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Maryland teacher shortage could create challenges for parents



BY AVA-JOYE BURNETT

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BALTIMORE -- Much of the United States is struggling with an extreme teacher shortage and Maryland is no exception.

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Cheryl Bost, the teachers' union president, has described the exodus as "a crisis."

"I've been in this business for over 30 years, and I've never seen such shortages across the state. There might be doubling up of classes which doesn't help our students with their learning," said Cheryl Bost, president of the Maryland State Education Association.

On Tuesday, the State Board of Education passed a measure that would allow more than 3,000 educators to continue teaching with a conditional teacher certificate for another two years as long as the teachers meet certain other requirements.

Those requirements include completing "a minimum of 12 semester hours of course work toward the professional certificate during the 2-year period; and a qualifying score on the basic skills teacher certification test if required under Regulation," according to the details posted on the State Board of Education's website.

"There is no quick fix to this," State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury explained. "There are things we can do in the long term and things we can do in the short term."

COVID created a realignment in many things, Choudhury explained when addressing the thousands of teachers who've decided to leave the field. The pandemic made many people "reassess what they wanted to do," he said.

Some local districts are aggressively going after teachers and offering contracts even before an opening. Howard County raised its base pay from \$50,000 to \$56,000.

Baltimore County Public Schools hired at least 450 teachers since March. But school district staff knew that hundreds of more teachers would be needed before the start of school. So the district has been trying to beat neighboring counties by quickly offering teachers jobs—sometimes on the same day.

Although the state is rushing to fill teacher slots, there could be challenges for parents when school starts.

"So, our parents will notice it first with the bus drivers who maybe aren't going to be available to pick up their students on day one for school," Boat said. "Then they'll notice it as they're trying to get their classes scheduled. Maybe in our secretarial staff and cafeteria and custodians. And then they're definitely going to see it in the teacher ranks."

In a presentation to board members on Tuesday, Choudhury presented data that said fewer people are completing a teacher education program in recent years—some statistics say there's a 33% decline.

The Maryland State Education Association is now pushing to raise the base pay for teachers to \$60,000 by the fiscal year 2024.

Teachers with conditional teacher certificates who were recently released because they did not have sufficient time to pass the Praxis exam may have an opportunity to be brought back on board since the waiver was extended for another two years.

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