**UEN 2021 Legislative Priority:   
Education and School Staff Shortages**

**Background:** Although Iowa’s urban schools have traditionally been full of excellent teachers with flexibility and dedication to student success, conditions in Iowa are making it difficult to attract and retain great teachers, indeed school employees in many different job roles, and it’s getting worse.

Many content areas are experiencing a shortage, but especially at the secondary level. The Iowa DE compiles a list, which for 2020-21 included physics, family consumer science, agriculture, industrial technology, business, all world languages, all science, English-as-a-second language, special education, school counselors and teacher librarians. See the complete shortage list on DE’s web site: <https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/educator-quality/practitioner-preparation/teacher-shortage-areas>

Urban school leaders would include the additional struggle of attracting and retaining a diverse workforce reflective of diverse student enrollment. It is critical for students to see successful adults as role models, yet urban districts, despite aggressive pursuit, are still struggling to find minority, immigrant and bi-lingual teachers and administrators. Almost all districts in Iowa are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers, including those in our urban centers.

As the work of educating students is getting harder, with more qualifications and mandates, fewer qualified candidates, and sometimes no candidates at all, are applying to fill vacant positions. Although the urban payscale is typically higher, the workload is significant. Experienced urban teachers may move to the suburbs which tend to have newer facilities and greater community financial and parental support. Private-sector competition is also compelling. Iowa’s low unemployment rate means employers are looking for a strong work ethic, communication skills, and the ability to get to work on time. The Future Ready Workforce list of High-Demand Jobs includes educators. All of this information predates the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has encouraged early retirement, discouraged returning substitutes, and increased needs for qualified staff to cover when teachers are out sick or in quarantine.

**Current Reality:** The qualified worker challenge is difficult in Iowa’s urban schools:

* The implementation of the teacher leadership and compensation system increased demand for teachers to fill vacant positions to replace teacher leaders. TLC may also have slowed the pipeline of individuals willing to take on the work of school administration.
* Teachers in urban areas have larger class sizes. As the increase in the state cost per pupil has not kept pace with salary and benefits cost increases, the pressure point in schools has become classrooms with as many as 30-40 students at the high school level. That leaves many papers and projects to grade and relationships to build.
* Some urban schools have been able to help a willing and capable employ obtain certification in a shortage area of content or from a minority or bilingual background, but the rules require provisional licensure status no longer than two years. Tuition and costs of coursework may be unaffordable for lower-paid staff and nearly unattainable for new teachers given the level of starting pay combined with college loan payments.
* Beginning January 1, 2021, educators new to the state should get reciprocity for their teaching, administrator or coaching license with sufficient experience. This is a welcome relief! However, it does not allow new college graduates from other states to begin their teaching careers in Iowa without having to take courses not required in their university’s school of education program.

**Teacher, Administrator and Staff Shortage:** Adequate funding is essential for public schools to compete with the private sector for employees. Licensure reciprocity with other states enacted in the 2020 Session is a great start. In addition to adequate base funding, other steps must be taken to help schools meet the challenge of attracting and retaining tomorrow’s educators and recruiting teachers that mirror the diversity in our students, including flexibility in certification requirements, acceptance of alternate evidence such as experience for Iowa licensure, loan-forgiveness for shortage areas or high-needs schools, creation of a public service track within Iowa’s CTE plan, creative grow-our-own programs and a strong IPERS and employee benefits system.

**Policy Solutions Urban Schools Support:**

1. Set the state supplementary assistance (SSA) rate for FY 2022 no lower than 3.75% but as high as the Revenue Estimating Conference revenue estimate is set if higher than 3.75%.
2. Expansion of temporary licensure to three years for teachers working for shortage area licensure to achieve the necessary credit hours.
3. Flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements – via partnership with another district, online, or through access to community college courses. Waivers from DE should be granted for more than one year to minimize administrative work in the following years.
4. Ability to start a school year or semester with a long term substitute if the position is a late vacancy without requiring a waiver from BOEE.
5. Special education general endorsement alternative, allowing teachers an alternative credential to meet special education licensure from PK-12.
6. Direct the BOEE to write rules regulating the hiring of new teachers just graduating from college in another state to minimize the additional coursework burden on these new teachers.
7. Alternative models of licensure for shortage area teaching positions in Iowa (build on the CTE model that allows completion of student teaching on the job, with support from TLC and instructional coaches.)
8. Education Loan Forgiveness to help pay student loan debt if teachers fit content or demographic shortage areas, or work in high-needs schools, and remain in the urban school district.
9. Define a CTE track for public service, including teaching (but could also include law enforcement, social work, criminal justice, etc.). Allow “internships” with teachers at school and completion of an associates degree or other course work to minimize college tuition and living expenses.
10. Use of management fund to pay for certification course requirement costs for teachers working toward licensure in shortage area positions, especially special education.
11. Soften the barriers of IPERs eligible employees returning to the workplace.
12. Allow individuals with an associates’ degree to substitute teach (BOEE proposed rules to continue flexibility granted by Governor Reynolds during the COVID closure are in process.)