

Lane, Garrison join teacher's coalition

*Coalition fights
to alter hiring process*

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CENTRALIA — Citing a shortage in teacher applications due to what they feel are problems with the current hiring system, superintendents Chuck Lane and Jennifer Garrison have joined the Teachers of Illinois' Future coalition.

Lane is the superintendent at Centralia High School. Garrison is currently superintendent at Sandoval Community Unit School District and was recently hired to become the top administrator for the Vandalia school district.

Designed to make the hiring process for teachers in Illinois easier, Lane said he and Garrison joined the coalition a few months ago, following their involvement in the battle for a new state funding formula.

"This has been an issue for awhile," said Lane. "The teacher's shortage phenomenon has been going on for several years, especially here in Illinois. It used to be when we had open positions we would have between 75 to 100 applicants for one job. Recently, when we did that we had 10 applicants and half of them weren't even certified. There has been a gradual decline of applicants, and there are several reasons for that."

According to Lane, one major cause the coalition wishes to address in Illinois is how unattractive becoming a teacher in the state has reportedly become.

"We have done a pretty good job of demonizing teacher positions in this state. We have done that by pay, by benefits, and by cutting pensions and things of that nature," Lane

Please see **Coalition**, Page 6A

Coalition:

Continued from Page 1A

advised. "We haven't made it a very attractive profession. People used to get into teaching because they wanted to help kids, and it was a fair paying job with good retirement. But now those benefits are being attacked."

Lane continued, "One thing that has changed is the basic skills test, which is called the TAP test. That's what you have to do in order to become a teacher. The issue with the TAP test is that it is used to be too easy. There was a 100 percent pass rate. So people got together and decided that wasn't right and that it needed to be stringent. So they changed it, and now it's gone too far in the opposite direction."

Lane said the TAP test currently has a failure rate of 75 percent and has become one of the major factors in the region's inability to find new teachers.

"It's too hard," she said. "Every three out of four people in this state who want to be teachers are failing it. If that happened in a classroom, we wouldn't blame the students. We would say it was the test, that there was an issue with the test and it needed to be changed. So the TAP test is discouraging people."

"We are being told [the TAP test] is the equivalent of a 26 on the ACT," Lane continued. "That is a pretty high standard. I'm not saying we don't need a high standard here, but I don't need my P.E. teacher to have a 26-level IQ in science and math. It's just not necessary. I would certainly want our English teachers to know English at that level, but they don't need to science on that level too. It's just a flawed system, and it needs to be changed."

Lane stressed that neither he nor the coalition are asking for the methods of old to be brought back but rather to find a new, less difficult means of assessing and hiring teachers.

"We are not saying we should go back to the other system that was far too easy," he confirmed. "It does need to be challenging enough to where the applicant is showing us they have the basic level of skill,

but it does not need to be so challenging that three quarters of the people taking it fail."

Another current stipulation Lane said he would like to see altered is the amount of time it takes for a student to become a teacher in Illinois, something he insisted played a large part in future teachers relocating to other states.

"On top of the four years it takes to get your degree, you also have to student teach, so it takes longer than four years to become a teacher," said Lane. "We would like to see student teaching become part of that fourth year. We would also like to see them become eligible for a stipend of some kind because, as of now, we can't pay them anything. We used to have student teachers all the time, and we haven't had any in awhile. There just aren't any candidates."

Lane went on to say, "A lot of students that want to be teachers in our state are going out of Illinois for college because the rules are easier in other states. So it is just a combination of a lot of things that have come together that have made it very difficult to find quality people. It's a supply issue, really. The demand is way higher than the supply, so we need to do something to affect the supply."

The third area Lane said the Teachers of Illinois' Future hope to address is the concept of expanding on grade levels. Lane said he would like to see the process for teachers to change the subjects they teach become easier moving forward.

"If we have a certified special education teacher and they want to move into English, they would have to go back to school and take all of their English [prerequisites]," said Lane. "If you are a teacher and you want to switch disciplines, we should be able to help you do that given the fact that we are going to train them and make sure they get the right courses. So, if we have a special ed teacher teaching math, why can't we have that same teacher



Chuck Lane

teaching standard math classes? Or if we there is a K through 8 teacher who wants to teach at the high school level and doesn't have the right certification, how hard should that process be?"

Lastly, Lane said he and the coalition feel individuals with bachelor's degrees and no teaching certification should be allowed to be hired by a school and gain their certification while already on the job.

"We also need to simplify the pathway for those who have bachelor's degrees but don't have the education required to teach," said Lane. "If you have a bachelor's degree in English but are not certified to teach, there is no way you could teach here unless you quit your job and went back to school. Most people can't do that. So what we're saying is that, if there is someone out there with a bachelor's degree who has experience, there should be a clearer path for them to be come a teacher in this state."

Lane said he felt the decision to hire someone not already in possession of a teacher's certificate should fall on the shoulders of the school district.

"We as a school district should be able to hire someone if we want to, get them working, and let them get the certification as their teaching," he said. "In no way should someone have to quit their job, go back to school for two years, and hope they get hired afterwards. It needs to be switched to where the job comes first. We as a school are going to be held accountable for teachers anyway, so why not let us be part of that process? Why not let us take a chance on an individual we believe in?"

However, Lane did wish to stress that should such a pathway be granted, the school would not use the method for their entire staff. Instead, the superintendent said he would hope fill only a few much-needed, hard-to-find positions through this method.

"We're not talking about opening the floodgates and that all of our teachers are going to be non-traditional in certification," he said. "We're just saying we should be allowed to supplement our staff with a few people. There should be an

alternative to hire a few people through a certain way, especially for the areas and subjects we can't find people for."

With its four major points targeted, Lane said Teachers of Illinois' Future hopes to push the issues hard this year with an ultimate goal of having new legislation passed.

"Ultimately, we hope that this leads to some kind of legislation that will give us some freedom as a school system for us to think outside the box," said Lane. "Right now [the coalition] has a phone conference at least once a week, and we meet in-person once a month. That will probably speed up soon, as we are really looking to get some things done in the springtime. I will say, though, that it appears the state board is interested in this and realized it is an issue."

No stranger to fighting for what he feels is the betterment of the state school system, Lane said he and Garrison are both prepared to go the extra mile with this new initiative.

"A lot of things came together to make this situation the way it is, which has really become somewhat of a crisis. And it is only going to get worse as people retire," Lane said. "So we can sit here and stick our heads in the sand and say we don't have enough candidates, or we can do something about it."

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Dr. Jennifer Garrison

Today's Funerals

Kevin Baetje

- 7 p.m.
- Styninger Funeral Home, Nashville

John Gregory

- 1 p.m.
- Sutherland-Garnier Funeral Home, Centralia

Evelyn Kehder

- 10 a.m.
- St. Mary Catholic Church, Centralia