

Meeting Minutes
Rural Education Advisory Council

Meeting No. 3
September 10, 2024
10 a.m.

Physical Location:
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. 1st Street, Springfield, Illinois 62702

Online:
<https://meet.goto.com/119711093>
Access Code: 119-711-093 * United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3212](tel:+18722403212)

Rural Education Advisory Council members present:

- David Ardrey, *Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools*
- Dr. Jennifer Garrison, *Vandalia CUSD 203*
- Jason Harper, *Rochelle Township High School District 212*
- Kristina Holloway, *Illinois State Board of Education*
- Lance Landeck, *St. Joseph CCSD 169*
- Dr. Laura O'Donnell, *Olympia CUSD 16*
- Jodi Scott, *ROE 33, Illinois Association of Regional School Superintendents*
- Patrick Twomey, *Macomb School District 185*

Rural Education Advisory Council members present via online meeting platform:

- Charley Cass, *Bethel Grade School District 82*

Rural Education Advisory Council members absent:

- Brenda Algandar, *Beardstown CUSD 15 Board of Education*
- Paula Daley, *Northbrook Middle School*
- Jenna Jiang, *Eldorado High School*

ISBE Staff present:

- Dr. Kimako Patterson, *Chief of Staff*
- Dr. Christine Paxson, *Executive Director, Improvement and Innovation*
- Dana Stoerger, *Executive Director, Legislative Affairs*
- Dr. Shawn Walsh, *Director, District/School Leadership*
- Dawn Frison-Cook, *Staff Facilitator*

Guests present:

- Tom Withee, *Goshen Consulting*

Guests present via online meeting platform:

- Jan Fitzsimmons

Chair: **Dr. Jennifer Garrison**
Vice Chair: **David Ardrey**

I. Pledge of Allegiance

Dr. Garrison called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

II. Welcome/Roll Call

After welcoming everyone to the third council meeting, Dr. Garrison asked for a roll call vote.

A voice roll call vote was taken:

Ms. Algandar, NO RESPONSE

Mr. Ardrey, HERE

Mr. Cass, HERE

Ms. Daley, NO RESPONSE

Dr. Garrison, HERE

Mr. Harper, HERE

Ms. Holloway, HERE

Ms. Jiang, NO RESPONSE

Mr. Landeck, HERE

Dr. O'Donnell, HERE

Ms. Scott, HERE

Dr. Twomey, HERE

Quorum was established.

III. Approval of April 30, 2024, Minutes

Dr. Garrison asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the April 30, 2024, meeting. Dr. Twomey made the motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and then carried via voice vote.

IV. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present who wished to speak.

V. ISBE Legislative Affairs -- Overview

Mr. Stoerger, executive director of ISBE's Legislative Affairs Department, gave a slideshow presentation regarding a general budget overview with a few major notes about large funding appropriations. He discussed appropriations that were approved, including Evidence-Based Funding, the Early Childhood Block Grant, Teacher Vacancy Grant, Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan, and after-school funding. He said three initiatives passed both chambers that were signed into law -- school board training (Senate Bill 2987); School Code and other statutory cleanup bills (SB 3156); and accelerated placement policies (House Bill 5250). He also mentioned two curricular mandates that passed into law-- one regarding fentanyl education for Grades 6-8 and the other regarding climate change.

In addition, Mr. Stoerger said three bills passed regarding teacher vacancies and private and public special education funding (SB 3606), creation of a state early childhood agency (SB 1), and school discipline policies (SB 1400 and HB 4175).

Dr. Garrison asked if any council member had questions, comments, or concerns. Dr. Twomey said he was always concerned about how to carve in time for mandates and the time it takes away from core instruction. Mr. Stoerger said he communicates that every time a new curriculum mandate occurs. Mr. Cass asked about past construction referenda that now require a school district to ask the legislature for a debt limit extension as long as a referendum passes. Mr. Stoerger said that he would have to check on percentage but believes it's beyond 15 percent. Mr. Cass said he believes this would be good for rural schools.

VI. Rural School Definition Update

Dr. Patterson said that she spoke with State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders. She said that Dr. Sanders wants to know how the definition of "rural" would impact the definitions of both "urban" and "suburban" schools, as well as the impact for both large and small school districts. She also said her research will focus on any impact with Title V and how data is reported to the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity. She added that the council will need to look at information with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in order to find out what the impact would be for the 852 school districts statewide.

Dr. Garrison asked if there is a national or state definition of urban and suburban. In response, Dr. Patterson said she believes that NCES has those definitions. Mr. Ardrey said the Large Unit District Association has a pretty clear definition on its end that is based on population and wondered how does its definition impact rural as well.

Members also expressed concern regarding a potential for a large number of students and schools to be left out of funding and grant eligibility and funding if definitions were to change. Mr. Landeck said he doesn't want a loss of current funding; he also said this council would need to come up with a definition for rural and small schools that wouldn't hamstring some schools or districts. Dr. Patterson said ISBE is sensitive to any potential loss and that's why the definition needs to be comprehensive, so the agency would be prepared if any school districts are affected.

Mr. Ardrey said he would reach out to John Glasgow from the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools to gather data. Dr. Patterson said that Dr. Sanders will attend a future council meeting. Dr. Garrison said Dr. Patterson and Mr. Ardrey will discuss this matter further and find out about establishing a council subcommittee to study definitions.

VII. Rural Support Lead Update

Ms. Holloway said she has been visiting Regional Offices of Education to support rural school districts and to get feedback regarding ongoing issues. She mentioned about a collaboration with ISBE's Multilingual/Language Development and CTE departments regarding establishing a one-page flowchart guide that would be available to district administrators who have multilingual and CTE students who are new to their district. She noted this idea came from a rural district discussion and could serve as a universal support for all districts. She added that information regarding the Rural Education Achievement Program can be found on the [ISBE Rural School Support webpage](#).

Mr. Ardrey noted that the subcommittee needs to look at the 31, 32, 33 locale codes as part of the rural definition. Dr. Garrison said that members are free to text or email her if interested in serving on the subcommittee. Dr. Twomey said that he would volunteer on the subcommittee.

VIII. Old Business

a. Teacher/Principal Shortage Retention

Ms. Scott introduced Tom Withee, a senior researcher at Goshen Consulting, saying the Illinois Association of Regional School Superintendents (IARSS) has used Goshen for a number of years to conduct the IARSS teacher shortage survey. Mr. Withee gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the impact of the educator shortage on rural schools.

After sharing his personal and professional background, Mr. Withee clarified that Goshen uses the NCES locale definitions for its educator shortage survey. He then presented data from ISBE pertaining to unfilled positions that were reported as of Oct. 1, 2023. When asked by Mr. Ardrey if a follow-up study was done since that time, Mr. Withee said Goshen does not do a follow-up study in the spring.

Mr. Withee then showed the percentage of positions reported either filled or remedied, according to the survey by IARSS. He said its survey included additional questions, such as a leader's perception of shortage severity, percentage of qualified applicants, number of applicants (fewer than five) per open position -- all delineated by rural, town, suburb, and city. He said that all of the data is available on an interactive dashboard on the IARSS website.

Council members discussed various challenging aspects of the educator shortage, including the principal shortage. Dr. Twomey asked how to encourage those with a Type 75 administrative certificate to come into the leadership field in rural schools. Mr. Withee said that Goshen has been doing the educator shortage survey for many years and has a large body of research available.

Dr. Garrison said her initial reaction is to make district leaders aware that this information is available. Dr. Twomey said this data highlights the work that this council is doing. Members also discussed the shortage of administrators and its impact in rural schools at the principal level. Dr. O'Donnell shared that, as a graduate teacher at Illinois State University's first course in the principal prep program, she noted that there were fewer than 10 students two years ago; now there are more than 30 enrolled. She said that believes the number skyrocketed due to the coursework and doctoral program all being done online.

Mr. Cass noted how close the numbers are regarding the educator shortage between rural and urban districts, but districts that are considered either town or suburban are doing better. Council members then shared about other types of programs statewide that help to address the educator and administrator shortages. Mr. Ardrey said that in private conversations with educators, salary is definitely in the minds of people. He emphasized the importance of equitable funding for schools.

Mr. Harper asked what the council's role should be and next steps to amplify this message. Council members agree there should be a push to get this dashboard in front of the superintendents. Ms. Scott said regional superintendents have access to this dashboard through IARSS. Dr. Garrison said there should be a multi-pronged approach through all state associations to get this information to superintendents; she asked Mr. Landeck to reach out to the Illinois Association of School Administrators.

Mr. Withee encouraged council members to visit the dashboard pages regarding solutions and proposed solutions provided by superintendents. He also said that Goshen is getting ready to launch this year's survey, and to send ideas, questions, or feedback to Ms. Scott, Ms. Holloway, or to him.

Dr. Garrison requested council members to look at the four solutions pages on the dashboard; she also said this will be discussed at the next meeting.

IX. New Business

Mr. Ardrey said he has been discussing this matter with Dr. Patterson and wanted to get the issue regarding the grant-making process on the table for further discussion. He said the timeline may be six to eight months from when grants are established at the beginning of the fiscal year to when Requests for Proposals go through the system. He also said the shorter timeline could be problematic for rural schools because more affluent districts can front the money and are ready to keep things moving when the funds are available. He added that he couldn't find anything from a statutory standpoint that would prohibit modifying the process in order to speed it up.

X. Future Meeting Date(s)

The date for the next meeting is set for 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 3, at the Illinois State Board of Education's Springfield Office.

XI. Adjournment

Mr. Harper made the motion to adjourn. Ms. Scott seconded the motion, which carried via voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 11:43 a.m.