

## **Can a High School Course Help to Solve a State's Teacher Shortage?** **By Brenda Iasevoli, published in Education Week on July 21, 2017 10:13 AM**

Utah has discovered a new pool of prospective teachers: high school students. This fall, two high schools in Provo, Utah will offer students in grades 10 through 12 an introductory course called Careers in Education I, with the aim of enticing young people into the teaching profession. Students will observe teachers, shadow principals, study up on education philosophy, and explore issues of equity, all while reflecting on their own classroom experiences.

If students show an interest in more in-depth courses on teaching, the high schools will design Careers in Education II and III to provide more hands-on training in lesson planning and delivery.

The ultimate goal is to replicate the Careers in Education course in high schools across the state in hopes of eventually solving a massive teacher shortage. The problem has become so bad that the state's board of education last year created an **alternative pathway to teacher licensure**. Bottom line: You no longer need a teaching degree to teach in Utah.

Here's what the state is up against: Forty-two percent of teachers quit before putting in five years, and more than one-third head for the exit at the end of their first year, according to the Utah State Office of Education. The number of prospective teachers graduating from Utah universities has also taken a downturn, while the state's student population rises every year by about 10,000 students, **reports the Deseret News**.

Provo doesn't itself have a teacher shortage, thanks in part to two local universities with preparation programs, but the courses could end up benefiting areas of the state in dire need of applicants like Salt Lake City, about 40 minutes north of Provo. The much larger Salt Lake City School District, which has about 25,000 students compared with Provo's nearly 17,000, reported 100 classes without full-time teachers this past school year.

"Multiply that by 30 students per classroom, and that's the total number of students who maybe had an iffy education for that year," said Superintendent of Provo City School District Keith Rittel.

Brigham Young University in Provo and Utah Valley University in nearby Orem have both expressed interest in the Careers in Education course for its potential to boost their teacher-prep program rosters. Students can even earn credits at Utah Valley University for taking the high school courses.

But are there **enough local high school students to fill the gaps**? Rittel, who spearheaded the effort, hopes the course can generate enough interest in teaching among youth who already have a stake in the community, and who may be more likely to remain there long-term.

Rittel knows the course can attract students because he's seen it firsthand as principal of two schools in Washington state that offered a similar course. The key is to find dynamic teachers who students are drawn to.

"If you have someone who is grumpy and not feeling good about their whole life as a teacher, well, that's not exactly going to inspire kids," he said. "But if you get teachers who have good communication skills, a positive outlook, interact well with kids, they'll attract new students like crazy and the program will thrive."

Rittel envisions that the course will first introduce students to the kinds of professionals who work in education from teacher aides to principals and even the state superintendent. At this introductory level, students will observe classrooms often and reflect on teaching techniques that work. Teachers may present case studies that ask students how they might respond to a particular problem such as the majority of students failing a test that the teacher developed to assess learning of a particular unit.

"We want to get kids thinking from a variety of different angles," Rittel explained. "Rather than just saying the students are stupid, the conclusion might be the unit could have been taught better. This won't be a course where students can spit out facts on a test.

There will be a lot of reflection on practice."

Wrapped up in all of this, of course, are **issues of equity**. He says that those who complete the course should come away with the understanding that the students sitting in a classroom on any given day come from a variety of backgrounds—whether it be from a family with one child or 12, one where all the kids take skiing lessons, or one where kids have never been to the zoo.

"The philosophy that I preach: we teach the kids we have; we don't teach the kids we wish we had," Rittel said. "We have a moral obligation to make sure they are learning. We don't have the choice not to work with certain types of kids."

By the end of the course, students will begin to develop their own philosophy that may spark the desire to one day put that philosophy into practice, or so Rittel hopes.

"Maybe one reason kids aren't going into teaching is we haven't offered this course," Rittel said. "We don't promote ourselves, but it's about time we start."