

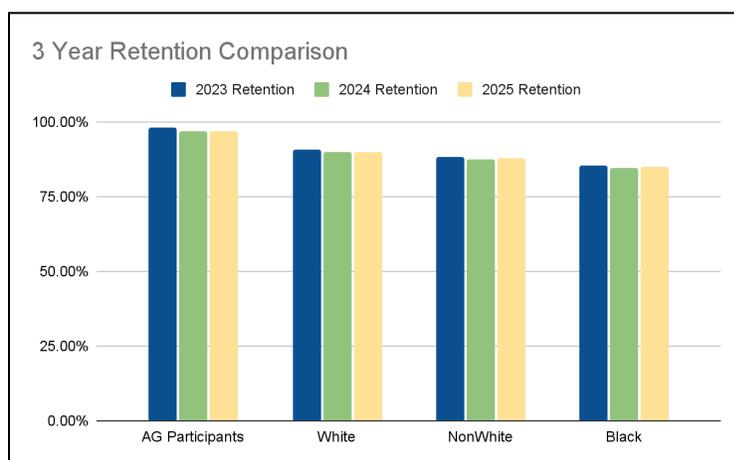


The Illinois Affinity Group Network: A Proven Strategy for Retaining Diverse Educators & Supporting Student Success

Teachers of color matter for student success. While the Illinois student population has become more racially and linguistically diverse, the Illinois teaching force has not reflected this growing diversity. Teachers of color have been shown to increase student engagement, improve reading and math test scores, and college attendance rates for students of color while also ensuring White students feel cared for and challenged.

Illinois has invested in recruiting teachers of color, it now needs to invest in retaining them. Illinois has invested significantly in recruiting teachers of color by quadrupling its investment in the Minority Teachers of Illinois program, now the Teachers of Illinois Scholarship program, from \$1.9M to \$8.2M. However, retention for educators of color, particularly Black educators, is sobering: Black teachers are 50% more likely to leave their teaching roles than their white colleagues.

Retaining teachers of color through the Illinois Affinity Group Network (IL-AGN). ISBE piloted the Illinois Affinity Group Network starting in February of 2022, and it is the **first statewide network of support for Educators of Color in the nation.** In its first three years, the network supported 1,773 educators from 111 Illinois districts throughout the state. **Affinity group participation increases educator retention.** According to ISBE data in SY24, 97% of participants were retained as educators in Illinois – outpacing the retention for Black teachers by 12%, and even outpacing the retention for white teachers by 7%.



"I now have the tools and confidence to facilitate collaborative conversations within my affinity group that are rooted in shared identity, trust, and strategic action."

~Affinity Group Facilitator

What does the Illinois Affinity Network do? IL Affinity Group Network Facilitators meet monthly with a group of educators in their district or area, creating an affinity group to support those educators. Each year, current funding levels have supported more than 40 affinity groups across the state. The IL Affinity Group Network provided monthly cohort sessions to support the facilitators in their development of facilitation skills and their capacity as policy advocates. Facilitators also met at least monthly with an affinity group network leadership coach, working individually and in small groups on specific issues facing their affinity space. Each facilitator received a stipend for leading their affinity group, and each participant in the affinity groups who attended 65% or more of the affinity group meetings received an honorarium. In addition, each facilitator received implementation funding to pay for affinity group activities. Finally, each group that launched an advocacy initiative created an advocacy team, which received a small stipend.

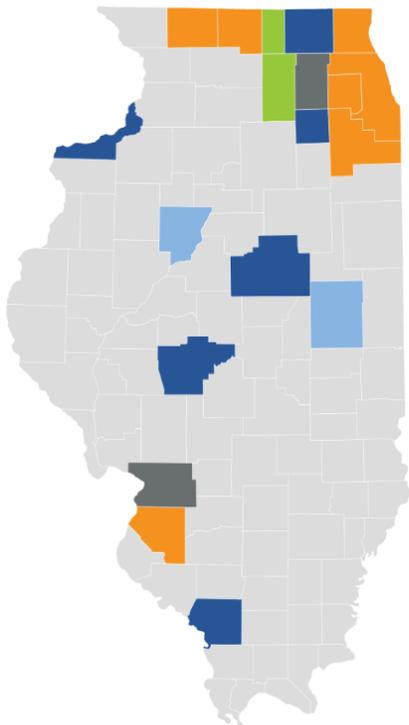
What were the impacts? An independent evaluation and ISBE data show that the affinity groups supported teachers in the following ways:

- **Reach:** In SY 2024-25, the network supported 673 educators, in 54 districts in all 6 IARSS areas. Those educators worked with an estimated 19,500 students.
- **Belonging:** In SY 2024-25, 100% of group facilitators and 91% of participants reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that participation in affinity groups helped develop a greater sense of belonging. 93% of both groups reported increased connections.
- **Advocacy:** In SY 2024-25, 100% of group facilitators and 97% of participants indicated that participation in affinity groups empowers them to share their voices and perspectives, and 89% report feeling motivated and prepared to take action.
- **Retention:** ISBE data in SY 2024-25 indicates that 97% of teachers who participated in affinity groups were retained as educators the following year. 85% of group facilitators and participants reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that participation in the affinity group positively impacted their decision to remain in education.

“Having a community of people who look like me, who also face similar challenges, empowers me to stay the course. The support I’ve received has encouraged me to continue to press forward in leadership..”
~Affinity Group Participant

ILAGN Membership

■ SY 23 & 24 ■ SY 23 & 25 ■ SY 23, 24 & 25 (3 Years) ■ SY 24 & 25 ■ SY 25 Only (New)



IL Affinity Group Network Fellowship Program Evaluation Reports and Additional Information:

- [IL-AGN 2024 Survey Executive Summary.pdf](#)
- [IL-AGN 2023 Evaluation Report.pdf](#)
- [IL-AGN Case Studies Summary.pdf](#)
- [IL-AGN 2023 Survey Executive Summary.pdf](#)

In these first few years, IL-AGN has supported over 1,000 BIPOC teachers, with a 98.4% retention rate. IL-AGN’s success has saved partnering districts more than \$2.2 million!

*According to research by the Learning Policy Institute:
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/2024-whats-cost-teacher-turnover>

For more information go to teachplus.org/illinois-affinity-groups/
Or, email ilaffinitygroup@teachplus.org