

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Maryland

Maryland aims to help former fed workers find jobs — and ease teacher shortages

The state is recruiting fired federal employees to become teachers.

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By [Nicole Asbury](#)

For years, Scott Neilitz conducted analyses for a nongovernmental organization to assess the impact of its efforts. It was a job he was passionate about, but he was laid off this year as the Trump administration cut the federal workforce and funding.

Neilitz tried applying for other positions in the nonprofit sector, but he found himself competing with thousands of qualified workers for the same posting.

Now, he's enrolled in a program at Montgomery College that is helping him earn a teacher's license, in hopes of becoming a middle school math instructor in a few months.

Neilitz is one of the thousands of former federal workers whom Maryland officials are trying to help find new careers — an effort they say could also help address an [ongoing teacher shortage](#). The state had more than 1,600 teaching vacancies as of mid-March, according to data released the next month.

The federal government typically has been the state's largest employer, but data shows that over 1,000 former federal workers filed for unemployment from November to March. This year, Gov. Wes Moore (D) ordered state agencies to support former federal employees in finding new careers.

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(The Washington Post)

The Maryland State Department of Education began working to develop a tool to help people search for teacher preparation programs. And in May, the Maryland Higher Education Commission announced \$1 million in grants to 11 colleges and universities to help former federal employees receive teacher training and licenses.

“We refuse to stand idly by while the new federal administration fires public servants without cause and are doing everything in our power to put Marylanders first,” Moore said in a statement announcing the grant money. “This funding helps our federal workers land on their feet, while also addressing the teacher shortage throughout our state.”

Montgomery College was one of the grant recipients, receiving money to support its Alternative Certification for Effective Teachers program for people who have a bachelor’s or higher-level degree in a non-education-related specialty but want to make a career change.

The program, which has been around for two decades, partners directly with Montgomery County Public Schools to find people whose expertise aligns with the district’s critical shortage areas, like STEM-related teaching jobs and foreign language instructors. Its participants are required to have a bachelor’s degree with at least a 3.0 GPA or pass a content expertise exam.

The program was updated to accommodate former federal workers looking to find a job on an accelerated timeline, said Glenda Hernandez Tittle, Montgomery College’s senior program director for alternative certification programs. About 20 people will participate.

Typically, the program involves six months of instruction, career coaching and student teaching. But some members of the most recent cohort — which started in June and was full of former federal employees — already have conditional contracts with the local school system.

“Our long-standing relationship with Montgomery College naturally evolved into this innovative program, which is bringing talented former federal workers into teaching,” schools spokeswoman Liliana López said in an email. “We look forward to them sharing their diverse experiences, helping us staff critical shortage areas like computer science and world languages, and enriching our students’ learning.”

She said some members of the cohort will start teaching on the first day of the upcoming school year, which is Aug. 26.

Enough people were interested in the Montgomery College teaching certification program that it was expanded to offer two cohorts; another group of former federal employees will start in August.

The cohorts have many candidates with PhDs, Hernandez Tittle said, and include a few medical doctors, a former deputy counsel for the Environmental Protection Agency and a few cancer researchers.

“The expertise that these people bring to the classroom is amazing,” Hernandez Tittle said.

Neilitz, 39, last worked for the National Democratic Institute as the regional lead for the Eurasia region, but the nonprofit cut about 1,000 positions after the Trump administration effectively cut funding for foreign aid.

He said he was drawn to Montgomery College’s program because it aligns with his lifelong passion for public service. He grew up in a family of educators and briefly taught English as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kazakhstan. While his previous occupation focused on “bringing American values to the rest of the world,” he said he’s now focused on bringing that passion to a different group of people: Maryland youths.

So far, he said he’s learned more through the program about how students develop neurologically and emotionally, as well as how to build effective lesson plans with a clear objective. And though he plans to become a middle school math teacher, he is also being trained on how to teach literacy.

Neilitz is already applying for some openings in Montgomery schools. He later hopes to become certified to teach foreign languages and work with English learners — two critical shortage areas in the county.

“The plan right now is to start off with a middle school math, get a few more certifications to figure out what is really that age level in that field that I feel super comfortable with,” Neilitz said. “In 10 years ... maybe there’s a way to use those monitoring and evaluation skills I used to have with MCPS or the Maryland State Department of Education.”

What readers are saying

The comments reflect a mix of skepticism and cautious optimism about the Montgomery College program's potential impact on the teacher shortage in Maryland. Some commenters express concern about the significant pay cuts and the demanding nature of teaching, suggesting that these... [Show more](#)

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