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Experiences of Illinois Districts with Early Success in Reducing Teaching Vacancies:

A Second-Year Evaluation of the Teacher Vacancy Grant
Pilot Program

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Executive Summary

The Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program (TVGPP) is a three-year policy initiative that directs additional state funding to public school districts with the highest numbers of unfilled teaching positions, or teaching vacancies (Office of the Governor JB Pritzker, 2023). Prior to launching the pilot program in the 2023-24 school year (SY24), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) identified 170 districts for participation based on unfilled positions data, urbanicity, and state funding levels from SY23. In particular, these 170 districts reported 80% of all teaching vacancies statewide in SY23. These districts also serve about half of all students enrolled in Illinois, equating to approximately 870,000 students. Because teaching vacancies are disproportionately concentrated in these districts, the central issue is one of equitable student access to quality education.

By design, the TVGPP extends to districts flexibility in devising and enacting strategies to improve teacher recruitment and retention. In total, the state invested \$120 million into the TVGPP, distributing \$45 million to program-participating districts in each of SY24 and SY25 and \$30 million in SY26, the initiative's third and final year.

In the current qualitative study, we interviewed nine program-participating districts that have demonstrated early success in reducing unfilled teaching positions, building on a prior quantitative analysis of district outcomes associated with grant participation (see Beilstein et al., 2025). Using multiple sources of data, including budget details describing grant-related expenditures, unfilled positions, and interviews, we explore districts' experiences developing and implementing recruitment and retention strategies, assessments of staffing outcomes related to program participation, and plans for sustaining successful strategies beyond the duration of the TVGPP.

Key Findings

Districts rely on multiple sources of data to determine where their teaching vacancies occur and what causes them. Districts used hiring and staffing data, job postings, interviews with job applicants, interviews with teachers leaving the district, culture and climate surveys, and publicly available datasets (e.g., ISBE's Illinois Report Card) to devise targeted recruitment and retention solutions.

Districts' strategic plans to reduce unfilled teaching positions varied based on their staffing needs and local contexts. Three spending groups emerged in how interviewed districts allocated grant funding and where they prioritized efforts, whether emphasizing recruitment, retention, or both. Districts that were focused on recruitment built out pathway programs for aspiring teachers, provided stipends to student teachers, offered hiring and retention bonuses, and more. Districts that were focused on retention devoted grant funds to classroom resources, professional learning opportunities, retention bonuses, and teacher support. Districts that were focused on both recruitment and retention used hiring bonuses in tandem with strategies aimed at encouraging new and current teachers to stay. Across and within each type of spending group, districts' strategy allocation varied based on their local context and nuanced staffing needs.

Districts plan to prioritize the most effective recruitment and retention strategies following the conclusion of TVGPP funding. The TVGPP afforded districts several years to expand existing recruitment and retention strategies and to test out new initiatives. Interviewed districts said they plan to use general funding to continue the solutions they found to be most beneficial upon the completion of the grant, but the number and scope of continuing strategies will be significantly reduced.

Experiences of Illinois Districts with Early Success in Reducing Teaching Vacancies: A Second-Year Evaluation of the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program

Introduction

The Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program (TVGPP), enacted by Governor JB Pritzker and implemented by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), directs additional funding to public school districts with the highest numbers of unfilled teaching positions, or teaching vacancies (Office of the Governor JB Pritzker, 2023). Beginning in the 2023-24 school year (SY24), the three-year pilot policy initiative distributed \$45 million to 170 participating districts in each of SY24 and SY25 and \$30 million in SY26, the initiative's third and final year (ISBE 2023b, 2025b). These districts serve approximately 870,000 students, or about half of all students enrolled in Illinois, while also carrying a disproportionate amount of the state's teaching vacancies. In SY23, the year when program eligibility criteria were established, teaching vacancies in these districts amounted to 80% of all teaching vacancies statewide.¹

Because teaching vacancies are concentrated in these 170 program-participating districts, which represent only 20% of districts across the state, the problem is one of equitable student access to quality education. Accordingly, an abundance of work from state agencies, advocacy organizations, and researchers has been devoted to understanding what educator shortages exist in Illinois, where they are located, who they affect, and why they occur. Every October, ISBE conducts their annual unfilled positions data collection, wherein districts report their numbers of open positions for instructional, administrative, and support roles (e.g., ISBE 2025c). Around the same time, from SY18 to SY25, the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools has administered a survey that gathers administrators' perspectives on the causes of educator shortages, temporary measures to fill open positions, and efforts to solve shortages, among other critical topics (e.g., ISBE et al., 2025). Advocacy groups such as Advance Illinois have put these data into context, both from examining the supply side, by tracking trends in enrollments and completions of teacher preparation programs (Advance Illinois, 2023), to examining demand, by mapping where teaching vacancies are concentrated and understanding which communities are most affected (Advance Illinois, 2025).

This body of work has shown that the causes of teaching vacancies in Illinois are multifaceted, stemming from declining numbers of teacher preparation program graduates (Advance Illinois, 2023) to attrition due to low wages and heavy workloads, among other factors (Beilstein et al., 2023; IARSS et al., 2023; ISBE et al., 2024, 2025). Not only do the causes of shortages in districts vary, so do their hiring needs. Our first-year evaluation of the TVGPP determined that the staffing challenges of program-participating districts are nuanced and localized (Beilstein & Bates, 2024). Different districts have different types of teaching vacancies, and often these positions are in areas of high need, such as special education and bilingual education.

Due to the localized nature of teaching vacancies, the TVGPP is designed to provide districts with wide latitude in implementing individualized strategic plans to improve teacher recruitment and retention, with the requirement that district decisions are based on staffing data and strategies supported by research (ISBE, n.d.). Despite such flexibility in how districts allocate program funding, the goal of the TVGPP is singular—to reduce the specific teaching vacancies found in participating districts' schools. And in light of the flexibility endowed by this initiative, our aim in this study is to understand how program participation has changed districts' abilities to recruit and retain teachers.

¹ Excluding Chicago Public Schools, teaching vacancies in program-participating districts amounted to 53% of all teaching vacancies statewide in SY23.

Study Objectives

In this qualitative report, we interviewed nine TVGPP districts that have demonstrated early success in reducing unfilled teaching positions (Beilstein et al., 2025). Using multiple sources of data, including budget details describing grant-related expenditures, unfilled positions, and interviews, we explore districts' experiences developing and implementing recruitment and retention strategies, assessments of staffing outcomes related to program participation, and plans for sustaining successful strategies beyond the duration of the TVGPP.

About the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program

The three-year pilot program began in SY24, during which ISBE identified 170 districts to participate across all three years. According to ISBE (2023b), program eligibility criteria were as follows: (1) Districts with the highest numbers of teaching vacancies in SY23 were prioritized; (2) Sixty percent of participating districts were to be rural (102 districts), and 40% urban (68 districts); and (3) Districts with more than adequate funding (classified as Tier 4, according to Illinois' Evidence-Based Funding, or EBF, formula) were ineligible.² The amount of program funding allocated to individual districts was based on numbers of unfilled teaching positions in SY23, with higher total vacancies resulting in larger awards (ISBE, 2025b; for ISBE's TVGPP funding formula, please refer to Appendix A). The award each district received was the same in SY24 and SY25. In SY26, awards were reduced by one-third (i.e., districts received two-thirds of their previous yearly amount). There was no option for non-participating districts to join in later years, as the entire three-year grant was based on SY23 unfilled positions data.

Method

For our second-year evaluation of the TVGPP, we adopted a two-phase, mixed methods explanatory design (Creswell & Clark, 2017), whereby the current qualitative study builds upon a qualitative analysis of district applications to receive grant funding (Beilstein & Bates, 2024) and a quantitative analysis of district outcomes associated with grant participation (Beilstein et al., 2025). Findings from both reports inform the current study's aims and methods. In this section, we detail the data sources used in the current study, the study sample, and analytical process.

Sampling Frame and Data Sources

One hundred and seventy districts, composed of 102 rural and 68 urban districts, were selected by ISBE into the TVGPP. For a comparison of program-participating districts (i.e., TVGPP districts) and non-participating districts (i.e., non-TVGPP districts) by EBF tier and urbanicity, please see Table 1 (ISBE, 2023a; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021). Regarding urbanicity, we applied locale classifications from NCES (2021) while following ISBE's categorization of rural and urban groups (2023b): Rural districts are those that meet NCES rural and town criteria (locale classifications 41, 42, 43, 31, 32, and 33), and urban districts meet suburban and city criteria (locale classifications 21, 22, 23, 11, 12, and 13).

² Districts' needs for state funding are determined by ISBE's EBF formula. Tier 1 districts are furthest from funding adequacy: These districts need and receive the most state funding. Tier 4 districts have more than adequate funding: These districts need and receive the least state funding. For more information, please see <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/ebfdistribution.aspx>.

TABLE 1. District characteristics of TVGPP and non-TVGPP districts (from Beilstein et al., 2025).

District Characteristics	TVGPP Districts (170 districts)	Non-TVGPP Districts (689 districts)
Evidence-Based Funding		
Tier 1	51.8% (88 districts)	35.1% (242 districts)
Tier 2	42.9% (73 districts)	27.4% (189 districts)
Tier 3	5.3% (9 districts)	8.7% (60 districts)
Tier 4	0.0% (0 districts)	27.0% (186 districts)
Locale		
Rural	60.0% (102 districts)	54.6% (376 districts)
Urban	40.0% (68 districts)	45.4% (313 districts)

Note: EBF funding tier information was not available for 12 non-TVGPP entities (ISBE, 2023a).

Selecting Districts with Early Success

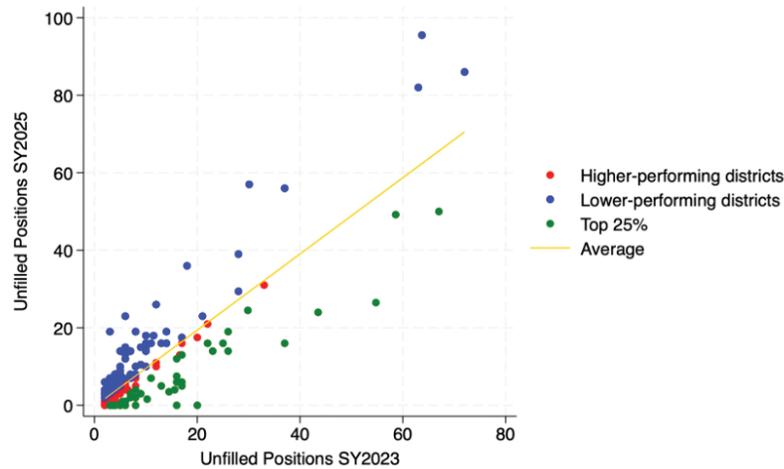
Starting with the 170 TVGPP districts, we applied two rounds of purposive sampling to select districts for interviews. In the first round, we conducted outlier sampling to identify districts with the greatest early success in reducing teaching vacancies (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), integrating findings from the preceding quantitative report. One analysis from that report examined variance in program-participating districts' performance by plotting the relationship between districts' number of unfilled teaching positions at baseline in SY23 relative to SY25 (Beilstein et al., 2025). We used unfilled teaching positions from SY25 because SY25 represents the first timepoint after which districts had one full year to enact recruitment and retention strategies.³

Figure 1 displays this relationship. In the figure, each dot is a district, and the average relationship between unfilled positions in SY23 and SY25 is shown by the yellow line.⁴ Districts above the line (in blue), referred to as lower-performing districts, had more unfilled positions in SY25 than expected, when compared to the sample average, given their unfilled positions in SY23. Conversely, districts below the line (in red and green), referred to as higher-performing districts, had fewer unfilled positions in SY25 than expected, given their unfilled positions in SY23. The 43 districts (in green) that were among the top 25% of higher-performing districts served as our initial sampling frame for districts with early success.

³ Using SY24 is too soon a timepoint to measure outcomes associated with the policy initiative's first year. During that year, TVGPP districts' enactment of recruitment and retention strategies co-occurred with the SY24 unfilled positions data collection. For further explanation, please refer to Beilstein et al. (2025).

⁴ Although Chicago Public Schools was included in this analysis, the district is not pictured due to interpretability of the figure.

FIGURE 1. Scatterplot depicting TVGPP districts' unfilled positions in SY23 and SY25 (from Beilstein et al., 2025).



Note: Data points in blue are TVGPP districts whose SY25 unfilled positions are higher than predicted, whereas data points in red are lower than predicted. Data points in green represent the top 25% of districts whose SY25 unfilled positions are lower than predicted.

Selecting Districts with Early Success for Maximum Variation

Next, from the top 25% of higher-performing districts, we applied maximum variation sampling so that a wide range of participating districts' experiences with the grant could be considered (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). We prioritized the following three dimensions:

1. *Geographical diversity*, which considers locale (NCES, 2021), region (Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS), n.d.), and relevant data elements (e.g., EBF tiers, student enrollment, student demographics, etc.) from the SY23 Illinois Report Card, version 5.0 (ISBE, 2023a). SY23 data are used because TVGPP eligibility was based on unfilled teaching positions from that year.
2. *Variation in districts' reported causes of teacher shortages*, drawing from our prior qualitative coding of district narratives (Beilstein & Bates, 2024). Appendix B Table B1 lists cause codes, and Table B2 displays districts' reported causes.
3. *Variation in districts' enacted recruitment and retention strategies*, drawing from our prior analysis of districts' budget details during the first (SY24) and second (SY25) years of the program (Beilstein et al., 2025). Appendix B Table B3 lists strategy codes, and Table B4 shows enacted strategies by dollar amount and percentage of total award spent on each strategy.

Sample

Forty-three districts comprised the top 25% of TVGPP districts with the greatest early success reducing teaching vacancies. After consulting with ISBE to narrow down that list and then applying purposive sampling along the three dimensions listed above, we reached out to 11 districts to participate in interviews. Nine districts (four rural, five urban) volunteered. Table 2 provides key characteristics for the nine interviewed districts, including locale, EBF tier, total teacher full-time equivalent (FTE), student enrollment, and unfilled teaching positions (ISBE 2023a, 2023c, 2025c; NCES, 2021). Appendix B Tables B2 and B4 provide an overview of the causes for and strategies to address teacher vacancies identified by these districts in their TVGPP applications. And Appendix B Tables B5 and B6 provide race/ethnicity information for teachers and students (ISBE, 2023a). The nine districts interviewed are located across the state, with at least one district in each of the six large service regions for IARSS (see Figure 2).

Interviews and Analysis

In fall 2025, nine semi-structured interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013), which lasted approximately 30 minutes, were conducted with district administrators representing a variety of roles, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, chief financial officers, teacher pathway and retention directors, curriculum coordinators, and principals.⁵ Interviews with districts focused on three topics: (1) identifying teaching vacancies and their causes; (2) developing and implementing recruitment and retention strategies to reduce teaching vacancies using grant funds; and (3) sustaining successful strategies beyond the duration of the grant. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

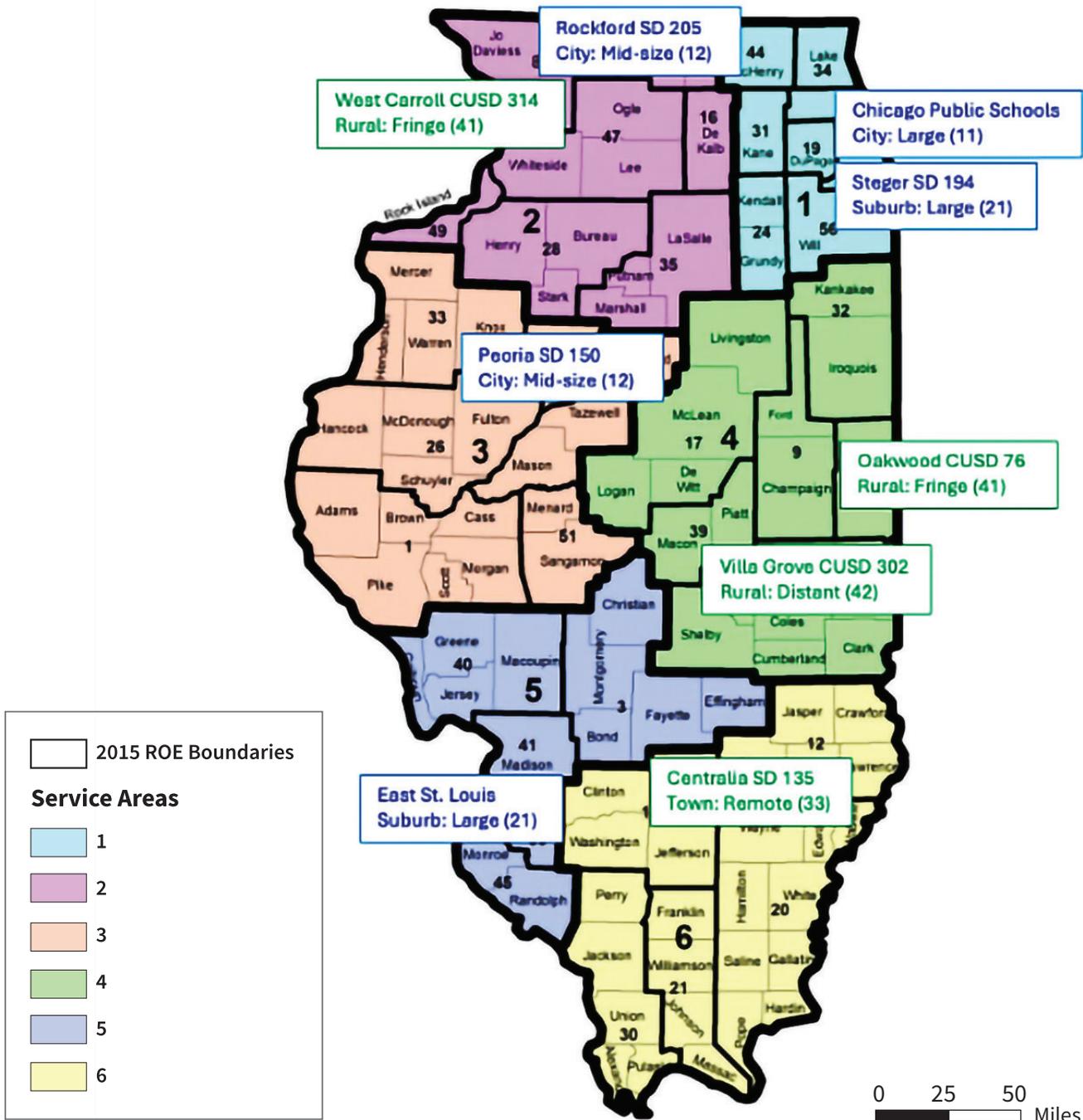
All interviews with districts were recorded and transcribed. Individual transcripts, along with interviewer notes, were deductively and inductively analyzed for themes related to the three topics of focus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, interviews across districts were compared to understand similarities and differences in districts' experiences with the pilot program. Interviewed districts also received a draft of the report to check for accuracy (McKim, 2023).

TABLE 2. Characteristics for TVGPP districts interviewed by locale, size, and unfilled teaching positions (ISBE, 2023a).

District	NCES Locale	County	Grades Served	EBF Tier	Total Teacher FTE	Student Enrollment	Unfilled Teaching Positions			
							SY23		SY25	
							Total Number	Vacancy Rate (%)	Total Number	Vacancy Rate (%)
Centralia SD 135	Town: Remote (33)	Marion	PK - 8	2	84	1,105	6	6.5	0	0.0
Chicago Public Schools	City: Large (11)	Cook	PK - 12	2	22, 145	319,769	1,094	4.7	954	3.9
East St Louis SD 189	Suburb: Large (21)	Saint Clair	PK - 12	3	388	4,582	26	6.3	14	3.5
Oakwood CUSD 76	Rural: Fringe (41)	Vermilion	PK -12	1	59	855	7	10.0	3	4.8
Peoria SD 150	City: Mid-size (12)	Peoria	PK - 12	1	831	12,605	55	6.0	27	3.1
Rockford SD 205	City: Mid-size (12)	Winnebago	PK -12	1	1,621	27,173	59	3.5	49	2.9
Steger SD 194	Suburb: Large (21)	Cook	PK - 8	1	99	1,399	11	9.2	7	7.0
Villa Grove CUSD 302	Rural: Distant (42)	Douglas	PK - 12	1	41	639	4	7.7	0	0.0
West Carroll CUSD 314	Rural: Fringe (41)	Carroll	PK -12	2	60	886	4	5.3	0	0.0

⁵ This evaluation project for the TVGPP, including the interviews conducted for this report, received non-human subjects research designation from the Office for Protection of Research Subjects at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

FIGURE 2. County and NCES (2021) locale of interviewed districts, organized by IARSS service regions. Districts in blue were classified by ISBE as urban, districts in green, rural.



Note: The map was adapted from IARSS (n.d.).

Results

The results section is divided into three parts, based on interview foci. Part 1 explores districts’ identified teaching vacancies and root causes. Part 2 examines how districts developed and implemented recruitment and retention strategies to reduce teaching vacancies. Part 3 looks ahead, considering districts’ visions of sustaining successful strategies beyond the duration of the grant. The results use terminology from our prior coding of districts’ reported causes of teaching vacancies as well as spending strategies (Beilstein & Bates, 2024; Beilstein et al., 2025). Definitions for these terms can be found in Appendix B, Tables B1 and B3, respectively. In each part, we summarize themes that arose from interviews with all nine participating districts. We also provide profiles that more deeply feature the localized contexts that shaped—and were shaped by—districts’ varied experiences with the TVGPP.

Part 1

Identifying Areas of Teacher Staffing Needs and Causes for Vacancies

The types of teaching positions that districts needed to fill as well as the causes for those vacancies varied across the nine districts interviewed for this study. Beginning with causes, these nine districts listed between four to five different causes of teaching vacancies, on average, in their applications to receive TVGPP funding during the grant’s first year (Appendix B Table B2). For eight of nine districts, these causes stemmed from difficulties with both teacher recruitment and retention. One district, Chicago Public Schools, reported causes related only to recruitment.

Districts said they used multiple sources of data to determine these causes—interviews with job applicants, interviews with teachers leaving the district, culture and climate surveys, hiring and staffing data, and more. Though the combination of causes that individual districts cited varied, most districts reported at least one of the following causes: noncompetitive salaries and benefits (coded as compensation), issues with location, and competition with neighboring districts. Additionally, half of participating districts cited receiving decreasing numbers of qualified applicants for open teaching positions, due in part to declining enrollments in teacher preparation programs. Another half of participating districts cited issues with attrition that magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, related to working conditions, classroom resources, leadership, and professional learning opportunities.

For young people, there are so many different [jobs] that didn’t exist 10, 15 years ago—that’s been our biggest shift. I’ve been an educator since 1997, and I can remember myself fighting for those positions. There were a million of us for 10 jobs. Now, it’s the total opposite.

– East St Louis SD 189

Similarly, Rockford SD 205 staff concluded that “it’s really been a supply issue, and there aren’t enough staff to backfill all the vacancies.” Rockford SD 205 also said that the realities of teaching have changed since the pandemic began, which has caused many teachers to “rethink their career path,” with newer teachers leaving the profession, and veteran teachers retiring earlier than anticipated.

Interviews with districts confirmed that the confluence of multiple causes has led to the specific teacher shortages they face. “Prior to COVID, it seemed like you had 20 applicants for every opening,” said staff from Steger SD 194. “And I think that changed for all of us, not just Steger. We had to start looking at what makes us more attractive, and what makes us a place where [teachers] want to be.”

Regarding teaching vacancies, participating districts expressed difficulty finding qualified teachers in areas that are historically “hard to staff,” such as special education, bilingual education, and early childhood education, as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Elementary school, middle school, arts, world languages, and physical education teaching positions were also noted by some districts as shortage areas, including Chicago Public Schools, Peoria SD 150, Rockford SD 205, Villa Grove CUSD 302, and West Carroll CUSD 314.

To illustrate, Centralia SD 135’s teaching vacancies were concentrated in special education, especially in middle school grades. “Special education was the area where we had constant turnover,” noted district staff. “We did look over data on unfilled positions, but it was a pretty glaring issue.” The district said that several special education teachers retired in recent years and finding qualified replacements was difficult. For another set of districts, like West Carroll CUSD 314 and Villa Grove CUSD 302, the same teaching vacancies went unfilled for multiple years. From year to year, West Carroll CUSD 314 carried over teaching vacancies in special education and high school Spanish. Villa Grove CUSD 302 did the same for special education, music, and foreign language.

For the last two school years, we have been able to fill our positions.
This has not been the case prior to the TVGPP.

– Villa Grove CUSD 302

The data infrastructure and timeline by which districts assess their teaching vacancies also differ among interviewed districts. East St Louis SD 189, for example, monitors their teaching vacancies monthly by updating the positions that become filled and adding job postings to their website.

Chicago Public Schools, as another example, monitors unfilled teaching positions daily, distributing reports to different units so that they can pinpoint the content areas where schools have vacancies and guide staffing initiatives, such as the Teacher Residency program. “For many years, we’ve been a passive consumer of whom universities are graduating,” said Chicago Public Schools staff. “Through multiple pathways, one of them that’s supported by the Teacher Vacancy Grant, we are now no longer a passive consumer. We can say, we have vacancies, we have vacancies in these specific areas, and we want to tackle them.”

And finally, Peoria SD 150 relies on multiple data streams, including job posting data, Illinois Report Card metrics, and district staffing dashboards. With TVGPP funding, Peoria SD 150 also hired Hanover Research, an external research firm, to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment involving focus groups and surveys with teachers. This analysis provided the district with insight into the root causes for their teaching vacancies. Taken together, this data informed the district’s recruitment and retention strategies. “These measures highlighted where problems were most concentrated, guiding us to prioritize investments such as mentoring supports to help new teachers remain in the profession and succeed,” explained Peoria SD 150 staff.

Part 2

Implementation of Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Three patterns emerged in how interviewed districts spent grant funding and, more specifically, where they prioritized their efforts (see Appendix B Table B4). Teacher recruitment was a focal point for Chicago Public Schools, Peoria SD 105, and Rockford SD 205, all of which primarily allocated grant funds to growing their workforce through pathway programs for aspiring teachers. These three districts also are among the largest districts in the state. Teacher retention, on the other hand, was of high importance to Oakwood CUSD 76 and Villa Grove CUSD 302, whose expenditures provided current teachers with classroom resources, support (i.e., teacher support, which includes implementation of climate and culture programs), and professional learning opportunities. Balancing recruitment and retention efforts was the main strategy for Centralia SD 135, East St Louis SD 189, West Carroll CUSD 314, and Steger SD 194. Steger SD 194, in particular, was unique in that they devoted all of their funding to the special compensation of newly recruited and current teachers.

Districts Primarily Focused on Recruitment Strategies

Within the districts that prioritized recruitment strategies, Chicago Public Schools, Rockford SD 205, and Peoria SD 105 each had different approaches and spending strategies. In this section, we present profiles organized by diversity of strategy allocation, from the least varied to the most.

Chicago Public Schools. Located in the northeast region of Illinois, Chicago Public Schools allocated their entire TVGPP allotment in the first and second years of the grant to their Teacher Residency program, a pathway program for aspiring educators pursuing either a bachelor's or a master's in teaching. When the program began seven years ago, district staff estimated that the initial cohort welcomed 12 residents. In recent years, Chicago Public Schools, which is the largest district in Illinois, enrolled its largest two cohorts, with approximately 225 residents in SY25 and 154 residents in SY26. The district attributed this growth, in part, to additional funding from the TVGPP.

“While residency isn’t the only strategy the district is employing to close these vacancies, it’s the largest strategy the district is employing,” district staff commented. “To say we have a pool of what was 200-plus resident teachers, and now, closer to 150... If we have 1-, 2-, 3-, 400 vacancies in special education per year. We’ve been chipping away at that.”

The Teacher Residency program offers two main pathways into the profession for aspiring teachers. Those with an associate's degree begin as a “teacher-in-training,” working in classrooms during the day and taking coursework at night. Chicago Public Schools refers to this year in the program as “year zero.” After year zero, teachers-in-training join those who have bachelor's degrees, and the cohort begins their term as teacher residents. This is “year one.” During year one, teacher residents undergo an immersive training program, working in a classroom under the guidance of a mentor for four days of the week and then taking coursework the remaining day. At the end of year one, residents earn either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree, depending on prior qualifications, and graduate as “ambassadors”. Ambassadors are placed in schools as licensed teachers the following year.⁶

“About two-thirds of our cohort are prior employees of CPS, with the majority being paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities and teaching assistants,” district staff said. “It’s really due to the targeted efforts of ... wanting to get out there and see who is within our schools, within our communities, already

⁶ Chicago Public Schools staff noted that ambassadors typically take more coursework to earn additional endorsements after completing the Teacher Residency program. Staff also shared that many ambassadors obtain dual endorsements. For example, residents pursuing early childhood credentials are also required to obtain special education endorsement.

doing the work, already familiar with our schools and neighborhoods, and saying, ‘Who wants to join this program?’ There’s been a lot of work to get out there into the communities.”

Teacher residents receive reduced tuition rates, opportunities for additional academic scholarships, as well as salary and benefits during years zero and one. In return, Chicago Public Schools requires residents to sign a three-year teaching commitment after completion of the program. “An overwhelming majority of the residents, typically 75% or higher, per cohort identify as people of color, which has been a big part in the shift in demographics over the last five, six years in the district,” reflected district staff. “The [TVGPP] funds have helped us tremendously, both as a district, and [representing the] many individuals that have gone through this program.”

District staff went on to share that there are “infinite stories” they know, “but even more that they don’t” about the reach of the Teacher Residency program and the TVGPP. District staff recalled two ambassadors, a married couple, who went through the program together. During year one, the couple welcomed a baby into their family. And, at the start of SY26, the couple headed into their second year of teaching.

Yes, [the Teacher Residency] program is closing vacancies, and yes, it’s improving retention. It’s also a strategy for upwards economic mobility. These were two paraprofessionals within CPS that went through this program, at the same time. They had a way, because the salary was paid for them, that they never saw before, to step up, become a teacher, and ... significantly increase their income while giving back to Chicago communities. Those stories, for me, are what’s pretty impactful.

– Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools had 1,094 unfilled teaching positions (4.7% vacancy rate) in SY23 (ISBE, 2023c) compared to 954 positions (3.9% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE, 2025c). Although ISBE’s unfilled teaching positions report for SY26 is not yet available, Chicago Public Schools reported a 2.5% vacancy rate for teaching staff at the start of the SY26 year (Vevea et al., 2025). We note that the district dropped their vacancies by 140 from SY23 to SY25, while increasing their overall teacher count by 856 (22,146 FTE in SY23 to 23,002 FTE in SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).⁷

Rockford SD 205. A midsize city in the northwest region of Illinois, Rockford SD 205 allocated 83% of their award to development of staff credentials, 7% to special compensation, and 9% to location stipends during the first two years of the TVGPP. Similar to Chicago Public Schools, Rockford SD 205 routed nearly all TVGPP funding to recruitment programs.

We didn’t use any of the [TVGPP] money for retention strategies, to be perfectly honest. We used them for recruitment strategies. That was really more of a need for us than retention. We were just really having a tough time getting young teachers to actually even look at the Rockford area.

– Rockford SD 205

⁷At the end of each district case study, we provide contextual data on district changes in unfilled and filled positions over the grant period. However, we caution that unfilled positions do not have a 1:1 correspondence with filled positions, as unfilled positions are often long-term needs in specific areas. For instance, a district could fill two long-term unfilled positions in special education, while also shrinking their overall teacher workforce by cutting positions in other areas.

Like many other districts, Rockford SD 205 identified special education and early childhood as shortage areas. However, unlike other districts, another large shortage area was elementary education. In response, they partnered with Northern Illinois University to build an accelerated pipeline, as part of a planning grant from Grow Your Own Illinois, specific to Rockford residents interested in pursuing teaching careers in elementary education. Rockford SD 205 expanded this existing pathway program with TVGPP funding.

Rockford SD 205 also tested out new recruitment strategies aimed at bringing in aspiring teachers from outside of the community. One new strategy was using TVGPP funding to pay student teachers a stipend of \$1,250 per month for a five-month placement. Another new strategy was offering housing allowances for student teachers who live more than 75 miles away. District staff found that out-of-town student teachers, in the past, sought affordable or free living situations, sometimes even “bunking up with a friend’s parents.” District staff wanted to provide student teachers an “opportunity to live in the community at the same time that they are student teaching,” and so, they rented 10 apartments in downtown Rockford for these student teachers to live in rent-free during their placement.

“There were a lot of really cool buildings in downtown Rockford that had been historically rehabbed,” district staff said. “[Student teachers] got to live in cool buildings in a vibrant, refurbished downtown. Also, it’s really easy to get around in Rockford. So, I think the [student teachers] really liked that too.”

In each of SY24 and SY25, Rockford SD 205 welcomed a cohort of about 40 student teachers. To encourage recruitment, the district also offered a student loan stipend of \$2,500 to student teachers who completed their placement and signed a contract for the next school year. Rockford SD 205’s expenditures on the student loan stipend decreased substantially from the first year to the second because the district did not find that type of special compensation to be “as effective as just paying student teachers.”

“We have [student teachers] asking to come to Rockford now,” district staff said. “We probably would have tried to figure out a way to offer even more of the housing allowances, because those were highly effective as well.”

Rockford SD 205 had 59 unfilled teaching positions (3.5% vacancy rate) in SY23, compared to 49 unfilled positions (2.9% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). They dropped their vacancies by 10 positions, while increasing their overall teacher workforce by 14 (1,621 positions in SY23 to 1,635 by SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

Peoria SD 150. Peoria SD 150, a midsize city in the midwest region in Illinois, allocated most of their TVGPP funding to recruitment efforts (35% on development of staff credentials, 32% on recruitment, and 11% on special compensation). Among the largest districts in the state, Peoria SD 150 expressed difficulty attracting and retaining new teachers, and so, they primarily directed program funding toward pipeline development in the high-need areas of special education, bilingual education, and STEM. “For one, we had a high turnover rate, but we also had a lot of new teachers who weren’t returning,” commented district staff. “So, we focused on our [recruitment of] first-year teachers and their retention.”

Peoria SD 150’s focus on the recruitment and retention of first-year teachers was multi-pronged. During the first year of their participation in the TVGPP, they offered signing bonuses, at \$2,000 per individual, to new hires and teachers who had been working in the district for three years or fewer. They paired that form of special compensation with another, retention bonuses, again at \$2,000 per individual, if those teachers returned to the district the following year.

In addition to financial incentives, the district invested in a comprehensive induction and mentoring program, using TVGPP funding to provide stipends to retired educators to serve as mentors for new teachers. The district said that mentors leveraged their experience to provide personalized guidance on topics such as classroom management, socioemotional learning, and instructional practice with the goal of reducing burnout during the critical early years of teaching. TVGPP funding was also allocated for tutoring to support teachers preparing for certification exams, especially those who struggled to pass required state licensure assessments. The district said that individualized tutoring increased certification success rates and helped retain qualified teachers.

The district also implemented ongoing professional learning, leadership development opportunities, and staff wellness initiatives to boost morale and job satisfaction among all teaching staff. Teacher support activities, such as new teacher events and after-school programming, were also offered to foster inclusion and community.

At the same time, Peoria SD 150 started new and scaled existing pathway programs that develop aspiring teachers, of all ages, from the community. For young aspiring teachers, the district directed TVGPP funding to launch an after-school program called Future Teacher Club whereby middle school students gain experience working with younger students on reading and mathematics in a teaching role. According to the district, this club is intended to “cultivate the next generation of local teachers,” by promoting early interest in the teaching profession, offering leadership development opportunities for staff, and connecting middle school students with mentoring from current educators as well as college students majoring in education.

The district allocated TVGPP funding to their dual credit education pathway for high schoolers interested in pursuing a teaching degree. This initiative allows high school students to begin their college coursework at Illinois Central College with transfer credits available to several four-year institutions, including Western Illinois University, Illinois State University, and Bradley University. Other pathway programs supported by the grant include Peoria SD 150’s Teacher Apprenticeship program through BloomBoard, which pays tuition and connects current district staff with an associate’s degree, such as paraprofessionals, to higher education institutions offering Professional Educator License programs. Their Teacher Ready program, an alternative certification program for aspiring teachers with a four-year degree, is a partnership with the University of West Florida and pays for the online coursework of aspiring teachers, many of whom currently work in Peoria SD 150 as long-term substitutes, as long as they commit to teaching in the district for three years after completion. Teacher Ready and the dual credit education pathway are two new initiatives that the district was able to implement because of TVGPP funding.

[The TVGPP] reinforced and expanded our existing grow-your-own approach. Building durable pipelines through dual credit pathways, grow-your-own programs, and preservice-to-hire alignment ... require a longer timeline. These efforts involve multi-year work, policy alignment, and collaboration with higher education institutions and employers.

– Peoria SD 150

The district reported 55 unfilled teaching positions (6.0% vacancy rate) in SY23 (ISBE, 2023c) compared to 27 positions (3.1% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE, 2025c). They dropped their vacancies by 28 positions, while increasing their overall teacher workforce by 25 (831 positions in SY23 to 856 by SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

Districts Primarily Focused on Retention Strategies

Two of the interviewed districts allocated most of their TVGPP awards toward efforts to retain current teaching staff, Oakwood CUSD 76 and Villa Grove CUSD 302. Both districts are rural; however, the mechanisms they enacted differ, as detailed in the profiles below.

Oakwood CUSD 76. Oakwood CUSD 76, a rural fringe district located in the midwest region of Illinois, allocated nearly all of their grant funding (97%) during the first two years of the TVGPP to two major initiatives, facilitating improvements to classroom supplies and resources available to teachers (18% on classroom resources) and enhancing school culture and support (79% on teacher support). Although neighboring districts were offering signing bonuses for some of the same positions that Oakwood CUSD 76 was trying to hire, like special education, Oakwood CUSD 76 decided against this approach. District staff said they worried such a strategy would distress current teachers, whose contracts did not include new-hire stipends. Instead, they invested in their current teachers' satisfaction, not just as a retention measure, but also as one of recruitment.

Oakwood CUSD 76 teachers, like many teachers across the state and country, voluntarily spend their own money on instructional supplies, which the district said can amount to several hundred dollars per teacher every year. With grant funding, Oakwood CUSD 76 extended stipends to teachers for the supplies they normally pay for—a new type of teacher support the district could not offer previously. “Teachers spend a lot of money out of pocket,” noted district staff. “If I am able to reimburse them, it’s one less thing they have to take out of their pockets.”

The district also allocated grant funds to purchase curricular items on teachers' “wish-lists” that were not covered by other funding streams from federal programs such as Title I and Title IV. The TVGPP allowed a veteran teacher of 25 years to purchase materials and supplies to create a reading nook, a long-desired classroom feature that neither the teacher, nor the district, had extra money to which to devote. “It brought more excitement to the fall,” district staff said. “Several teachers posted pictures of their classrooms on Facebook and social media. And they thanked me and our district, and that is one of the most important things.”

With TVGPP funding, Oakwood CUSD 76 also made substantive upgrades in classrooms. In the first year of the grant, improvements included new desks and chairs for teachers. In the second year, technological improvements, such as new computers for teachers, were prioritized. But due to decreased state funding in the TVGPP's third year, Oakwood CUSD 76 was unable to provide another large classroom upgrade. Instead, they said they will continue to allocate a portion of grant funds for teacher stipends on classroom supplies. “We will get 25 to 30 emails thanking us,” said district staff. “New teachers have said, ‘This is where I am supposed to be.’”

It has been very successful. People knew about us, and they heard the good things teachers were saying about us. Lots of new teachers were recommended to apply here from our current teachers. I firmly believe that investing in current staff helps us with recruitment more than anything else we can do.

– Oakwood CUSD 76

According to district staff, the culture and collegiality at Oakwood CUSD 76 was on a rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. And now, with the infusion of TVGPP money, morale in the district has improved even

more. Oakwood CUSD 76 invested a large portion of their grant award to show appreciation and support for teachers, from catered meals during teacher appreciation week to subsidizing daily hot lunches.

Oakwood CUSD 76 had 7 unfilled teaching positions (10.0% vacancy rate) in SY23, compared to 3 positions (4.8% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). At the start of SY26, district staff said their open teaching positions have been “completely full” since the end of the prior year. They dropped their vacancies by 4 positions, while increasing their overall teacher workforce by 5 (59 positions in SY23 to 64 by SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

Villa Grove CUSD 302. A rural distant district in mideastern Illinois, Villa Grove CUSD 302 cited low job satisfaction and stress as reasons for teacher attrition. According to the district, spillover of responsibilities from teaching vacancies left staff feeling overextended, and retention has been a “huge factor.” In response, the district allocated most of their TVGPP funding to retention-oriented strategies. Nearly one-fourth of their award went to special compensation in the form of a \$500 loyalty stipend to all returning teachers. An additional one-fourth went to classroom resources, which included furnishing all teachers with supplies and materials to set up their classrooms and purchasing new classroom technology and computers for teachers. District staff said that teachers have been very appreciative, noting that “sometimes it’s the small things that make a big difference.”

About 15% of Villa Grove CUSD 302’s TVGPP funding went to professional learning: The district created a formal mentoring program for new teachers, which covered salaries for time outside of contracted hours as well as materials. The district also expanded professional learning opportunities for current teachers. District staff noted a shift in the team culture as a result of the mentoring program, observing that staff were able to “make some really good connections.”

Finally, 11% of TVGPP funding went to teacher support in the form of culture-building activities. District staff commented that “those activities have really helped solidify more of a team atmosphere.”

We have had a much greater retention experience as a result of being able to implement some of these things. The take-home message is that it really has to fit your local need. And I think that is what this grant allowed—for us to identify and target the reason for our shortages and address those locally.

– Villa Grove CUSD 302

Villa Grove CUSD 302 had 4 unfilled teaching positions (7.7% vacancy rate) in SY23 and 0 unfilled positions (0% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). They dropped their vacancies by 4 positions, while increasing their overall teacher workforce by 7 (41 positions in SY23 to 48 by SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

Districts That Balanced Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Hiring bonuses were a common strategy deployed by the districts included in this section, Centralia SD 135, East St Louis SD 189, West Carroll CUSD 314, and Steger SD 194. But recruitment was not the sole focus of these districts’ TVGPP-based strategic plans. They also prioritized encouraging new and current teachers to stay. However, the mechanisms by which these districts enacted retention-based strategies varied, as highlighted in the profiles below.

Centralia SD 135. A remote town in the southeast region of the state, Centralia SD 135 used the TVGPP to target recruitment and retention of special education teachers, a chronic shortage area for the district. Their approach was multidimensional, and their spending diversified across recruitment and retention. A majority of TVGPP funding in years one and two was allocated to special compensation (32%) and development of staff credentials (38%), with remaining funds going to strategies such as classroom resources and professional learning, among others.

First, they began offering a \$3,000 special education teacher stipend, available to new and existing educators. This incentive encouraged one general education teacher to transfer to special education and increased the quality of their applicant pool. The incentive also encouraged a former special education teacher from Centralia SD 135 to return.

The special education teachers that we have attracted, and the last five that we have hired, have been very high quality. For a while, you hired who you could hire. We haven't had an abundance of applicants, but the ones that have applied have been highly qualified, and they're coming to us with some experience from other districts.

– Centralia SD 135

Second, TVGPP funding allowed them to start monthly meetings for new teachers. Led by instructional coaches, these meetings provide additional support and professional learning on topics such as curriculum, instruction, and socioemotional learning. In addition, new teachers were provided with a stipend to attend these meetings. “We’ve seen the importance of supporting new teachers, and we’ve been able to keep teachers who we might not have been able to hang on to without that support.”

Third, the district has, in the past, provided currently licensed staff tuition reimbursements for furthering their education by pursuing endorsements in areas of high need. They moved this item to TVGPP funding, and with more general funds available, Centralia SD 135 offered tuition reimbursements for non-licensed staff, mainly paraprofessionals, obtaining teaching degrees.

And finally, the district used TVGPP funding toward retention-focused efforts, such as upgrading classroom materials and resources and enhancing professional learning opportunities for current teachers.

Centralia SD 135 had 6 unfilled teaching positions (6.5% vacancy rate) in SY23 and 0 unfilled positions (0% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). They held steady from SY23 to SY25 with 84 total positions (ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

East St Louis SD 189. A large suburb in southwest Illinois, East St Louis SD 189 mainly used TVGPP funding for recruitment (48%) and support staff (30%), with smaller allotments going toward professional learning (13%), special compensation (8%), and teacher support (2%). In terms of recruitment, the TVGPP allowed the district to enhance their recruitment strategy and outreach. Expenditures included part of the salary for a recruitment and retention director, advertising campaigns, recruitment materials, career fairs, and a staffing platform. As a recruitment effort, the district also providing hiring bonuses, amounting to \$4,000 per individual, to new hires in hard-to-fill positions in areas like STEM and special education.

We have hired a plethora of teachers during career fairs, so that has definitely been one of the major things that we have done well with this grant. The bonuses were also very successful because we were able to fill, especially in our SPED department, a lot of those vacancies. Getting that extra bonus was a push for us.

– East St Louis SD 189

Retention-focused efforts were largely devoted to professional learning, and the district provided teacher leadership stipends for department heads and teacher leaders. The district enhanced their mentorship program with allocations covering stipends for mentors and their mentees as well as professional training in areas like socioemotional learning. Grant funding went toward stipends for affinity group facilitators (i.e., teacher support). The district also devoted a large portion of TVGPP funding to substitute pay (i.e., support staff) to provide time for teachers to plan, collaborate, and take part in mentorship programs.

In the third year of the grant, East St Louis SD 189 said they are testing out a new initiative by taking part in ISBE’s visiting international teacher program, where they will use TVGPP funding to pay for fees associated for sponsoring teachers from other countries.

“The Teacher Vacancy Grant has been a phenomenal thing for our school district, because some things we may have not been able to do due to budget cuts in the last couple of years,” reflected district staff.

East St Louis SD 189 had 26 unfilled teaching positions (6.3% vacancy rate) in SY23 and 14 unfilled positions (3.5% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). They dropped their vacancies by 12 positions, while also dropping their overall teaching workforce by 14 (from 388 positions in SY23 to 374 positions in SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

West Carroll CUSD 314. A rural fringe district in the northwest region of the state, West Carroll CUSD 314’s spending plan across the first two years of the TVGPP was diversified. The district allocated 33% to special compensation, 28% to the development of staff credentials, 23% to classroom resources, and remaining amounts on professional learning and recruitment. “We are a very small rural district, and there’s not a lot of activities for young people,” remarked district staff. “So, the draw is more, if you like to be around corn and cows, that’s what we have a lot of. Our draw has been to get students that grew up here to come back.”

With grant funding, West Carroll CUSD 314 offered \$2,000 signing bonuses for new teachers joining the district. They also refined new teacher mentorship programs, which in the past were “very fluid.” “This year, it’s much more structured,” commented district staff. “We’ve hired a retired principal to run the mentor program, and she is going to meet with them two times a month.” Available to new teachers in their first two years, the program will focus on curricular and instructional practices as well as management of parent-teacher conferences and finals.

Providing continuing education pathways for currently licensed and non-licensed staff was another priority for West Carroll CUSD 314. TVGPP funding has supported two teachers pursuing master’s degrees in education. “The teachers understand that we are investing in them, and so, we want them to stay here and invest in our kids,” said district staff. Grant funding also supported a paraprofessional participating in a special education residency program through Northern Illinois University’s Licensed Educator Accelerated Pathway program. Of the paraprofessional, the district said, “She’s raised her kids here, and her family is here, and so, I’m very excited this is going to happen for her. For us too, because we are going to get a great special education teacher out of the deal.”

Providing professional learning opportunities for current educators and staff was another investment made by the district. For example, they used TVGPP funding to provide special education teachers with an opportunity to attend a conference on working with autistic children in early childhood. In addition, the district replaced teachers' old and outdated laptops.

The grant gave us opportunities to reach out in areas that we hadn't before with some new tools. We never had signing bonuses; we never had the amount of tuition reimbursement or assistance previously. I mean, it's a little district, they don't have a whole lot of money. ...This was a good idea to try some things, and they worked.

– West Carroll CUSD 314

West Carroll CUSD 314 reported 4 unfilled teaching positions (5.3% vacancy rate) in SY23, compared to 0 unfilled positions (0% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). They dropped their vacancies by 4 positions, while increasing their overall teacher workforce by 2 (60 positions in SY23 to 62 by SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a).

Steger SD 194. Special compensation (96%) and recruitment (4%) comprised all of Steger SD 194's expenditures during the first two years of the grant. District staff said that hiring qualified teachers was difficult due to their location and their close proximity to several neighboring districts, as a large suburb 35 miles south of Chicago. Because competition was so high, Steger SD 194 noted that they lost potential applicants due to salary. To make the district more attractive, Steger SD 194 introduced signing bonuses for all new hires, at \$2,900 per individual, and retention bonuses for current teachers, at \$2,400 per individual.

“You can do all the work you want to build a culture internally,” reflected district staff. “But no one does anything without some kind of incentive. And so, what's the incentive to get them in the door? Because we know we have a pretty good culture, and we know we have a place where people want to stay.”

Steger SD 194 also devoted other, non-TVGPP funding to extend signing and retention bonuses to staff not covered by the pilot program. “It's important for us to build a culture that says, ‘No one's greater than the other,’” district staff expressed. “We value all employees, and so while the grant took care of a large portion of our employees, we ran this program across 100% of our employees and 100% of our offerings.” These forms of special compensation were a new recruitment and retention initiative for Steger SD 194.

Prior to the third year of TVGPP participation, Steger SD 194 said they realized that more needed to be done to fill open special education and bilingual education positions. District staff then evaluated current teachers' qualifications and thought, “Why go out and find somebody new when we have them here, and we know they'd be good in those roles?”

So, Steger SD 194 altered their strategy by offering a “student-services” stipend in lieu of signing and retention bonuses. And, according to the district, current teachers with the required credentials, who “traditionally stayed in general education classrooms,” requested to be transferred into open special education and bilingual education positions. The district then hired new teachers to replace general education positions.

“When we knew we would receive the grant, we had the dollar amount that we were going to get,” recalled district staff. “We started to develop how we're going to use it, and we used that to fuel a change in how we hired across the board—that wouldn't have been something that Steger SD 194 would have even entertained.”

Steger SD 194 reported 11 unfilled teaching positions (9.7% vacancy rate) in SY23, relative to 7 unfilled positions (7.0% vacancy rate) in SY25 (ISBE 2023c, 2025c). They dropped their vacancies by 4 positions, while increasing their overall teacher workforce by 1 (99 positions in SY23 to 100 by SY25; ISBE 2023a, 2025a). According to the district, they had 1 unfilled teaching position in September 2025 (for SY26).

Our goal wasn't to get you here in the door so that our October 1st unfilled position report looked good. Our goal was to find someone that's going to get tenure and make a career in Steger 194.

– Steger SD 194

Part 3

Sustainability of Recruitment and Retention Strategies Beyond the TVGPP

All interviewed districts expressed gratitude for the TVGPP to allow them the flexibility to expand existing recruitment and retention initiatives and the innovation to test out new strategies. All districts also expressed reluctance at needing to scale down, or suspend, these initiatives upon completion of the pilot program at the end of the current school year, SY26. Because total TVGPP funding was reduced in the third and final year, districts noted that they already had to deliberate which strategies to keep and which to eliminate.

“We knew there was an end date to this. So, while we’ve been able to maintain [special compensation], even with the reduction this year, we knew we needed to step it down,” commented Steger SD 194 staff. “We weren’t sure financially that we could sustain something like this moving forward.” Steger SD 194 used special compensation as a mechanism to improve their ability to hire and retain new teachers in a competitive market. In the meantime, the district has negotiated two 5.5% raises for Steger SD 194 staff, which they said hopefully “drives our starting salaries into a more competitive range, and maybe sustains all of the work that we’ve done. [The TVGPP] bought us the time to fix things to get us more competitive in the marketplace.”

Several districts said they will remain committed to the development of staff credentials and pathway programs. For example, Peoria SD 150 will continue to prioritize pipeline development programs “that build lasting capacity,” such as their dual credit courses and Teacher Ready program. The district anticipates gradually incorporating related costs into its general funding structure. However, the district noted that future funding allocations are subject to change: Certain positions supported by the TVGPP, such as retired teacher mentors and Future Teacher Club leaders, may need to be reevaluated at the conclusion of the pilot program, depending on available resources. Centralia SD 135 plans to make general funds available for teachers’ continuing education and for new teacher supports. The district envisions continuing special education stipends as well. “It’s [the TVGPP] been a great resource to be able to do some extra things and try some things out to attract [high quality] people and hang on to the good ones we have,” commented Centralia SD 135 staff.

Likewise, Rockford SD 205 foresees providing stipends to student teachers in coming years, though the housing allowances may likely need to be eliminated.

There’s no way that I will give up [the student teaching] program now that we’ve got it rolling. It’s an important part of our strategy now on how we’re going to get people to come to the community.

– Rockford SD 205

Rockford SD 205 has since observed that other districts have also begun compensating student teachers. “We do know now that some of the other suburban districts have queued in on what we’re doing, and they’re starting to pay student teachers out of their own funds,” said district staff. “We just don’t want to get lost in the shuffle here, because now other districts have started to copy what we’ve done.”

Villa Grove CUSD 302, which directed a large portion of TVGPP funding toward retention efforts, said that participation in the TVGPP “has brought to light definite strategies that have been most helpful.” The district will try to sustain their new teacher mentor program and teacher support activities. Expenditures related to providing teachers with classroom resources, however, will need to decrease at the end of the TVGPP. “It’s a pilot program,” commented staff from Villa Grove CUSD 302. “We won’t be able to sustain everything. Our budget just won’t allow for that.”

Conclusion

These interviews, as well as our prior studies (Beilstein & Bates, 2024; Beilstein et al., 2025), suggest that a singular blueprint cannot solve all of the staffing challenges districts across the state experience. Instead, the TVGPP granted districts the ability to serve as their own architects, to identify which areas of teacher staffing need bolstering and why, and to test individualized plans for remediation. Early results from this pilot program indicate that the latitude endowed to districts afforded them not only with needed funding, but also financial flexibility to target their specific staffing challenges, grounded in their local contexts and communities.

Coming up with those out-of-the-box ideas, I don’t know that we could have afforded to do it, had this grant not been available to us. It [came down to] how do we put it to use and spend it so that the funds get as close to the students’ seats as possible.

– Steger SD 194

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Appendix A

TVGPP Funding Formula

The funding formula ISBE used to allocate TVGPP funding to individual districts in SY24 to SY26 is below (see ISBE, 2025b).

Calculation of District Awards with “Variable-Base Funding” in SY24 and SY25

Districts selected for the program were allocated funding based on their total unfilled teaching positions in SY23. Because these totals ranged widely, ISBE created three different base funding levels to “allocate funding for selected districts with lower counts of unfilled teaching positions.” Additionally, districts received \$8,582.20 per reported unfilled teaching position.

$$\text{Total Award} = \text{Base} + (8,582.2 \times \text{count of unfilled teaching positions in SY23})$$

Base Options

- Eleven or more counts of unfilled teaching positions receive a \$200,000 base.
- Six to 10 counts of unfilled teaching positions receive a \$125,000 base.
- Fewer than six counts of unfilled teaching positions receive a \$75,000 base.

Examples

Chicago Public Schools, which reported 1,094 unfilled teaching positions in SY23
 $\$200,000 + (\$8,582.20 \times 1,094) = \$9,588,926.33$

Villa Grove CUSD 302, which reported 4 unfilled teaching positions in SY23
 $\$75,000 + (\$8,582.20 \times 4) = \$109,328.80$

Calculation of District Awards for SY26.

In SY26, districts received two-thirds of their SY24 and SY25 awards. Original awards were divided by three and then multiplied by two.

Examples

Chicago Public Schools
 $\$9,588,925.00 / 3 \times 2 = \$6,392,616.67$

Villa Grove CUSD 302
 $\$109,329.00 / 3 \times 2 = \$72,886.00$

Appendix B

Sampling and Sample Characteristics

TABLE B1. Codebook for reported causes of teaching vacancies found in district narratives (from Beilstein & Bates, 2024b).

Cause Category	Definition
Compensation	District offers noncompetitive salary, benefits, healthcare.
Student Characteristics	District points to perception that their specific student population poses unique challenges.
Student Behaviors	District points to specific student behaviors as a concern (e.g., low achievement, behavioral problems, socioemotional/trauma).
Location	The area surrounding the district deters recruitment and retention (e.g., area is too rural, no housing).
Neighboring Districts	District lost applicants and/or current teachers due to competition from neighboring districts' salary or other amenities.
Growth Opportunity	District does not provide financial support for teachers to further their education or licensure/credentials.
Lack of Qualified Teachers	District receives small number of qualified applicants.
Teacher Preparation	District cites issues with teacher preparation programs (e.g., district is too far from such programs, cannot place student teachers).
Recruitment Practices	District reports issues during the recruitment process (e.g., lack of places to advertise, need more staff to recruit).
Working Conditions	District cites untenable working conditions as a problem (e.g., high stress, heavy workload, burnt-out or underappreciated staff).
Classroom Resources	District curriculum is insufficient; district does not provide needed classroom supplies; classroom materials, technologies need updating.
Professional Learning	District does not provide teachers needed coaching, mentoring, or professional learning.
Attrition	Teachers left the district due to personal choices (e.g., moving closer to home), changing professions, or retired.
Leadership	District points to leadership as an area of concern (e.g., underdeveloped leadership, leadership turnover, vacancy in key leadership positions).

TABLE B3. Codebook for recruitment and retention strategies from districts’ budget details (from Beilstein et al., 2025).

Spending Strategy Category	Definition
Special Compensation	Implementation of short-term or one-time stipends (e.g., hiring and retention bonuses), often in hard-to-fill areas, including special education, bilingual education, science, and mathematics.
Development of Staff Credentials	Provision of formal growth opportunities for non-licensed and licensed staff to fulfill staffing needs, often in hard-to-fill areas.
Professional Learning	Provision of expanded teacher professional learning that includes instructional coaches and induction and mentoring programs.
Recruitment	Investing in recruitment practices such as advertising, hiring recruitment staff, attending/hosting recruitment fairs, and distributing referral bonuses, among other practices.
Teacher Support	Implementing self-care programs, affinity groups, staff celebrations, promotional apparel, facility improvements, activities to improve school climate (e.g., climate/culture surveys).
Classroom Resources	Distribution of stipends for classroom supplies (e.g., curriculum, technology, supplies for teachers and students, materials, etc).
Location	Distribution of stipends for relocation, housing, commute, general living costs, daycare.
Standard Compensation	Investments to increase teacher salary by improving healthcare coverage, covering full-time teachers’ salaries (e.g., special education teachers), amending salary scales to recognize teachers’ prior years of experience.
Support Staff	Hiring more staff, such as school support personnel, paraprofessionals, and substitutes, to provide additional support to teachers.

TABLE B4. TVGPP-related expenditures by recruitment and/or retention strategy for interviewed districts, accounting for the first and second years of the program (SY24 and SY25). For each district, rows designated with a \$ indicate the dollar amount that districts spent on a specific strategy, and rows designated with a % indicate the percentage of the total award spent per strategy.

District	Total Award (\$)	Recruitment and Retention Strategies					Recruitment Strategy	Retention Strategies		
		Special Compensation	Development of Staff Credentials	Standard Compensation	Support Staff	Location	Recruitment	Professional Learning	Teacher Support	Classroom Resources
Centralia SD 135	\$	114,120	134,304	14,418	0	0	8,814	24,505	8,000	48,825
	%	32	38	4	0	0	2	7	2	14
Chicago Public Schools	\$	0	15,684,811	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East St Louis SD 189	\$	68,540	0	0	252,695	0	405,604	105,925	13,510	0
	%	8	0	0	30	0	48	13	2	0
Oakwood CUSD 76	\$	0	855	0	0	0	2,200	8,610	290,872	67,613
	%	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	79	18
Peoria SD 150	\$	142,763	469,157	0	0	0	428,328	124,546	170,100	4,856
	%	11	35	0	0	0	32	9	13	0
Rockford SD 205	\$	101,839	1,170,743	0	0	131,650	0	1,602	0	0
	%	7	83	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Steger SD 194	\$	562,400	0	0	0	0	26,408	0	0	0
	%	96	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Villa Grove CUSD 302	\$	51,000	3,000	0	6,000	0	23,158	31,230	22,500	81,770
	%	23	1	0	3	0	11	14	10	37
West Carroll CUSD 314	\$	70,000	58,958	0	5,657	0	7,339	19,566	0	48,556
	%	33	28	0	3	0	3	9	0	23

TABLE B5. Percentage of teachers in participating TVGPP districts by race/ethnicity, in percentages (ISBE, 2023a).

District	White	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian	Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	American Indian and Alaska Native	Two or More Races	Unknown
Centralia SD 135	90.5	5.9			1.2			2.4
Chicago Public Schools	47.7	21.4	23.1	3.8	0.0	0.3	1.5	2.2
East St Louis SD 189	26.3	72.5	1.3					
Oakwood CUSD 76	100.0							
Peoria SD 150	80.4	10.1	3.7	4.6	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.4
Rockford SD 205	86.3	3.1	4.7	1.5	0.1	0.2	3.8	0.2
Steger SD 194	91.9	4.2	1.9	1.0				1.0
Villa Grove CUSD 302	95.1							4.9
West Carroll CUSD 314	89.3		1.7	3.3				5.7

Note: Some district totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

TABLE B6. Percentage of students in participating TVGPP districts by race/ethnicity, in percentages (ISBE, 2023a).

District	White	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian	Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	American Indian and Alaska Native	Two or More Races
Centralia SD 135	59.8	19.3	4.0				16.0
Chicago Public Schools	11.1	35.7	46.6	4.5	0.1	0.3	1.8
East St Louis SD 189	0.8	96.4	2.0				0.7
Oakwood CUSD 76	88.7	2.0	5.1				4.0
Peoria SD 150	19.3	56.7	13.1	1.0	0.2	0.3	9.4
Rockford SD 205	26.1	30.8	31.4	3.9	0.1	0.2	7.5
Steger SD 194	20.0	29.9	41.3				8.4
Villa Grove CUSD 302	90.0		6.4				3.0
West Carroll CUSD 314	85.4		9.5				4.1

Note: Some district totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Pre-interview Introduction and Consent

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. For these interviews, we are learning from TVGPP districts that have had early success in reducing unfilled teaching positions. The questions we will talk about relate to your administrative experiences with district operations and staffing. We will not be collecting any personal or identifying information. As such, when we write the report, we will refer to the district and not identify you personally.

Interview Questions

Some questions before we begin

- Is it ok if I record the zoom for analysis?
- Is it ok with us using portions of this interview as quotations in reports, presentations, and other forms of dissemination?

First, I was hoping to start with the causes of shortages in your district.

1. How did you use local data to identify shortage areas, as well as the causes of those shortages? How did these data inform development of spending strategies? Are there other ways you are using staffing data as the program progresses?

Next, let's talk about strategies for reducing teaching vacancies and implementation of grant funds.

2. What has your district's experience been in implementing recruitment and/or retention strategies as part of the TVGPP? How has participation in the TVGPP changed your district's abilities to implement recruitment and/or retention strategies?
3. How has the grant program aligned with current and historical approaches you have undertaken to solve teaching shortages in your schools?
4. Are there certain types of strategies that you found easier to implement than others?
5. What issues have you encountered and what actions were needed in response (e.g., have you needed to reconsider strategies you proposed in your applications because of these barriers)?
6. What, if any, new or amended strategies have you developed since your proposal?

To wrap, let's think about the future.

7. How do you envision sustaining these strategies beyond the duration of the TVGPP? What is possible? What might you have to put on hold?