

By Bill Husfelt
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Staff shortages across all levels of education are making the news throughout the country and Bay County is not immune to that situation. While we had an incredibly successful job fair this summer, and left no stone unturned regarding advertising, we're still short about 30 teachers and about 45 support personnel just like districts throughout the state and country. Like businesses and organizations across the country, that leaves us short-handed and overworked! And I'm sure many of you are wondering what that means for your students.

The good news is that our incredibly talented and hardworking instructional, support and administrative team members are doing all they can to ensure that students are as unaware of these challenging situations as possible. Teachers are welcoming additional students into their classrooms, paraprofessionals are doubling up on duties where they can and administrators are being very creative regarding scheduling and leveraging their resources.

But it's challenging; there's no question about that.

A shortage of teachers isn't "new news." This situation has been brewing for years as fewer and fewer college students have chosen to pursue education majors. The state has responded by allowing non-education majors to begin teaching while pursuing their certification credentials which has been very helpful BUT it means we have teachers in the classroom with less training than new teachers may have had in the past.

Don't get me wrong; these amazing people (all of whom have four-year college degrees unless they are newly-approved veterans with a minimum of 60 credit hours) have answered the call to step into classrooms and impact the lives of our students. We're so grateful for them, but they haven't had the benefit of student teaching. The learning curve for ALL new teachers is steep but even more so for those who haven't had time to practice their craft during student teaching.

The teacher shortage is one of the biggest challenges for our state's leadership at this time.

There are anywhere from 5,000 to 9,000 teacher vacancies throughout Florida right now (the actual number depends upon the sources used) which means districts across the state are scrambling just as we are. To put it more in perspective, if all of those vacancies were for fourth-grade teachers, then more than half of our state's fourth graders would be without teachers. If those vacancies were all high school math teachers teaching 25 students a day for five periods, that would mean about 70 percent of all high school students in Florida without a certified math teacher.

And that's simply mind-boggling.

I spoke to the State Board of Education last week and implored them to get involved. We've resolved national defense situations and global pandemics in less time than it's even taken us to get started talking about this issue. But the time has passed for talking about the teacher crisis ... we need a task force, a commission or something beyond what we're already doing to address this crisis immediately. It's not something you or I can fix but we can reach out to our legislators on the state and federal levels and encourage them to turn their focus to the teacher shortage.

And in the meantime, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, we all need to practice grace and compassion with those in our schools who are doing more, teaching more, supervising more, helping more and mentoring more than they ever have. Our team is determined to get the

job done and to get it done well, but it's exhausting at times and I beg you to show them kindness, understanding, patience and gratitude.

The great leader President John F. Kennedy, wrote a book entitled [Profiles in Courage](#) (an enlightening read that I strongly recommend) describing inspiring acts of bravery and integrity. We're going to piggyback on that idea in the coming weeks by profiling some of these hometown heroes who have answered the call to serve the children of their community. We hope you enjoy reading the stories of these dedicated citizens who are bravely venturing into new careers as much as we've enjoyed collecting them.

These days, supply chain issues and staffing shortages impact practically every transaction in our lives. From ordering a meal through the drive-through to purchasing a replacement appliance, we all have to dig deep for patience and calm as once-simple transactions are more complex than they used to be.

Your school system is in the same boat.

If your child has a teacher who is new to the profession, please embrace him/her and be an encourager. We've already had ten brand-new teachers decide this isn't for them simply because they got understandably overwhelmed at the journey ahead. We can't afford to lose any more of the ones we have and desperately need more to join their ranks.

So, if you have a Bachelor's Degree in ANYTHING and want to be a part of the solution, I genuinely encourage you to reach out to us at BDScomm@bay.k12.fl.us so we can get you started on the path towards certification. If you don't have a degree, we still have positions for you and all of our support positions now pay a minimum of \$15 an hour. You can find those instructional and support vacancies listed at www.bay.k12.fl.us/careers.

Stay safe and God Bless!