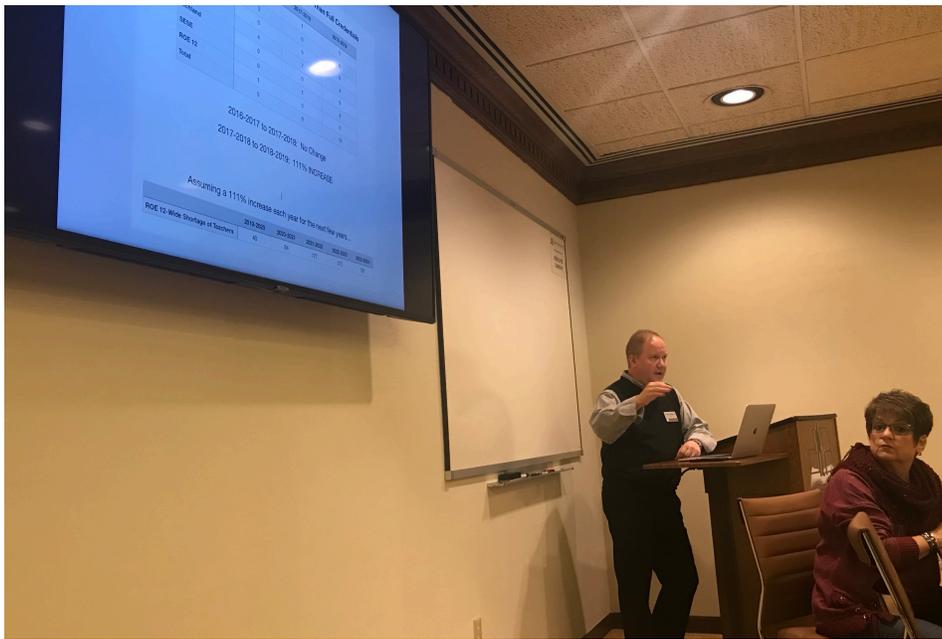


## Who Will Teach Our Kids: A Community Conversation



Community leaders from throughout Clay, Crawford, Jasper, Lawrence, and Richland Counties assembled at the Regional Office of Education in Robinson on the evening of Thursday, December 6, 2018 to hold a discussion on how our local communities can mitigate the impact of the ever-worsening teacher shortage crisis. Regional Superintendent of Schools Monte Newlin convened the meeting with the goal of brainstorming ideas to consider for implementation and for sharing with leaders at the university and state levels. “We invited folks from not only the education community, but from local government, business and industry, teachers’ unions, law enforcement, and health care.” said Newlin. “We needed to have a robust conversation from all segments of the community, with many varying perspectives represented.” A representative from Eastern Illinois University was also in attendance.



“While our ability to directly mitigate this issue on a state or federal level is limited, I am convinced that we wield tremendous potential for addressing the issue at the local level.”

-Monte Newlin, Regional Superintendent of Schools



“Our local schools are posting vacancies for teaching positions and getting zero applicants, even in subject areas typically abundant with candidates, such as P.E.”

-Monte Newlin, Regional Superintendent of Schools



**“I see the potential for IECC to offer dual credit teacher education courses that can potentially reduce a five-year teacher prep program down to four.”**

*-Rodney Raines, President  
Olney Central College*



**“Let’s be frank. If we’re going to get more teachers, we have to change the perception of the profession. We have to start promoting a career in teaching.”**

*-Jeff Patchett, Oblong CUSD 4  
Superintendent of Schools*

The program began with Newlin presenting the basic problem facing schools and how the lack of qualified teachers is beginning to have a negative impact on classrooms, not just statewide, but locally in the five-county region. “Between last school year and this school year, we have witnessed locally a 111% increase in the number of teachers working with less than full credentials.” said Newlin. “If this rate continues, it will prove to be unsustainable.” Without a healthy supply of qualified teachers, classes are often cancelled or combined, or converted to online instruction when possible. When a shortage is severe, and no other options exist, certain academic programs are discontinued. Newlin pointed out specific examples from the eleven public school districts served by ROE 12. “Instead of expanding opportunities for kids, the reality of the situation is forcing schools to limit opportunities—just the opposite of what we should be doing to prepare students for success in the 21st century.”

Eventually, a lack of teachers will force school reorganization either by consolidation or deactivation and annexation. According to Newlin, this crisis impacts small, rural school districts first, and hardest. A recent study conducted by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, illustrates in great detail the scope of the issue statewide and by region. Participants reviewed the study along with locally-collected data to gain an appreciation of the issue.

With an aging teacher workforce, upcoming retirements will leave classrooms without a teacher as enrollment in teacher education programs at the state's universities has plummeted. "Not very long ago, EIU was the second largest producer of teachers in the state and they had a total enrollment of close to 13,000." said Newlin. "Now, they have an enrollment that hovers around 7000." Brian Reid, of EIU's 'Grow Your Own' program, noted that Eastern was not alone in such decreases, and that all the state universities have experienced similar declines.

This meeting is the first in a series of conversations that are to take place at the regional level as part of EIU's 'Grow Your Own' initiative, which is designed to forge partnerships between state, regional, and local education entities to develop local implementation plans for recruitment and support that are tailored to the needs of the schools and communities in their region. It is hoped that the program can foster an environment that will allow for the implementation of regional recruitment plans that identify and provide information to prospective teaching candidates and connect existing professional development opportunities with the special needs of new rural teachers to bring new education models and evidence-based strategies to those candidates.

"This is not the last word, but the first conversation of many that we'll need to have if we are going to continue to provide the high-quality education that each of our students deserve. We owe it to them." said Newlin.

