

Increasing diversity of students is changing faculty needs as well as makeup of schools

Twenty-five years ago, about 94 percent of the students in Sioux Falls Public Schools were white. Today, students who are white comprise about 64 percent of the enrollment.

Diversity in Sioux Falls' schools is likely to keep increasing because younger grades have more students of color than the upper grades.

"We've coming up on 37 percent racial diversity," said Superintendent Brian Maher. "One generation ago, it wasn't all that likely that you would see a student that wasn't of some kind of European descent in a classroom. Whereas today, if you walk into a classroom, you have better than a one in three chance to see racial diversity in any seat in a classroom."

The district, as a matter of policy, values its growing diversity in its quest to educate and prepare students to succeed in a changing world.

"It's easy to say we embrace diversity. It's a whole other step to embrace diversity. I really believe we as a district embrace diversity," said Maher, who is in his third year leading Sioux Falls Public Schools.

The increasing diversity in schools is adding tasks to the district's to-do list.

"We think there are several things that we should be doing," Maher said. "One is we should be raising the cultural responsiveness of the school system."

The district has been working on that issue with Dr. Derrick Robinson, an assistant professor of educational administration at the University of South Dakota.

The school system also is trying to increase the diversity of its staff.

Next year, the district will add courses designed for students who are interested in becoming teachers. The hope is that more students of color will consider teaching in Sioux Falls as a possible career option.

Nearly 24,000 students presently are enrolled in the district in kindergarten through 12th grade. In addition, there are more than 1,000 pre-kindergarten students.

The district grew by more than 300 K-12 students from the fall of 2016 to the fall of 2017. The biggest block of students is in K-5, with nearly 11,800 students. Grades in 9-12 have fewer than 6,800 students.

With more students enrolled in the lower grades than in the upper grades, high schools could become considerably more crowded in a few years. The increase of students in the lower grades does not appear to be a short-term bubble working its way through schools.



Dr. Brian Maher

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Enrollment is getting bigger, more diverse

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The school system, like the community, is growing, and the demographics appear to be changing for the longer term.

Future building needs are part of the district's strategic plan that currently is being addressed.

Another indicator in the rising diversity of schools is how students can communicate. Ninety languages can be spoken by students in the halls of schools.

"We have an incredibly robust English Language Learners Program," Maher said.

The district is continuously looking at how to best provide services to students who don't speak English as a primary language in their homes, he said.

Black students represent the largest minority population in schools. They account for 11.9 percent of the enrollment. Blacks are followed by Hispanics at 11 percent and Native Americans at 4.3 percent.

"I'm very pleased at how our buildings, how our teachers, truly embrace diversity," Maher said.

Ethnicity of students in the Sioux Falls School District

Asian: 3.5 percent

Black: 11.9 percent

Hispanic: 11 percent

Native American: 4.3 percent

Multiracial: 5.5 percent

Pacific Islander: 0.1 percent

White: 63.7 percent

Source: Fall 2017 Enrollment Report prepared by Information & Technology Services.



Shopko Foundation makes two gifts

The Education Foundation has been awarded two gifts totaling \$1,500 from the Shopko Foundation's Community Charitable Grant Program.

The Education Foundation received a \$500 for a 2018 grant application and \$1,000 for 2017. The \$1,000 grant is designated for the First-Time Teacher Grants Program, which helps new teachers buy classroom supplies. The \$500 grant is for the Innovation in Education Grants Program, which awards teachers grants for create educational projects.

The Shopko Foundation helps support charitable nonprofits in its business communities. Wisconsin-based Shopko has two retail stores in Sioux Falls.

Invest in local education

Tax-deductible gifts to the Education Foundation are welcome. Contributions from businesses, organizations and individuals primarily fund the Education Foundation's grant programs for teachers.

The Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that is endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District. The organization operates entirely on donations.

The Education Foundation funded less than 40 percent of the grants for creative teaching projects that were requested for the 2016-2017 school year. The organization wants to do more to help students and teachers by funding more projects not covered by tax dollars. You can help by contributing.

More information about the Education Foundation is available on its website, www.SFEducationFoundation.org. Questions about programs may be directed to SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com.

Questions about donation options may be directed to the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, phone (605) 336-7055.



Grant-funded books spotlight Native Americans

Students at two schools in Sioux Falls are benefitting from new books that feature Native American children at home and play.

Teachers at John F. Kennedy Elementary and Garfield Elementary received Innovation in Education Grants from the Education Foundation for literacy projects.

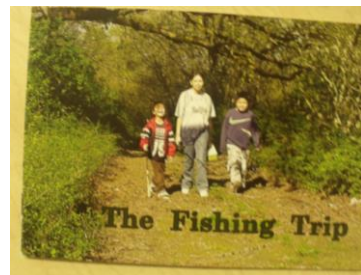
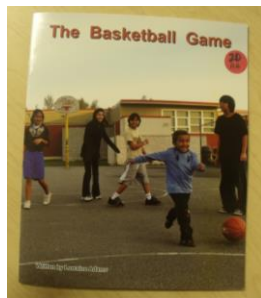
Teachers used the grant money to buy books from Eagle Crest Books, which specializes in publishing texts in which Native American children and families are portrayed in everyday situations. Kids are featured playing ball, skipping rocks and looking for a cat, for example.

Paula Ruedebusch, a reading specialist at JFK, was awarded a \$1,023 grant. She bought six-packs of 25 different titles. Ruedebusch's grant application was titled, "Native Faces in Literature – Windows & Mirrors."

"When you read a book, it's a window into another culture, but it's also a mirror that reflects back on your life, things you can identify with," Ruedebusch said.

Providing Eagle Crest books to readers at early stages in their education gives them opportunities to really connect with characters and events in what they read, she said.

"This isn't just for our Native American students. It's for all



Above, reading specialist Paula Ruedebusch reads with some of her students at John F. Kennedy Elementary. At left are two covers from Eagle Crest Books in use at the school.

of us," Ruedebusch said.

Peggy Baney and Janelle McKenzie, who teach reading at Garfield, see similar value in the Native American-focused books. They used a grant of \$3,759 to buy six-packs of 38 titles. Their project was called Oceti Sakowin, a reference to tribal people in the South Dakota.

So much current children's literature focuses on white people, Baney said. The new books demonstrate to all students that Native American kids are just like everyone else, she said.

Any student can check out the books. "They're used very often. Kids are very receptive to them and like them," Baney said. The literacy grants were part of the \$40,000 the Education Foundation awarded for Innovation in Education grants for the 2016-2017 school year.

Feb. 23, 2018 is the application deadline for the next round of annual grants.

Teachers at any grade level are eligible to apply. See www.SFEducationFoundation.org for more information.

"I think having these grants available is a special incentive that pushes us to think outside the box and be creative," Ruedebusch said.



Teacher finds serving on board ‘invigorating’

Two years of serving on the Education Foundation Board has been an eye-opening and energizing experience for Kiki Nelsen.

“It’s invigorating to see so many people working behind the scenes to provide opportunities for teachers,” said Nelsen, a mathematics teacher and National Honor Society adviser at Roosevelt High School.

Nelsen sought an appointment to the Education Foundation Board after hearing a presentation about it from member Nancy Duncan, a retired teacher who Nelsen admires.

“This just seemed like a wonderful place where I could do some good and contribute,” Nelsen said. “I also get to work with Nancy. I couldn’t pass it up.”

Nelsen is a graduate of Sioux Falls Washington High School and the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. She earned a master’s degree at the University of South Dakota. She and her husband, Derek, are the parents of two young children.

The Education Foundation provides teachers with Innovation in Education Grants to fund creative teaching projects. The Board also awards First-Time Teacher Grants to new teachers to help them buy classroom supplies.

Nelsen is excited about how the Education Foundation has updated and refined its direction. The Board also wants to increase the positive impact that it has on public education in Sioux Falls. Members have been discussing options, such as the possibility of expanding its staff to raise more money for educational grant programs.

“I really feel we’ve got momentum and direction. We’ve got such diversity of skill sets on the Board” to help, Nelsen said.

“In the next three to five years, I think it will be impossible for a teacher not to know who the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation is,” she said.

In addition to Nelsen, members of the Education Foundation Board are: Reece Almond, Peggy Baney, Callie Beisch, Vernon Brown (vice chair), Catherine Dekkenga (secretary), Jackie Dumansky (treasurer), Nancy Duncan, Stephanie Gongopoulos (chair), Nancy Hagen, DeeAnn Konrad, Deb Koski and Cynthia Mickelson.

Board members are assisted by two part-time employees: Foundation Coordinator Angie Kuiper and Newsletter Editor Rob Swenson.



KiKi Nelsen, a teacher at Roosevelt High School, serves as a volunteer on the Education Foundation Board.

Board updates its focus

Members of the Education Foundation Board have updated the focus of the organization. Here are the Education Foundation’s new niche and mission statements:

Niche

We raise funds to support teachers and their impact on students.

Mission

We champion teachers and students by encouraging, promoting and funding creative and innovative teaching strategies in order to enhance and enrich education in all Sioux Falls Public Schools.

