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## **Moore Public Schools Combat Teacher Shortage Concerns Through Collegiate Partnerships and Mentorship Efforts**

MOORE, OK. – Moore Public Schools (MPS) increases efforts to recruit and retain quality teachers through additional partnerships with state colleges for student-teaching opportunities. The district also provides teacher mentorship through dedicated personnel, including Instructional Resource Specialists.

The teacher shortage has been a growing concern nationwide for the past few years with some contributing factors being lack of adequate support, training, funding, and respect for the profession.

“Our Administration continues to seek ways to support our current educators and also encourage those who are on a pathway to become a teacher. We appreciate our collegiate partnerships, which some date back many decades, and some are new this school year. These relationships provide a pipeline for students from obtaining their certification to having their own classroom,” said Asst. Superintendent of Human Resources, Johnny Bailey.

MPS Administration welcomes 15 student-teacher partnerships with the following universities: Cameron University, East Central Oklahoma State University, Langston University, Mid-America Christian University, Northeastern State University, Oklahoma Baptist University, Oklahoma Christian University, Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma State University, Randall University, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma, and the University of Science and Arts Oklahoma.

Student-teachers are provided mentorships with tenured and high-quality district teachers. In the early stages of their collegiate experience, students can participate in classroom observations and practicums while they obtain their education degree. This provides student-teachers with exposure and a window into their future career.

“Often, we have the first opportunity to hire quality graduates because they have been in our schools as a student-teacher. They have developed relationships with principals and fellow teachers. Principals have the chance to observe their interactions with students, and it is not uncommon for them to be hired by the district and requested by that principal if they have an open position,” said Asst. Supt. Johnny Bailey.

The past several years, Moore Public Schools has hired a pool of unassigned candidates throughout the year, many of whom have completed their student-teaching with the district. The new educators are then placed in one of the 35 schools by June 1, which allows them the summer to prepare for the first year of teaching.

MPS has continued to welcome student-teachers during the 2020-2021 school year during the health crisis. With the district being one of few that resumed school in-person on the original date, August 13, 2020, student-teachers continue training in brick-and-mortar with students and teachers. Administration requires that everyone follows current health and safety protocols on district property.

“In normal school years, we understand the tremendous roles our educators serve – not only teacher, but also mentor, counselor, and biggest supporter. With the many challenges we currently face in the classroom from the health crisis, social unrest, mental and emotional concerns, and so much more – it is imperative that we provide much-needed tools for our new to MPS teachers,” said Superintendent, Dr. Robert Romines.

Beginning last school year, the district created two new Instruction Resource Specialist positions to provide much-needed guidance and support for new teachers. Kelley Gappa works with PreK-6 grade teachers and Kyle Kent works with 7-12 grade teachers.

Both Gappa and Kent mentor new teachers, those who are new to MPS and/or new to the teaching profession regardless of certification pathway – traditional, alternative, or emergency. They assist teachers and principals to ensure district and state requirements are met. The specialists also train and equip new teachers with tools needed to confidently serve and grow in their new position.

“Between the pipeline to the classroom and much-needed mentorship once in the classroom, we are hoping to not only recruit and retain quality educators in our classrooms, but also increase interest in the teaching profession and grow the workforce. We simply cannot provide a quality education without quality educators,” said Supt. Romines.

Moore Public Schools currently has approximately 24,000 students between grades PreK-12, 35 schools, and more than 2,700 staff members.

According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s, “Oklahoma Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2018,” there was an overall downward trend in educator supply with 52,493 teaching workforce in the 2012-2013 school year to 50,598 in the 2017-2018 school year. Statewide in Oklahoma, we lost almost 2,000 educators during that six-year period and gained more than 22,000 students.

Online source:

<https://sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Oklahoma%20Teacher%20Supply%20and%20Demand%20Report%202018%20February%20Update.pdf>

There are many state and federal programs to assist Education majors. For a list of resources, visit: <https://www.okhighered.org/otc/tseip.shtml>.

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