

Teacher ed pro-con missed point

By Sharon Hartin Iorio



Pro-con commentaries (Sept. 6 Opinion) debated the question: Does a teacher need an education degree?

Like the answers to most important questions, a simple “yes”, or “no” is not sufficient. In fact, the argument is not so much about the type of university degree a teacher needs but about the type of opportunities that universities offer individuals wishing to become teachers.

Any good teacher needs two things: strong knowledge of the subject matter, and high-level skills in the process of helping students learn.

It takes both content knowledge and real-world classroom experience to prepare the best teachers. Pro and con arguments about the kind of university degree a teacher needs really miss the point.

The point is there are many models for preparing first-rate teachers. There are traditional routes to becoming a teacher, and new pathways are opening to serve individuals who become interested in teaching at different points in their professional lives.

Here’s how institutions of higher education across Kansas are working to give college students the basic training to start a teaching career:

■ For 18-year-olds entering college as freshmen and dreaming of becoming teachers, a degree in

education will provide on-campus instruction in a discipline and field experiences in partner public schools, usually during the junior and senior years, culminating with one full semester of student teaching.

■ For students coming from community colleges to complete teaching degrees at Kansas Board of Regents universities, transfer guides are offered to help make the transition go smoothly. In addition, Wichita State University has formal “Two-Plus-Two” partnerships for WSU education faculty to deliver degree-completion course work on-site, through inter-active distance learning to Butler and Cowley community colleges.

■ For those who hold a bachelor’s degree and decide at midcareer or perhaps after retirement to change direction and enter the teaching field, alternative certification programs place students in the classroom as the teachers of record. These students go through a “university boot camp” before entering the classroom, where they earn a full teaching salary while completing the remaining required pedagogical skills course work at a university during summers, at night and on weekends.

■ The Kansas State Department of Education announced recently that it will accept proposals for teacher preparation residency programs, and several universities either have or are looking into this option. Residency programs allow individuals to enter the school

system as a paraprofessional and receive salary while pursuing education course work. Practical experience is accomplished through direct supervision of the resident’s work by the classroom teacher of record.

Universities in Kansas have moved beyond arguments over which kind of degree is best for a teacher. Degrees in education – but also in fine arts, liberal arts, and engineering – can all lead to strong teacher preparation. So, could we please stop arguing about this and start looking for talented, caring adults who interact well with children and believe in the power of education to change the world? Direct these people to an accredited institution of higher education in Kansas, and we’ll be happy to take it from there.

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