

RETIRED K-12 TEACHERS AS ACTIVE AGENTS FOR AMS EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the United States, teachers who entered the field of K-12 education as a career in the mid-1960's, are now reaching retirement age. Many of these educators, besides surviving decades in the classroom, have attained advanced degrees and considerable hours of professional development. Some of the teachers of science have developed special interests and skills in the fields of atmospheric and marine sciences, as well as related topics of study. In addition to content strengths, some have developed expertise in teaching techniques to meet varied learning styles and effective curriculum development processes. Quite often, these same educators have been participants in the development of state standards and state assessments. It is these active and involved pre-college classroom teachers that could be valuable in the process of designing and distributing the fine information and materials being developed by the college professors, scientists, and their various programs. It is a time of rapid and outstanding discoveries that need to be made available to the teachers and students in the nation's schools. With a strong background of professional development experiences these educators can play a significant role in bringing up-to-date science content and process skills to classroom teachers. Generally, teachers who are involved in professional development activities are more excited about the courses they teach and interact better with students. This excitement can spark the students to be more interested in science as a field of study, but can also have them consider the sciences for college studies and careers.

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2. RETIREE ADVANTAGE

Many retired classroom teachers don't want to actually leave education, but wish to be semi-retired by holding part-time positions or working on individual contracts. One possibility that uses the years of experience is by working with new teachers and other teachers who are looking to pursue a new area of interest. Another group of teachers is older persons who are entering education as a second career. Frequently they have extensive content knowledge but few to limited classroom management or education process skills. New teachers, of any age, often find the classroom experience frustrating and overwhelming. The retired teachers can be hired as mentors to work with the novice teacher and assist them through their early years of teaching. Many aspiring teachers have been lost to the profession because of the lack of real support during these difficult years.

The retired educator can be more active as consultants in producing materials, or can work as individuals or with organizations to facilitate professional development workshops and courses. Since they are no longer constrained by classroom responsibilities and schedules, they have the time to prepare and present the events. Retirees can serve on development teams and committees, providing an input connection to real-life in the classroom, a sometimes over-looked component. However, their participation must be appropriately compensated, since these activities are frequently held during school hours and costs are covered by the sending school system.

At a time when the Earth Sciences and Earth System Science is changing and growing dramatically, semi-retired science teachers could be a valuable new group of educators for those persons and organizations involved with training presenters, developing teacher enhancement programs and classroom materials, and organizing professional development opportunities. The retired teacher may be an important resource for teacher organizations, various agencies, and others

involved with professional development for educators. Besides the education community, retired teachers can bring special talents to assist organization and agencies involved with general public training programs.

3. PART-TIME TEACHING

Recently retired teachers are seeing a new opportunity emerge in the position of part-time classroom teacher. Some changes in the profession are making this possible and desirable. First is the growing problem of a lack of certified teachers in the job market. Ironically, part of this problem stems from the increasing number of teachers reaching retirement age while fewer young graduates are entering the profession. With the rise in responsibilities for the teacher that is not directly classroom/teaching situation related, teachers are becoming concerned with the required use of their time. After thirty or more years of teaching, these changes are becoming significant issues and have added to the inherent stresses of teaching. Reducing a class load to half-time can be a way for some teachers to continue in the classroom.

Situations like budget constraints have influenced the establishing of part-time teaching positions, particularly at the secondary level to provide or maintain as many course options for the students as possible. However, with generally low salary schedules throughout the country, finding certified personnel able to work half-time at half pay is very difficult. Experience reveals that the situations often result in less than acceptable classroom and learning environments.

The states vary in their laws and conditions governing education derived earnings by their retired educators. A recent change in some states allows a retired teacher to work in education and is allowed to receive unlimited income from this source. This can be done without any loss of retirement benefits, including retirement compensation. In the state of Maine, it means that a retired teacher can afford to take a half-time position to augment their retirement income. For the employing district, it means filling the position with an experienced teacher. The teacher resumes the responsibilities of an educator, but at a greatly reduced load. During the non-teaching time, the semi-retired educator can be involved in other interests or perhaps hobbies. For a person who wishes to continue in the professional development arena, they are

available for many of the previously mentioned opportunities for retired educators.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Retirement is a special time for any person. It represents a new phase and way of life for the person who has spent decades in a chosen profession. The ideal of relaxing, enjoying travel, and having funds to do those long awaited things may still be unattainable. Low benefit packages in many states coupled with an unstable economy leave many with insufficient funds. Consequently, retired teachers may have to look for various types of employment to obtain supplemental funding, generally outside of education. Today new opportunities are emerging that will allow the teacher to remain active in education to whatever extent they desire. Valuable knowledge and skills need not be lost to the profession, the schools, the teachers, and the students. For many retirees, working part-time in one of the many aspects of professional development or other forms of teaching activity is now possible. AMS Education is a fine example of an organization where retired teachers are continuing to develop materials, do presentations, and facilitate courses. Many other groups are also using this human resource and hopefully additional teachers will join the retired teacher's semi-retired workforce.

5. REFERENCES

"Quality Educators: The Best Opportunity for Maine Children", *Report of the K-12 Educator Recruitment and Retention Commission, April 2001, Established by: State of Maine 119th Legislature.*