

Last-minute resignations, hirings underscore ongoing shift toward younger educators in district

The Port Washington-Saukville School Board last week accepted four last-minute resignations and hired 13 new staff members — most of them teachers — in what has been another year of significant turnover in the district.

“We’re seeing a shift in our teaching population” toward younger educators, Supt. Michael Weber said.

In the last three years, the district has hired 56 staff members, 29% of its 196 employees.

The majority of district employees — 136, or 69% — were hired in 2000 or later.

Retirements have been a significant factor in the turnover in recent years, particularly with changes to retirement criteria and benefits, but administrators are now seeing educators leave the district for other reasons.

“We have very few staff members now who qualify for retirement,” Weber said.

Of the 23 vacancies the district has had to address this summer, only five were due to retirements. Three employees left the district to take jobs closer to their homes while two resigned because their spouses took jobs outside the area. Another three employees left teaching to take jobs in other fields, and two are on leave without pay to pursue advanced education.

One employee, school psychologist Jason Gahan, resigned to become the director of special education and a school psychologist in the Cedar Grove-Belgium School District.

The number of resignations and the variety of reasons for them have some school officials wondering if the district’s teachers, and educators in general, are becoming more transient.

“As we move forward — and I hope this isn’t the case — we could see more transitions in some of our positions,” School Board President Jim Eden said during an Aug. 12 board meeting.

Weber said it’s too early to tell if the district can expect significant turnover every year.

“One year doesn’t make a trend, but it could be that there will be a more transient workforce in Wisconsin,” he said.

PW-S school staff turnover continues

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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Weber said although there is a natural tendency to perceive turnover as negative, that's not necessarily the case. A rigorous hiring practice enacted in 2000, which considers traditional factors such as education and experience but also includes tests like the teacher perceiver and positive attitude survey to measure more intangible qualifications, have ensured the district's teaching corps is highly qualified, he said.

"It's sad to see good, longtime employees leave, but things happen and you have to move on," he said. "The key for this district is that when we do move on, we hire people who are just as strong, and that directly benefits our schools and students."

The resignations accepted by the board on Aug. 12 were from high school German teacher Alissa Miller, Saukville Elementary School reading specialist Nancy Kurten, Dunwiddie Elementary School psychologist Casie Rindfleisch-Schulz and high school communications teacher Peggy Wirtz-Olsen.

The board assessed a \$500 penalty to each employee because their resignations were submitted after the June 15 deadline.

"This is one of the few times I remember that we've had these types of changes this close to the school year," Eden said.

The educators hired by the board last week are:

- Elyse Bicher, fourth grade; and Jessica Greger, second grade, at Dunwiddie Elementary School.
- Megan Fay, early childhood; Cynthia Hampton, third grade; and Christie Shelvik, fourth grade; at Lincoln Elementary School.
- Sara Smith, fourth grade, at Saukville Elementary School.
- Cara Shea, cognitive disabilities, at Thomas Jefferson Middle School.
- Aaron Konitzer, health and physical education; Laura Laudebach, library media; Ingrid Pfeiffer, German; Katherine Jaessig, German; Kelly Hadacek, communications; and Stephan Hellman, physics; at Port Washington High School.

Konitzer and Jaessig will also teach at the middle school.

The School Board also authorized the creation of three new positions recommended by administrators. They are a teacher for a 10th section of kindergarten to handle high enrollment, a special education teacher to replace a paraprofessional who resigned and is needed to handle a high demand for services at Lincoln Elementary School, which hosts the district's early childhood program, and a unique social worker position.

The social worker will be an employee of the Ozaukee County Human Services Department

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but spend 40% of his or her time working for the district, primarily at Lincoln and Dunwiddie elementary schools.

Director of Special Services Duane Woelfel said the cost of the social worker, which is not to exceed \$25,000, will be less expensive than contracting for services as the district has done in the past.