

## EDUCATION

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## **Facing limited supply, Pattonville hopes to create its own pipeline for minority teachers**

By Terri Waters Special to the Post-Dispatch 10 hrs ago

The Pattonville School District wants to add more teachers who reflect its diverse student population. The majority of students are African American, Hispanic, or other ethnicities, yet 92 percent of the teaching staff is white.

On Tuesday the school board heard updates from the district's human resources staff on efforts to recruit more minority teachers. Assistant Superintendent Barry Nelson said that many Missouri school districts, especially in the St. Louis area, are focusing on increasing the diversity of their teaching staff.

"Being a diverse district, it's important for our kids to see themselves reflected in our workforce, to have teachers with similar backgrounds as their own," Nelson said.

Finding ethnically diverse teachers may prove difficult, however. According to the Missouri Department of Higher Education, 85 percent of the state's students earning bachelor's degrees in education in 2017 were white. Only 5 percent were black, and even fewer were Hispanic or Asian.

"We just don't have enough diverse candidates walking in the door," Nelson told the Post-Dispatch. "In Missouri, we definitely have some challenges in getting (minority) people into the education field."

The district's recruitment plan includes promoting teaching as a career choice to high school students. Students can job shadow Pattonville and Special School District educators to learn more about various teaching roles. Last summer,

minority students participated in a program at Missouri State University, where they took ACT preparation courses, met with advisers and admissions counselors, and talked with students majoring in education.

Next semester, Nelson's staff will host Google Hangouts — live online sessions — for recent Pattonville graduates pursuing careers in education. They'll offer help on building resumes, applying and interviewing for teaching positions, and best practices for new teachers.

"We want to help them get out there and be successful teachers, whether at Pattonville or other districts. This is also a way to stay in touch with our graduates, with the possibility of hiring them to teach in Pattonville," he said.

The district is also encouraging current minority support staff to become teachers, offering tuition reimbursement and highlighting the various paths they can take to achieve certification. In addition, Pattonville has launched incentives for long-term teachers, at the top of the salary scale, to leave their positions, freeing up money to hire 50 new teachers for 2019-2020 school year. That's twice the number the district normally hires each year.

It's not just a numbers game, Nelson said. "Our goal is to hire the very best people that we can, while making an extra effort to find minority candidates," he said. "We have to be aggressive, especially for those candidates who are in highest demand."

Nelson noted that the district is interested in minority candidates of all backgrounds. "We have kids from all across the world that go here. If we can find candidates of color to come and make a difference for our kids, that's important to us," he said.

The district has also focused on cultural diversity training for current teachers, helping them to build relationships with students and parents of different racial or ethnic backgrounds.

“If you come here to teach, you’re going to have to work with all kids, so we equip teachers with skills they need – how to problem-solve, work through things,” Nelson said. “It takes a lot of work to help everybody understand each other and work together.”