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Shortage In the Schools

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COMMITTED TO THE CLASS: Even with the challenges of the past two years, Rylee Ramos '20, a dual-language second-grade teacher, feels passionate about teaching.

Shortage in the schools

Combating the feared teacher exodus by preparing teachers quickly and completely

By Eric A. Howald and Kathy Foss

In 2019, the Economic Policy Institute wrote that the “teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought.” Its four-part series, titled “The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market,” outlined issues with recruiting and retaining qualified individuals; low teacher pay; demoralizing school environments; and a lack of training, career support and professional development as major concerns in the field. Debates pertaining to school choice, critical race theory, standardized curricula and school shootings constantly make headlines. And this was before the COVID-19 pandemic challenged the profession in ways never imagined.

As schools prepare for the upcoming school year, concern is growing. Will teachers leave their classrooms – and all these challenges – behind? Despite the crises on multiple fronts, and numerous reports to the contrary, a feared teacher exodus hasn’t yet materialized ... yet.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are more than 4 million full-time and part-time teachers in the United States, and it is an industry that is growing. The Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates 7-8% growth in teaching jobs from 2020-30, with more than 300,000 people joining the profession each year. One of those teachers was Rylee Ramos '20.

Preparing for the changing classroom

Ramos entered the workforce as a teacher not long after the COVID-19 pandemic upended the world. He ended up teaching his dual-language second-grade class online for most of the year, and finally met his students face-to-face in spring 2021.

“In my first year, I was overwhelmed, as all parties were, during comprehensive distance learning; however, I was lucky to have a strong second-grade team that came together to support each other,” Ramos said. “Last year was challenging because apart from the COVID guidelines, continuing to learn our curriculum and creating and developing classroom routines, my class also had an adventurous year learning two languages.”

While change has been the only constant during the start of his career at McMinnville’s Columbus Elementary School, Ramos still felt prepared.

“All of my professors talked about what they did for self-care ... I learned how to care for my needs, which helped me create a culture of learning in my classroom that values diversity, values inclusivity and that values the whole child.” – Rylee Ramos '20

“All of my professors talked about what they did for self-care,” Ramos said. “It was important to know that there are ways to step back and have boundaries. I learned how to care for my needs, which helped me create a culture of learning in my classroom that values diversity, values inclusivity and that values the whole child.”

Education remains one of Linfield’s strongest majors, consistently falling in the top four majors, and there is no sign of that stopping anytime soon. The percentage of Linfield students graduating with education degrees rose in the 2021-22 school year. Between 2016 and 2021, education degrees comprised approximately 10.66% of overall degrees. In 2021-22, education degrees accounted for 13% of undergraduate degrees at Linfield. That hasn’t meant that it has become any easier to train the next generation of teachers. Linfield’s Department of Education has nimbly adapted its curriculum to meet the changing demands of the classroom and industry.

“We pay close attention to how things are going in schools,” said Carrie Kondor, Linfield’s director of education. “We incorporated an added focus on social-emotional learning, wellness and mindfulness to our coursework. We want students to practice it



“In addition to our traditional undergraduate bachelor’s degree, we wanted to make an education degree accessible to someone who is working – someone with a bachelor’s degree in a different field or who is working in the school as a paraprofessional or teaching assistant.”

– Professor Carrie Kondor, director of education

while they are at Linfield, and by extension, in their classrooms.”

With 90 percent of educators saying that burnout was a serious problem in a January 2022 survey by the National Association of Educators (NEA), integrating self-care and wellness into its curriculum has not been a luxury for Linfield’s teacher preparation program – it’s been a necessity.

“We’ve gone through a traumatic time and training new teachers to be able to support a child – and themselves – through that is critical,” Kondor said.

“The hardest part of entering the teaching profession right now has been finding healthy boundaries between school and my personal life,” Ramos said. “Our workload is heavy, and with so many responsibilities, you feel the need to work at home to be a competent teacher.”

But, it hasn’t prevented dedicated teachers like Ramos from returning to the classroom.

“I chose to be a teacher to make a difference in my community, bridge the lack of Spanish-speaking teachers that are vital to bilingual education and to support our larger population of Latinx students and families. With my family being from Mexico and growing up in poverty, I’ve seen the inequities in our systems that hold so many people back from accomplishing their goals or even believing they can be successful,” Ramos said. “Although teaching the last few years has come with a series of challenges and uncontrollable circumstances, I want to be a strong male and bilingual role model that is able to instill a love for learning, cultures and languages in my students.”

Creating new pathways into teaching

However, with the continuing stressors and challenges facing the teaching profession, many still worry that the long-feared exodus will still occur. How much becomes too much?

In the NEA’s January survey, 55% of respondents said that they plan to leave the industry sooner than planned because of

the pandemic. This could hit some states, like Oregon, especially hard where 25% of the current K-12 workforce are already eligible to retire.

In an effort to increase the rate of licensed teachers in the state, Linfield added a new pathway for adult learners to enter the profession.

“In addition to our traditional undergraduate bachelor’s degree, we wanted to make an education degree accessible to someone who is working – someone with a bachelor’s degree in a different field or who is working in the school as a paraprofessional or teaching assistant,” Kondor said.

Partnering with community colleges, Linfield has created a 2+2 program, allowing students to take two years of classes at their local community college and two years at Linfield taking prelicensure courses. Depending on the student’s background, someone with a non-education bachelor’s degree could finish a degree for their teacher’s license in around 20 months, Kondor said.

Courses are offered in-person during the evenings or available remotely, and Linfield works with districts to allow students working in schools to complete clinical experiences at work.

“We set up technology in specific spaces creating really high-tech classrooms,” Kondor said. “Students can join remotely during a live class and feel that they are immersed in the classroom setting, interacting with other students.”

What’s more, Linfield has added a dual endorsement for students interested in graduating with a special education endorsement as well as an elementary education endorsement, helping graduates manage classrooms with all types of learners.

“Linfield prepares teachers for success throughout their careers by prioritizing wellness, reflection, culturally responsive practices and relationship building,” Kondor said. “Strong partnerships with local districts and the community have been vital to growing our thriving and responsive teacher education program.”



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