

CGHS program inspires students to teach

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Cottage Grove High School (CGHS) has been providing students with a pathway to education careers for the past four years and is beginning to see hometown returns on its efforts.

The school's Teacher Cadet Program encourages high school students to consider a career in education by offering exposure to a range of introductory education concepts through Lane Community College (LCC) and more than 40 hours of field work.

"It's the course that you take so that you can get into a teacher licensure program," said Geriann Walker, CGHS science teacher and instructor for the course. "So it's a nice, broad overview of teaching and learning."

Beginning with 12 students in its first year, the CGHS teacher cadet course has grown to include its current 14 students per year, positions which are awarded in a competitive application process.

"We've had more students apply than we have spots for," Walker said.

The Teacher Cadet class is the last step of the school's teacher education pathway, which includes the LCC courses Introductory Child Development and Early Childhood Education.

The program also comes with time in real classroom environments where cadets can observe teachers and learners at a full range of grade levels.

"It also allows for exploration of trauma in students' backgrounds and developing trauma-informed practices in the classroom and it allows for all these hours in the field," said Walker, who also coordinates all field experience hours for the students.

Now a national curriculum, the Teacher Cadet Program was first piloted in South Carolina in the mid-1980s and has grown to be adopted by dozens of states. The curriculum and instructor training are provided by CERRA (Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement) out of South Carolina.

For CGHS, the program began in 2016. Walker has been the program's instructor since its inception.



COURTESY PHOTO

Teacher cadet Kyleigh Walker-Joseph, a junior at CGHS, joins children for unstructured play.

'Grow Your Own' Teachers

Bringing the program to CGHS was largely motivated by reports of teacher shortages in Oregon.

The Oregon Department of Education, in its latest teacher shortage report, highlighted a significant shortage in specific disciplines and districts.

"While research indicates that teacher shortages exist, it also indicates that they should not be characterized as a statewide crisis," reads the report. "Rather, teacher shortages are a series of smaller, localized concerns."

The report identified special education, physical education, health, math and Spanish as potential shortage areas and pointed to more rural counties as being vulnerable to shortages of highly qualified teachers.

South Lane School District (SLSD) has felt the impact of the shortage not only locally, but in its statewide recruitment searches as well.

"I guess there are two ways to look at it," said Interim Assistant Superintendent Brian McCasline. "There is a shortage of teachers, especially in mathematics and special education. The state may say that it is localized, but there aren't enough teachers with

specific licenses. Since we are outside the Portland/Salem area, we see more of a shortage; but statewide, we don't have enough teachers to fill positions.

"In South Lane, we have worked hard to recruit across the state each year to make sure that we are able to draw good candidates for these hard-to-fill positions."

A looming wave of retirees has also caused concern. According to the State of Oregon Employment Department's 2013-2017 estimates, about 26 percent of the education, training and library workforce was over 55.

By 2027, around 123,000 jobs are projected to open

up in these fields and 82 percent of the Oregon education workforce is expected to turn over.

"They're referring to it as the 'Silver Tsunami,'" said Walker. "There were a lot of cuts to education during the recession, so there weren't a lot of people feeding into the pipeline at the time. And yet we have all these people who are retiring and exiting."

Paying for school, a four-year degree requirement and a steep learning curve are a few of the factors which may be impeding entry into the profession, Walker said.

Creating teacher education pathways has been one way to get ahead of a future short-

age and decrease barriers.

"They're based on what we call a 'Grow Your Own' model," said Walker. "Students come up through our school district system, they know our community, they know the people in our community and they have interest in becoming educators in our community."

By providing opportunities to develop pre-professional educator skills early and keeping connected with students after graduation, the hope is that students will return for practicum hours or student teaching and possi-

bly become teachers in their hometown.

"There's a lot of research that says students respond better when they have adults in front of them who reflect who they are and what their community is," Walker said. "So this is a really powerful model."

Now four years running, the program is beginning to see returns on this idea.

"A student from our second-year cohort was just on our high school campus doing teacher licensure practicum hours with one of our English teachers," said Walker. "And the intention is to come back here and do student teaching and to work here. That's the Grow Your Own model."

Another past teacher cadet is currently working as a part-time education assistant at Bohemia Elementary School while studying to become a teacher.

And more may be coming. LCC has been considering reinstating an education assistant certificate option. For students who earn college credit as they progress through the high school program, a graduating teacher cadet would be only two courses shy of getting that certificate.

The Curriculum

With a wide range of educational opportunities on the table, the program attracts not only those who want to be teachers, but also educators of different capacities.

"For example, I have a student who's interested in working with law enforcement and adjudicated youth," said Walker. "I have another

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