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Plans for the Future

Being a teacher in the state of Connecticut requires a bachelor’s degree, but so much of the pay can depend on the subject and the degree level of the teacher.  Teachers in Waterford are always being hired at all levels, according to current math teacher Bill Bassett at Waterford High School. The trends in Connecticut prove to agree with Bassett’s claim, as projections show that teaching industries will continue to grow**.** More specifically, there is a probable 15.4% rise in mathematical teaching and a 15.8% increase in chemistry teaching by 2024 (“Office of Research”).With all the openings, the opportunity to increase annual pay by attaining more degrees and continuing to stay in a singular school district, becoming a teacher in the state of Connecticut seems to be a reasonable, comfortable career.

Teachers are extremely important because they shape the lives of future generations. The salary and benefits for teachers in Connecticut are an extreme attraction for people pondering a possible career. As a starter in the teaching industry, Bassett made under $30,000 a year, but got medical insurance and half his tuition was paid for to continue his education. After his master’s degree, Bassett moved to Waterford and is currently making upwards of $90,000 a year, has half his tuition paid for and most importantly, he provides medical insurance for his wife and two children. Katherine Pesko, a chemistry teacher at Waterford, is only in her sixth year of teaching and is already making “well-over” the average salary for a Connecticut teacher because of her UConn certification. As time progresses, she knows that she will be making more money because of her commitment to the Waterford school system.

When looking for a potential future career, the actual required work is an important quality to fully understand. Many professors at the University level have teaching as a secondary position with research being their main source of revenue. Teaching at the high-school level is extremely different, as teachers are primarily focused on teaching their students and are almost always available to help them. Both Bassett and Pesko stated their favorite part of teaching to be working with the kids and watching them advance. They both believe that it is extremely important to love the job; if the job is done just to get the paycheck, life will be miserable for the teacher and the students. The worst part about teaching is the bad attitudes of students and parents getting involved in matters. At the high school level, students are being guided to the adult world, where they will have to handle problems on their own; parent’s involvement causes stress and does not help the child evolve, according to Bassett. The most important skill that can be learned in high school according to Pesko is problem solving, which goes along with leadership. These skills agree with a study done in The Envision, which shows problem solving and leadership to be in the top 13 skills acquired in high school (“13 Essential Skills”). Watching these changes in students is one of the rewards of teaching, one of the measures of success for passionate teachers. Helping the students grow is just part of the job for the teachers in today’s world.

Aside from helping the students develop as people, teachers must actually teach their assigned subject to their classes. Through the interviews, Pesko revealed that the hands-on experience for the students is one of the most important features of being a high school teacher. By being involved with the student’s projects, Pesko feels that the information will be kept in the mind of the student instead of forgotten days after the exams. Pesko also loves the fact that she can choose the way to teach her course material instead of having a strict curriculum force her to abide by textbook rules. Both Bassett and Pesko knew the most important part of teaching: energy. If the teacher does not find the subject interesting (or pretend to), then the students will not care at all and do poorly in the class. By keeping an upbeat persona through the lessons, students tend to feel motivated to learn rather than bored. Teachers are most successful when they, “harness the students energy to channel it into the joy of learning” (Bega). Energy runs high in teenagers and controlling it can be a problem. By doing projects and allowing them to talk with one another, the students do not feel the need to act out against the teachers. Bassett claims “it is important to allow the students to be themselves because when quiet is pressed on them, they lose focus” (Bassett). Bassett’s classes are almost always groupwork designed because it builds teamwork and emits energy from the students; also, this makes learning more fun and memorable for everyone. Pesko has the same strategies as Bassett because she also believes that working together is an effective way to learn. Lecturing tends to put students to sleep, based on her experience. The day-to-day work as a teacher is a bit tedious with all the grading of the papers, but it is worthwhile due to the development of the students for the teachers.

When looking for a job, the pay is an extremely important aspect of the job. In the state of Connecticut, the average student debt in 2016 was $35,494 (“Project on Student Debt”). Meanwhile, the cost of living in Waterford, CT, is 18% higher than the national average (“Areavibes”). These statistics prove that the overall salary of a worker in CT must make a lot of money in order to survive with a comfortable living in that area. Teachers in Waterford are able to enjoy the luxury of incentive pay, meaning that they can get a raise with harder work and dedication. The benefits are also important, as medical insurance is covered for teachers and their families. Both Pesko and Bassett share the belief that the job is more important than the pay, but the pay must provide a comfortable living. Bassett states, “I log many hours here. Eight hours a day, five days a week at least. If I didn’t enjoy it, me and everyone around me would be miserable” (Bassett). Pesko adds to that by saying, “The social aspect of teaching is fun. I get to know my colleagues and bounce ideas off them, then we are friends outside of school. Without friends, this job would suck” (Pesko). With the high pay and the great social environment, teaching seems to be a great job possibility.

One of the most interesting aspects of being a teacher has nothing to do with being in a classroom. The public perception of teachers is extremely important in school districts, so teachers must stay responsible in and out of school. These additional requirements of being a teacher are not always noticed by potential incomers. Bassett noted that he feels obligated to do the right thing at all times because of the opinion of the school district. For example, Bassett (jokingly) said, “I can’t go drink and party because somebody is always watching” (Bassett). The responsibility of the teacher’s in a town goes beyond a classroom because these workers are held to a higher standard. Teachers are also responsible for the students when their students are in the classroom. Keeping the students safe is one of the more interesting parts of teaching because even though unfortunate events rarely happen, a teacher must be prepared for everything. Some teachers are lucky enough to never have unpleasant events occur in the classroom; others are not as fortunate. Pesko remembers a time when one student viciously vomited through the class and she had to take care of the student as well as continue teaching her class the lesson. Pesko says, “It was a stressful moment and I didn’t really know how to handle it. I tried to stay calm but it was hard” (Pesko). Dealing with adversity is a necessary trait for a teacher because all students are different. Teachers must be open-minded to understand all type of students. According to Bassett, teachers need to be patient as well. Students may not understand a topic easily and other students may be disrespectful at times. Connecting with the students is necessary for the teachers and it makes the experience more enjoyable for both the students and the teachers.

The different fields in teaching do not have a different pay scale. Instead, education requirements and length of time of teaching determines the net pay (“Become a Teacher”). However, more openings are being opened in the fields of chemistry and statistics because these subjects are more advanced. Both of these majors have been increasing in popularity over the past 20 years (“Annual Reports”). Many of the openings in the teaching industry are in the math and science fields because a lot of the jobs in the market are STEM related: especially the well-paying jobs. These statistics prove that being a teacher in the fields of math or science is beneficial and the pay is enough for a healthy living.

Ultimately, it makes sense to be a math or science teacher in Waterford, CT. The incentive-based pay and the social aspects make the job extremely appealing. Personally, I believe it would be a great idea to be a teacher in Waterford. I would get to take my interest in mathematics or chemistry and teach it to the future generation while having a social life and summers off. The pay would be enough to support myself and I would be happy at my job for a long time. Another benefit of teaching is that I could participate in coaching baseball, as pointed out by Bassett. His participation in the basketball program is an additional payment and he gets to continue being involved in a sport that he loves. By coaching the baseball team and being a teacher, I would be able to continue pursuing both of my interests, be happy, and get paid for it. My plan at the beginning had no thought of spending more time in a school. However, after research and interviews, teaching is a healthy life and it also makes people happy if they enjoy it. As of now, I can see myself being a teacher at Waterford because I am familiar with the area and the benefits are tremendous. I plan on continuing my education through at least a master’s degree, hopefully my doctorate, and then I will see what it is that I truly want to do. As I left my final interview, I was given advice from Bassett, “Play baseball for as long as you can and as long as you enjoy it. When it’s over, find a way to stay involved because you love it so much; you deserve it” (Bassett). I believe that his ideas are true; I will continue to pursue a baseball career for as long as I can then I can hopefully coach the game at some level to continue being around my true passion.

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