



Editorial: Pa. should learn from creative W.Va. teacher recruitment program



THE EDITORIAL BOARD ☒

Submit a letter to the editor

letters@post-gazette.com

JUN 3, 2024

5:30 AM

A new teacher incentive program in West Virginia is offering a lot more than a job and some extra cash: The program offers community. It's the latest innovation to boost rural teacher recruitment, and could offer valuable insights for other states with severe teacher shortages like Pennsylvania.

The "Teachers Ascend" program, funded through the West Virginia Public Education Collaborative and administered through West Virginia University, offers teachers \$6,000 to take jobs in Monongalia (Morgantown and surroundings) or Preston counties, both adjacent to the Commonwealth.

But money is just the beginning. Each cohort of teachers enjoys chartered trips across the state, including free access to kayaking, skiing, backpacking and mountain biking. And back at their new homes, participants have

access to weeknight social gatherings and community service projects in the neighborhoods they serve. Nearby WVU offers \$4,000 tuition vouchers for teachers pursuing master's degrees. The program even helps teachers land summer jobs.

A program offering more social support for teachers is overdue. As school staffs hollow out, the job description of "teacher" has expanded to include "therapist," "secretary" and, in some cases, ersatz family. This is even more true in rural communities in West Virginia, where the opioid epidemic has frayed family structures for over a decade. This work can't be done without proper support.

Although West Virginia's median teacher salary is fourth-lowest in the nation, hovering around \$50,000, the state's cost of living falls into the same slot. The low cost of living makes the wages more tenable than in other states — and the perks more potent.

All of these perks add up. Integrating into a new community is a process that requires time, effort and luck. By launching a program that includes community-building, not just money, West Virginia may have cracked the code to make a move not just financially prudent, but personally desirable.

The stage had already been set by a larger public/private partnership program launched in 2021. That program, just called Ascend, offered remote workers \$12,000 to move to select West Virginia cities. It also had most of the same perks as this Teachers Ascend spinoff. The initiative was backed by a Silicon Valley executive's foundation as well as West Virginia's governor. Large applicant pools and positive reviews have brought encouraging results.

Monongalia and Preston counties are along the Pennsylvania border, so some Commonwealth residents may be tempted to hop over the state line. It's high time for Pennsylvania to look over at our neighbors for recruitment insights — and to share in their success.

First Published: June 3, 2024, 5:30 a.m.

Popular in the Community

AdChoices 

Sponsored

