

School District of New Berlin Addressing Concerns with Teacher Pipeline

New Berlin, Wis. - A recent report from the Public Policy Forum, *Help Wanted: An Analysis of the Public School Teacher Pipeline in Greater Milwaukee*, highlights concerns all too familiar to many.

The demography in Wisconsin and across the country has many industry sectors collaborating on innovative solutions to current and projected workforce challenges. The education sector is no different. While trend data suggests districts have managed the transitioning teacher workforce thus far, challenges are apparent on the horizon. Education leaders know a leaky talent pipeline has some significant consequences for students, families and the communities they serve.

According to the report, on average, teachers age 50 and over represent almost 30 percent of the workforce and will soon be eligible for retirement. Combined with the need to replace younger teachers who leave the profession, the reliance on a steady influx of entering teachers becomes more important to filling vacancies. Districts in Wisconsin that have leveraged the flexibility afforded through the passage of Act 10 have likely already weathered an initial transition of their staff as some nearing retirement age decided to leave the workforce due to uncertainty under the new rules.

The report's examination of enrollment and completion trends in Wisconsin preparation programs suggests the steady supply of teachers may be in jeopardy. As with program enrollments, Wisconsin's decline in completers is part of a larger national trend. Across the country, the number of teacher prep program completers is down 18.4 percent. The decline in program completers in Wisconsin is not as severe as other states or the country, but it does present challenges within our state.

The School District of New Berlin has been an active voice in addressing projected workforce needs across a variety of industry sectors.

"It is our collective work to help students develop a diverse set of talents that can fuel innovation and job creation while supporting projected workforce needs," Superintendent Joe Garza said. "It is critical we proactively address pending shortages in the teacher pipeline if we are to sustain the quality of education in our community, our region, and Wisconsin. We have to rethink the way we attract and retain top talent to the industry, but we also have to work differently than we have in the past. We can't do it alone, but we can certainly do our part."

SDNB provides a "Future Teachers" mentorship program for students interested in exploring careers in education. Students are paired with professional mentors in a variety of settings and assist with programming, small group instruction, differentiated literacy instruction, and more.

The "Future Teachers" program is being expanded to include additional rotations and external field experiences that expose students to the many different aspects of educating a broad spectrum of students in a manner that supports their unique needs: advanced learners, special education, career and technical education, academic and career planning, educational leadership, etc. Participating students will also have the opportunity to teach elementary students the Junior Achievement BizTown curriculum as part of their field experience. This allows students to qualify for Junior Achievement's scholarship program.

Students currently receive high school credit for their field experience and have the opportunity to earn additional credentials that can assist them in the college admissions and/or future employment process.

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In the 2016-17 school year, students involved in the “Future Teachers” program will also have the opportunity to earn college credit through the UW System and will be provided targeted guidance and support to start working on their post-secondary degree while still in high school.

“We want to connect students who are interested in education with passionate and accomplished educators,” Garza said. “We want them to better understand the art and science of educating a diverse set of learners vs. being merely consumers of their own education. We also want to provide them with guidance and support to minimize the time and cost to complete their degree.”

SDNB also supported the recent changes to experience-based licensure in an effort to attract additional mid-career professionals to teaching.

“In the absence of an immediate solution, districts will continue to have to fight for the few resources available,” said Nicole Jones, SDNB’s director of employee services. “Clearly, a win for the one district’s students means a loss for another’s. No district feels comfortable knowing they may put learning in jeopardy for students in neighboring school districts, but that has become the hiring climate for many of us.”

Jones added that SDNB, in part thanks to information gained through one-on-one interviews with staff members, is actively exploring various strategies to attract and retain top talent. Those strategies include improvements to the district’s teacher induction and peer support programs; revising the compensation model to reward and support professional growth; and providing additional opportunities for leadership development.

“We want to continually improve our staff experience to ensure that our team wants to continue to work for the School District of New Berlin,” Jones added.

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