

"Everyone, my family and friends, tell me to switch out of teaching. But I'm going to stay in."

This admission from one of my students can bring tears to an advisor's eyes.

We talk some more.

Despite overwhelming advice from parents and classmates, she understands that the next generation of Kansas kids will need good teachers too.

State Department of Education data on secondary teaching licenses showed that in 1999, all college programs across Kansas together produced nearly 240 new biology teachers, over 125 new chemistry teachers, 115 new physics teachers and 62 new earth science teachers every year.

By 2014, production of new science teachers in Kansas dropped to less than one-tenth those levels.

What happened?

Science teachers are particularly repulsed by teaching-to-the-test. This nosedive in science teacher production began when No Child Left Behind forced many science teachers to drill students for state assessments. Many schools reduced or eliminated field trips and laboratory exercises.

(This focus on testing continues today. It remains in the current proposed renewal of the federal education law in Washington, DC.)

In the last 15 years, I went from having 50-60 learning to be biology teacher in the 4-year pipeline and 4-to-6 student teachers per semester, to having just 15 advisees and 1-2 student teachers per semester.

That was last year.

Then the we ended due process for Kansas teachers. Last summer, many parents had talks with their college student. Families where grandparents and parents had all been teachers...counseled their offspring: "find another field."

The first week of last fall, eight more students came in to switch out of teaching.

During this spring political season, every few weeks there has been another action that has reduced the dignity and respect for teaching, from raiding KPERS, to petty quarrels over the Teacher of the Year award system. And with each action, several more student teachers bailed.

After my current student teachers graduate this year, I will have just three left in the 4-year pipeline.

I ask a colleague at another Kansas university how many student teachers they have in preparation in chemistry? None. Physics? Zero. Biology? Two.

This downturn is underway at colleges and universities across Kansas.

Even some school teachers are increasingly reluctant to recommend a career in teaching to their students.

And reading newspaper headlines turns many away from careers in education.

It is not a marketing problem about salary. It is an attitude problem emanating from many state capitols.

While science and special education are the hardest hit fields, enrolments are declining in other disciplines too. At the last State Board meeting, members heard how rural Kansas superintendents are having difficulty filling vacancies in elementary and other fields as well. How administrators from other states were signing contracts with the fewer student teachers who were attending our career fairs.

Affluent Kansas schools do not yet feel the pinch, but many rural schools have no choice but hire out-of-field teachers.

Every Kansas university needs 60 science teachers in the pipeline. I have three.

They don't want to teach for the money. Or even the respect.

They know that tomorrow's kids will need good teachers too.