

POCAHONTAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“PREPARING TODAY FOR TOMORROW”

Recruitment and Retention Plan 2023- 2024



The Pocahontas School District has gone through a surge of demographic change in the last decade. This demographic change has been accompanied with a shift within our community with the addition of a major corporate presence in the poultry processing industry. The \$160million plus investment into our community has been accompanied by many opportunities for our school district. Through the 2016-2017 school year the student population of Pocahontas school district were fairly consistent hovering around 91% each year with Hispanic students accounting for nearly half (4.3%) of the remaining 9%. During that year students self-reporting as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander logged in at 0.3%. State records show that in 2017-2018 students and families self-reporting as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander jumped to 5.6%, an overall increase of nearly 18%. Since this time, the number of Pacific Islander students has continued to grow. As of 2022-2023, the Pocahontas school district demographics have shifted to 78% white, 13% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, with 8% self-reporting in an ethnicity that includes Hispanic or as a student of two or more races. It is safe to say the district diversity has increased dramatically (43%) in a short time. While the student racial makeup of Pocahontas schools has changed in the last seven years, the racial demographics of the teaching staff has remained fairly constant. At the completion of the most recent school year, the certified teaching staff included 170 teachers with 169 self-reporting as white and no certified Hawaiian/Pacific Island teacher on staff. The classified staff reflects a similar trend. The district reported 116 classified staff members. Of the classified staff, one (1) self-reported as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, one (1) self-reported as Black/African-American, one (1) Hispanic and the remaining 112 self-reported as White. Administrative positions within the district are currently filled with white majority candidates. As these positions become available in the future, all efforts will be made to identify and encourage minority candidates to apply. Clearly the racial makeup of our staff is behind the racial makeup of our students.

During the most recent school year (2022-2023), the Pocahontas district implemented a recruitment and retention bonus of \$6000 for certified staff and \$4000 for classified staff. The breakdown of this bonus structure recognized teachers and staff members who returned in Jan '23 to complete the second semester as well as teachers and staff who signed their 2023-2024 contract. Other factors impacting teacher retention may include leadership change at the central office level and educator fatigue that remains on this end of the COVID pandemic. In 2022-2023, resignations from our district were 17 certified and 19 classified employees.

Current district leadership has implemented a structure to elicit information and feedback from district employees. This feedback is anonymous at the participant level and identifiable at the building level. Much of the feedback regarding future recruitment and retention is rooted in the culture that currently exists within each building and across the district. Organizational culture has been identified as a vital component of the future of teacher retention in Pocahontas. It is the goal of this ongoing three year rolling plan to ensure movement over the course of the plan toward a future that includes teachers

leaving the district primarily due to retirements and a staff that more accurately reflects the current and future student body within Pocahontas Schools.

RETENTION/RECRUITMENT GOALS:

1. To retain 93% (the baseline from 2022-2023 was 90%) of our experienced educators from year to year that have been trained in the #Pocahontas_Is professional structure.
2. To recruit a high-quality teaching, administrative, and classified workforce as well as increase our minority/ethnic staff diversity to more adequately reflect our community.
3. To develop a classified workforce that reflects our community/student population by addressing department needs within the district to include food & nutrition, bus drivers, custodians, and maintenance staff.

ACTIONS/STEPS TO MEET GOALS:

- ARP ESSER III funds will be used (board approved in Nov '22) to provide certified staff returning to the Pocahontas School District for the 2023-2024 school year with additional compensation in the amount of \$3000. This was distributed to each certified employee who returned a signed contract with the Pocahontas School District prior to June 10, 2023 and return to fulfill that contract in August '23 for the preparation of the coming school year.
- ARP ESSER III funds will be used (board approved in Nov '22) to provide classified staff returning to the Pocahontas School District for the 2023-2024 school year with additional compensation in the amount of \$2000. This was distributed to each certified employee who returned a signed contract with the Pocahontas School District prior to June 10, 2023 and return to fulfill that contract in August '23 for the preparation of the coming school year.
- Pocahontas School District will utilize teacher education programs from around the state, including but not limited to: Arkansas State, Henderson, University of Arkansas, Arkansas Tech, UCA, UALR, and Harding to recruit a diverse staff capable of teaching and at the same time reflecting the growing diversity of our community.
- Representatives from Pocahontas will attend job fairs as available across the state.
- Pocahontas School District will work to provide opportunities for students to participate in “grow your own” programs and partnerships through local institutions and organizations to improve the number of PHS student choosing education as a future.
- PSD leadership will engage with the City of Pocahontas and the Chamber of Commerce to develop a relationship that enables new teachers to choose our community as their #Pocahontas_Is the place to live.

CURRENT PROGRESS:

The Pocahontas three-year plan dated August '22 lists three “action steps” for the goal of having 80% of vacancies filled by May 1 and 100% filled by August 1. Both steps one and three were utilized and will continue to be utilized, however the goals have been removed from this iteration of the plan as a way to strengthen and provide more targeted and strategic actions to accomplish the overall goals listed above.

Goal two related to retention of staff and focused on a supportive work environment. This remains a focus but has been adapted to be included as action steps necessary to achieve the larger goal of retention of staff. As noted in the narrative above, steps have already

been put into place that seek to check in monthly with staff to provide administrators with feedback concerning the culture of the organization as well as provide information related to the perceptions of the overall workforce.

Goal three was designed to support students in choosing teaching as their profession of the future. Evidence to be used to show progress included new program initiatives and tracking student data. Currently it is too early to draw conclusions about whether or not the plan is achieving the desired results.

Evaluation of Plan:

Evaluation of the enclosed plan will include, but not be limited to:

1. Collection and analysis of data related to the gap between staff demographics and student demographics when compared to data from the previous year. Success will be evaluated by the size of the gap between one year and the next. Trend data will also be addressed as appropriate.
2. Staff attendance & contract completion data
 - a. Staff attendance will be monitored during the school year by semester.
 - b. Data will be collected concerning the number and frequency of staff members who fulfill and honor contracts each year.
3. Numbers of teachers and staff who choose to return to Pocahontas year over year.

The plan herein will be reviewed, evaluated, and revised annually (at a minimum) to respond to needs and trends on an as needed, ongoing basis.

CONCLUSION:

The Pocahontas school district continues to identify high quality strategies that will lead to accomplishing the goals set forth above. This will include seeking out and hiring the most qualified teachers in minority and ethnic demographics as the opportunity presents. We will continue to work with the city because we understand that teacher candidates work in a school district but their families live in the community. It is important we undertake a plan and strategies that deal within this reality.