

Peoria Public Schools District 150

The Challenge

Peoria Public Schools (PPS) had about 108 teacher vacancies in 2015, which presented the district with a major challenge to recruit and retain qualified and diverse teachers. Teacher Vacancy Grant funds have supported PPS to partner with Hanover Research to perform needs assessments so the district could analyze data and develop an action plan to cultivate supported, empowered teachers. The partnership examines staff perceptions of equity and inclusion, identifies subgroups that may need additional support or resources, and tracks district progress over time.

As a result of the Teacher Vacancy Grant, the number of African American teachers has more than doubled – from 60 in school year 2020-21 to 123 in SY 2023-24. The district's teacher retention rate has increased by 10 percentage points, from 78% in 2019 to 88% in 2024.

Strategic Local Investments

Strategy 1: Alternative Teaching Certification Program for Staff with Bachelor's Degrees

PPS has partnered with the University of West Florida to provide an alternative certification program. PPS covers 100% of the tuition cost for current district subs with a bachelor's degree who complete the program within two years and commit to work for PPS for three years after program completion.

Outcomes

- The district hired **three new teachers** from the program in 2024. An additional **10 long-term substitutes** will be hired once they graduate.
- **Forty-eight additional personnel** are participating in the program.

Strategy 2: Teacher Apprenticeship Program for Paraprofessionals

PPS has partnered with BloomBoard, which is a talent development provider, and Lake Erie College in Ohio to offer a two-year teacher apprenticeship program that allows paraprofessionals to earn their teacher license by gaining valuable on-the-job academic and vocational training while employed by the district.

Outcomes

- **Ten paraprofessionals** started a pilot cohort in January 2025 to earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education. **Five** will start a mini cohort in fall 2025.

Strategy 3: Education Pathway/Future Teacher Club for Aspiring Teachers in High School

PPS' Education Pathway allows high school students to explore careers in education. Participating students receive a Letter of Commitment; get ahead with tuition-free college credits; and earn valuable credentials, hands-on skills, and real-world field experience before they graduate. PPS also hosts Future Teacher Clubs at both middle and high schools. Students in the clubs receive Letters of Commitment, attend conferences, and gain hands-on experience.

Outcomes

- There is a Future Teacher Club at each main high school and half of our middle schools. There currently are 73 students in the clubs; however, that number continues to grow.
- Programs provide the district with a pool of locally grown, diverse candidates to hire.