 16 shows results from an index created using nine indicators of collectively bargained innovation and flexibility measures: school improvement days, planning periods, professional learning committees, district leadership teams, internal transfers, academic freedom clauses, class size maximums, a procedure for dealing with parent complaints, and memoranda of understanding. As previously discussed, planning periods and professional learning committees give teachers independent time to prepare for instruction, while school improvement days allow for district-wide professional development for teachers. Voluntary transfers give teachers autonomy to change workplaces within a district, and academic freedom gives teachers flexibility over controversial content. Class size maximums place caps on the number of students that an educator can teach, which gives them increased time with individual students and can improve teacher flexibility over instruction by improving their ability to tailor lessons to specific students.

The index looks at the 535 school district CBAs with complete information in Illinois. Each indicator is weighted equally, with a value of 1 if it is in the contract and a value of 0 if it is not. Only one of the districts had a perfect score of 9 on the workplace flexibility index for teachers and districts, meaning that the teachers had successfully negotiated for school improvement days, planning periods, professional learning committees, district leadership teams, internal transfers, academic freedom, parent complaint procedures, memorandum of understandings, and class size limits.

⁸ Along with MOUs, contracts can also include similar documents called "Side Letters."

FIGURE 15: MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING (MOUs) BY SUBJECT MATTER, 2017-18

MOUs by Category or Subject Matter	Number
Total MOUs	148
Benefits	15
Committees	17
Compensation for Extra Curriculars or Extra Work	13
Contract Remains Until Next Contract	5
Evaluation	10
Leaves	9
Planning Time	9
Positions	17
Retirement	17
Salary Schedule	19
Schedule	12
<u>All Other Items</u>	<u>38</u>
Activities and Sports	1
Association Rights	1
Cancel Time Off for Participation in School Trip	1
Class Size	4
District Technology	4
Drivers Education	1
Drug Testing	1
Employees' Increased Role in Decision Making	1
Graduate Hours Earned Prior to Master's Degree	1
Grievance Procedures	1
Hard-to-Fill Positions	1
Master's Equivalency	1
Mentor Program	1
Online Courses	1
Reduction in Staff	3
Representation for Non-Supervisory Teachers	1
Safety Plan	1
School Reform	1
Seniority	1
Summer Cleaning	1
Teacher Placement	3
Tuition Reimbursement or Professional Development	3
No Data	27

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts. "Schedule" includes early dismissal, schedule of entire school day, school calendar schedule, and advisory periods. "Leaves" include unpaid leave, sick leave, and parental leave. "Positions" include new positions, directors, nurses, speech pathologists, substitutes, aides, and vacancies.

FIGURE 16: DISTRICT-WIDE INNOVATION AND FLEXIBILITY INDEX, 2017-18 (CONSTRUCTED BY AUTHORS)

Workplace Flexibility Index	Index Value	Number of Districts	Share of Districts
High District Flexibility	9	1	0.2%
	8	3	0.6%
	7	19	3.6%
	6	39	7.3%
Moderate District Flexibility	5	84	15.7%
	4	110	20.6%
	3	137	25.6%
Low District Flexibility	2	98	18.3%
	1	39	7.3%
	0	5	0.9%
Average School District	3.6	535	100.0%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 543 collective bargaining agreements with school districts. The number of school districts with complete information for all five metrics is N= 535. For a full list of the 535 school districts, see the <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1uiQotzKfa86ageYM4iXnnzMfXLP8PCSE1KpY-oZx06Q/>.

Another 11 percent of districts (N= 61) have high workplace flexibility, with a flexibility score from 6 to 8. Fully 62 percent of districts (N= 331) have a moderate flexibility score between 3 and 5. The remaining 27 percent of districts (N= 142) have low workplace flexibility in Illinois with a score from 0 to 2. The flexibility index demonstrates that there is substantial variation in collective bargaining agreements at Illinois' public school districts. Not all CBAs are the same, and many are not rigid in their rules. In fact, the majority of teachers in Illinois have at least some autonomy in their workplaces to make the best decisions for them and their students.

Conclusion

Public education is the primary way to develop children and train young adults for the skills they need to succeed. More than two million children attend over 3,800 public schools in 852 local school districts across Illinois. Nearly all of these districts have collective bargaining agreements, privately-negotiated contracts between school districts and teachers' unions, that determine the terms and conditions of employment.

There is substantial variation in working conditions, innovation, and flexibility across Illinois' school districts. Fully 87 percent of school districts have planning periods that allow teachers to prepare for instruction. Most districts also allow teachers the flexibility to change schools within their district. Teachers in 16 percent of districts have academic freedom to discuss controversial topics. In addition, at least 27 percent of all districts have memoranda of understanding covering multiple workplace and educational matters, demonstrating that districts have flexibility to negotiate with teachers' unions to modify their contracts to address ongoing concerns.

Overall, 74 percent of local school districts collective bargaining agreements in Illinois contribute to a moderate-to-high degree of workplace innovation and flexibility. Ultimately, the analysis finds that collective bargaining agreements in Illinois' public schools are quite dynamic, reflecting both the needs of teachers and the administrative, financial, and strategic challenges faced by local school districts across the state.

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