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New Case Study Shows How Schools Can Build Sustainable Teacher Pipelines— Starting in High School: Learning from South Dakota

Arlington, VA—February 5, 2026—PDK International today announced the release of a new case study documenting how **South Dakota’s Educators Rising program** is strengthening the teacher workforce by engaging students early, aligning education and labor systems, and creating paid, stackable pathways into the profession.

Key Findings: What’s Working—and Why It Matters

The South Dakota case study highlights several practices with immediate relevance for school leaders and policymakers:

A Proven “Grow Your Own” Model

- Educators Rising expanded to **35 school sites statewide**, with participation and conference attendance growing steadily year over year.
- Students engage in teaching as a *career pathway*, not just an extracurricular activity.

Paid, Stackable Pathways Increase Retention

- The state launched **paid internships**, paraprofessional apprenticeships, and a “4+1” model that compensates student teachers.
- These incentives reduce financial barriers and encourage participants to remain in their local communities.

Strong Alignment Across Systems

- The program connects **K–12 schools, postsecondary institutions, workforce agencies, and state education leaders**, ensuring students move smoothly from interest to certification.
- Initiatives such as a statewide **Teacher Signing Day** elevate the profession and formalize transitions into employment.

Equity-Driven, Locally Responsive Design

- Pathways were tailored for **rural districts, Indigenous communities, and paraprofessionals**, demonstrating flexibility across diverse contexts.
- Schools were able to adapt Educators Rising to meet regional workforce needs while maintaining statewide coherence.

Why This Matters for Schools and States

Teacher shortages are not a short-term disruption—they are a structural workforce challenge. The South Dakota experience shows that **early identification, paid experiences, and coordinated policy support** can rebuild the pipeline from within.

“This case study shows that when schools invest early in students who want to teach—and remove financial and structural barriers—those students stay, complete preparation, and return to serve their communities,” the report notes.

PDK International’s chief executive **Jeanie Lee** remarked: “South Dakota has shown what is possible when state agencies and schools align around early educator pathways. Our DOL partnership accelerated paid internships, clearer employer signals, and stronger coordination across high school and post secondary. The insights from this first year will shape how we prepare more students for teaching while meeting state workforce needs.”

For districts, the model offers:

- Earlier access to future educators
- Reduced recruitment costs
- Stronger community ties and retention

For state agencies, it demonstrates:

- Effective use of workforce funding
- Cross-agency collaboration
- Scalable strategies aligned with labor market needs

About the Report

The Year 1 case study focuses on implementation, early outcomes, and lessons learned, with future reports planned to examine long-term impacts and additional state models.

The full report is available at: <https://pdkintl.org/whitepapers-edrising/>

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About PDK International

Established in 1906, PDK International supports P-20 educators, researchers, and policy makers by strengthening their commitment to the profession throughout the entire arc of their careers. We are committed to elevating the profession through the intersection of research and practice. Through our

core values of excellence, service, community, optimism and leadership we encourage educators and stakeholders to elevate the discourse and change the narrative around teaching and learning to ensure that every student has a high-quality education. www.pdkintl.org

About Educators Rising

In 2015, PDK International – in its 115-year commitment to the profession of education – launched Educators Rising, formerly the Future Educators Association (FEA). Today, Educators Rising is cultivating a new generation of highly skilled educators by guiding young people on a path from high school through college and into their teaching careers. By working with aspiring educators who are passionate about serving those communities through public education, Educators Rising is changing the face of teaching. www.educatorsrising.org