

Proposed raise addresses teacher shortage

By Garrett Pearlman

Although 17 Durant teachers could see a bigger paycheck from a recent proposal by Governor Kim Reynolds to use state monies to increase teacher pay in Iowa school districts, there is a downside to it as well.

Gov. Reynolds and the Iowa Legislature are finally recognizing that there is a crisis in the education field as school districts in Iowa find it harder and harder to recruit and retain teachers.

A neighboring school district, Tipton, even recently considered switching to a four-day school week to entice teachers to work in its district.

“We are definitely on the edge of a crisis, and we’ve been able to fill positions here in Durant and in Wilton next door, but I know several schools in more rural parts of the state that have not been able to fill positions,” said Durant Superintendent Mr. Joe Burnett.

He said the state is in a “tough spot now, but I do think it has the potential to get a lot worse.”

“We’re very fortunate where we’re located,” he said, noting Durant can attract teachers who want to live in a larger urban area like the Quad Cities and Iowa City but still teach in a rural district. “But even then, our applicant pool has gotten very small over the last five to ten years.”

In the 2024 Condition of State Address Jan. 9, Gov. Kim Reynolds asked that \$96 million in state money be used to increase new and veteran teacher salaries.

The plan would increase the starting pay for first-year teachers to \$50,000. In addition to that, Gov. Reynolds proposed

that teachers with 12 years of experience make a minimum of \$62,000.

Mr. Burnett is happy to receive the proposed state money for teacher salaries as it would increase the pay for eight Durant teachers to \$50,000, and nine veteran teachers would receive a pay bump to \$62,000.

“I think anytime we can improve the educational setting, which means getting more qualified people and more young people interested in becoming teachers, I think it is a good thing,” he said.

Mr. Burnett believes the governor’s proposal can entice younger people to pursue a job in the education field.

“You know, the starting teacher salary would be more competitive in the overall job market at that number,” he said.

Tipton Elementary School Principal Bryan Woods, who is leading a committee that is studying the four-day school week, said the district was not able to fill one of its vacancies last summer in the middle school, and it had to modify the schedule as a result.

“We were able to absorb it, but a teacher is taking an overload of students because of it,” he said.

In the last four years, Tipton has had around 12 teachers resign each year, and the district has gone from averaging five to six applications for an open position to less than three.

Mr. Woods said that his district competes with schools in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and Davenport for teachers and hoped the four-day school week might help.

“We have 47 percent of our staff commute in,” he said.

“Instead of applying to Iowa City

and taking the position when they know that they’re going to do the same job for more money, maybe we’re able to retain those individuals and instead of leaving, they would be willing to stay for a four-day week.”

Tipton shelved the four-day school week for the 2024-2025 school year because two-thirds of the community did not support it in a recent survey. However, the school board and a calendar committee would like to continue studying the option, according to Mr. Woods.

He described the teacher shortage as urgent and unsettling.

“We have our most valuable resource, which is our kids, and we have one or zero applicants for positions that are going to be influencing these young minds in our future,” he said.

Gov. Reynolds also talked about the value of teachers in her address.

“Aside from parents, teachers are some of the most influential figures in a child’s life,” Gov. Reynolds said. “They push them to be their best, set them on a path to success, and impart a love of learning that can change their lives for the better.”

Gov. Reynolds also wants to bring more young students into the education field.

“We want younger Iowans to see the teaching profession as something to aspire to,” said Gov. Reynolds. “It’s one of the highest callings one can have, so let’s make sure that teacher pay sends that message.”

Mr. Curtis Lilienthal, a first-year teacher at Durant High School, sees how Gov. Reynolds’ proposal could get more young people into the education field, and the Iowa Legislature is showing initiative to help with the teaching shortage.

“The one kind of knock that I’ve heard on teaching from a lot of people outside of the education world is the pay, that they aren’t necessarily getting paid enough,” Mr. Lilienthal said. “That’s what a lot of people I know at least kind of stayed away from education due to that.”

Mr. Lilienthal believes that increasing the salary of teachers may add more skilled teaching applicants per open position.

“I think if the salary kind of jumps, then that could lead to more people being interested in teaching, and that would make it so it would be a little easier for other schools to find new teachers,” he said.



Photo by Nic Poston
First-year English teacher Mr. Curtis Lilienthal helps out eighth grader Owen DeLong.

Musical From page 1

that our cast is excellent, and they would step in as needed to make modifications to the script and storyline if someone is sick.”

Jones has done rehearsals after

school and little extra things to help her get ready for the musical.

“When I was first cast as Annie, I went home and watched the movie as a re-

flection of the Annie character,” said Jones. “When I’m not in rehearsal practices, I am running lines at home and singing in my room or around the house.”

The role of Annie is Jones’ first lead role since she joined the drama club.

“I am generally on the quiet side, so there will be some nerves,” said Jones. “It will be a great opportunity for growth for me though. But I also really love acting and singing, so I am extremely excited to be able to get up and do something I love.”

Richards has had star roles in other Durant plays as well. He was a Russian waiter in *Million Dollar Meatballs* and the victim in *And Then There Was One*. The dif-

ference with *Annie Jr.* is that it is a musical, but this doesn’t affect Richards.

“Singing is something I’m very familiar with, so I don’t have a problem acting and singing at the same time,” said Richards.

Jones, on the other hand, feels that a musical provides an added challenge.

“With a play you will run lines and memorize lines while choreographing the act with everyone in the play,” she said. “A musical is all that plus dancing and singing. Musicals are more challenging in my opinion.”

Richards, who has experience performing in front of a crowd, said he doesn’t get nervous on stage anymore.

“I’ve done it a lot, and I think right before, I get nervous, but when I actually start to perform, all that nervousness goes away,” said Richards.

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correctly at school.

Johns Hopkins sleep expert Laura Storni, M.D., said that teens “experience a natural shift in circadian rhythm.”

The website added, “This makes it more difficult for them to fall asleep before 11 p.m. Add in early school start times and an increase in homework, extracurricular activities and sometimes a part-time job, and sleep deprivation in teens becomes common.”

An upperclassman at Durant said he has missed a lot of school because he often works from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. after school and doesn’t get to sleep until 1 a.m. Then he has to get up at 7 a.m. for school the next day, leaving him with only six hours of sleep.

So he usually gets to school late or leaves school early, so he has time to sleep and do homework. This caused him to fail two classes last semester due to absences.

Mr. Diederichs said that if a student is chronically absent, “it can lead to a pattern later in life that can decrease the chances of the person succeeding in the workforce.”

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Today's Dentistry coach of the month

Coach Daniel Knipfel has been coaching the Durant boys’ track for seven years, with five of those as head coach. What made him want to coach track was that he saw a lot of potential in Durant’s athletes. Coach Knipfel’s team won a state title in the 4x400-meter relay last season, and he is very proud of the athletes’ hard work and determination to achieve that success. It was a great feeling watching them win.




Knipfel




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Liberty Trust & Savings Bank's club member of the month



Junior Jada Jones has been in the drama club at Durant High School since her freshman year. She is playing the lead role in the musical *Annie Jr.* in March. Jones has participated in theater since she was 11 years old. What she enjoys most about theater is singing.



Jones