

# Supporting Future Teachers

Former teacher of the year says it's time to start supporting students interested in teaching

**SESSION** *Building a High School to Teacher Prep Program Pipeline*

**Presenter** Mauston: Leah Lechleiter-Luke, teacher

In 2010, Leah Lechleiter-Luke, a Spanish teacher at Mauston High School, was named Wisconsin's teacher of the year. The recognition earned her invitations to special councils and education groups focused on improving education. By participating in those special groups, Lechleiter-Luke said it became obvious education was facing a big challenge.

"In all of those circles, everyone is talking about the teacher shortage," she said. "It is a reality that everyone in education is living in right now."

She shared data that showed the U.S. needs to hire 1.5 million new teachers by 2020. Meanwhile, only 5 percent of students who took the ACT in 2015 indicated an interest in going into teaching. In addition, about one-third of new teachers leave the profession within three years.

"I think we can do a better job," Lechleiter-Luke said. "And it starts with the high school students we have in our schools."

Lechleiter-Luke pointed out that there are strong student organizations for students interested in areas like business and agriculture. She added that she thought it was funny that in schools, which are full of educators, there aren't many groups or clubs for future teachers.

Interested in starting some kind of future teachers club, Lechleiter-

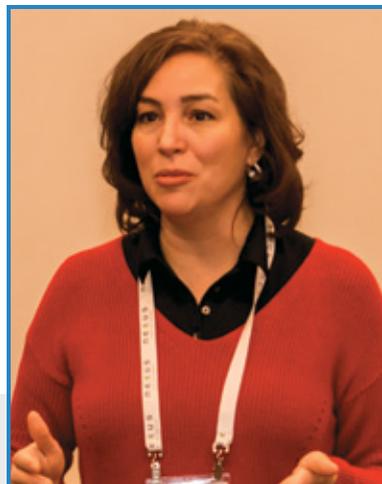
Luke began compiling a list of Mauston High School graduates who have gone into teaching and she began getting a list of current students who expressed an interest in the profession. In 2015, the Mauston School District, which has about 475 students, had two students interested in teaching. In 2016, that number increased to five students. That slight increase might be due to the fact that in 2016, Lechleiter-Luke formed a future teachers club.

The club is a local chapter of a national program called Educators Rising, which is dedicated to supporting and promoting aspiring teachers.

In Mauston, Educators Rising meets three times a week. Students hear from guest speakers like a new teacher in the district or a specialist. They visit other school districts and see examples of rural, suburban, and urban schools. They have also made a visit to the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and met with the dean of education.

Through a partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, students can take an introductory education course. Lechleiter-Luke is credited to teach a college education course — Individual, School and Society.

Lechleiter-Luke said involvement in the club helps students find out if it is a career they are interested in.



**"I don't sugar coat anything. I tell the students that this is a hard job. If you're up for it, we'll support you."**

— Leah Lechleiter-Luke,  
Mauston School District

"I don't sugar coat anything," she said. "I tell the students that this is a hard job. If you're up for it, we'll support you."

She added that, unfortunately, many educators in Wisconsin are frustrated with their profession and might even tell students not to go into education. She said that you should encourage teachers to speak positively, yet honestly about the profession.

"We have to stop telling our students, 'Don't go into teaching, don't do it,'" she said.

Today, the club has about 25 students and continues to grow. Lechleiter-Luke encourages interested schools to look into forming their own chapter of Educators Rising ([educatorsrising.org](http://educatorsrising.org)) and form partnerships with organizations like post-secondary institutions.

"This is a priority we all share," she said. "We need to pull together as a team and help support these students." ■