



# Is the work-from-home revolution making America lonelier?

HEALTH, 7A

## WEEKEND AmericanNews

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# Watertown business wants to train leaders to succeed

A.J. Kaufman

Special to the Watertown Public Opinion | USA TODAY NETWORK

A new Watertown business just launched, with a mission to help individuals, leaders and organizations succeed through leadership development and workforce training.



Meidinger

While The Pulse Advantage is new, owner Melissa Meidinger, who holds a doctorate in leadership, tells the *Public Opinion* that “the work behind it has been years in the making, through my experiences in higher education, workforce development, economic development and business consulting.”

Throughout her career, Meidinger has worked with

students, entrepreneurs, business owners and organizational leaders; she says that one theme consistently emerged.

“Organizations are looking for ways to develop stronger leaders, improve communication, increase employee engagement and create healthier workplace cultures,” she explained. “I saw a growing need for professional development that focuses not only on leadership skills but also on emotional intelligence, self-awareness, team dynamics and personal growth. As someone who is passionate about helping people reach their full potential, I created The Pulse Advantage to bridge that gap. While organizations often invest in technical skills, there is an increasing

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Second grade teacher Krista Baartman holds up her classroom number for her students to find her during the first day of school on Aug. 21, 2025, at Marcella LeBeau Elementary School in Sioux Falls.

SAMANTHA LAUREY/ARGUS LEADER

# South Dakota seeks to fix rural teacher shortages

Makenzie Huber

South Dakota Searchlight | USA TODAY NETWORK

Teacher shortages in rural and tribal schools are driving the South Dakota Department of Education to explore alternatives to licensing exams.

State Education Secretary Joe Graves asked members of the state Indian Education Advisory Council for their input on the possibility last month. He did not offer a timeline for the possible change.

Statewide, the number of teacher openings fell recently to 290, down from a high of 410 at the same time in 2023. But district-specific data show elevated vacancies in rural and tribal districts such as Sisseton, Todd County and Oglala Lakota schools. Those three school districts reported average full-time staff vacancies of 2.64, 3.83 and 7.23, respectively, at the start of the school year from 2019 to 2025. The average school district in South Dakota reported 0.59 vacancies.

Graves said willing, educated teachers with relevant “cultural backgrounds” — particularly Native American teachers — are especially in need but are often failing the licensing exam.

“Meanwhile, we’re replacing them with people not just lacking their cultural background, but people we’re recruiting from across the Pacific Ocean,” Graves said.

In 2025, 446 teachers hired from overseas were leading classrooms statewide. Many of those educators are “high quality people,” but it’s “galling” to some educators observing the situation that they can’t fill that role, Graves told South Dakota Searchlight after the council meeting. Meanwhile, some school districts are relying on untrained, long-term substitutes.

Offering an alternative certification pathway for some local teachers could help solve the problem, Graves said during the meeting. The state has required teachers to pass a certification exam — the Praxis Series, a standardized test of academic skills and subject knowledge — since 2005.

Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Tribal Education Director Sherry Johnson partnered with a national non-profit to conduct research on alternatives after years of concern about the exam’s impact on Native American teacher candidates. Johnson was awarded a fellow, Diana Martinez, from Leadership for Education Equity to study the issue. Martinez presented her findings to Graves in June.

Johnson said the research stems from a “longtime concern among tribal educator directors” about potential teachers not passing the certification test.

“We can’t always bash and bash the system,” Johnson said. “When you’re going to bash the system, you need to come to officials with some resources and examples and solutions.”

About 61% of all candidates pass the certification exam each year in South Dakota. The certification

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Brown County Fair. PROVIDED BY BROWN COUNTY FAIR

# Brown County Fair returns in August with free admission

A.J. Kaufman

Special to the Aberdeen News | USA TODAY NETWORK

A great Aberdeen tradition dating back nearly 150 years returns to the region soon.

With the theme of “Gettin’ Rowdy in the Stix in 2026,” the Brown County Fair runs from Aug. 10-16 and offers a full week of entertainment and live music, day or night. As always, there are exciting activities for all ages.

Brown County Fair & Parks Manager Rachel Kippley recently told the *Aberdeen News* that some of the highlights this summer include grandstand concerts; Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Rodeo; \$2 Tuesday; Zeus - the biggest thrill ride ever; the Farmers Union Ag Education Expo, which is an interactive learning space designed to connect children and families with agriculture; contests, like chicken chuckin’, hot dot eating and more.

Four decades ago, the “Booster Button” concept was introduced, providing quality, well-known grandstand entertainment for the week at one price. Those no longer are offered but low concert prices on the grandstand remain and can be found at [browncountysd-fair.com/grandstand/](http://browncountysd-fair.com/grandstand/).

## Brown County Grandstand

- Dacotah Bank Stampede Rodeo 7 p.m. Aug. 10-11/Mon. & Tues.
- Cooper Alan & Jackson Dean 8 p.m. Aug. 12/Wed.
- Tyler Hubbard & Blackhawk 8 p.m. Aug. 13/Thurs.
- Theory of a Deadman & Sevendust 8 p.m. Aug. 14/Fri.
- Lee Brice & George Birge 8 p.m. Aug. 15/Sat.
- Ranch Games 2 p.m. Aug. 16/Sun.

“We are excited to welcome our annual 280,000 guests,” Kippley, who has been in her role with the fair for four years, explained. “It’s pretty unique to have a Free Admission Fair of our caliber. It’s only with volunteer power and sponsor generosity that the Brown County can continue to be successful.”

While fair admission and parking are free, Senior Day is Wednesday, August 12, and Kids Day is Thursday, August 13.

As for background, in the 1920s, the events became known as the Tri-State Fair, featuring competitions among purebred animal producers, large machinery displays, horse racing and auto racing.

Since those early days, the fair has opened up to all residents of the county and includes a large variety of agricultural exhibit choices: all breeds of livestock, poultry, field crops, garden crops, flowers, arts and crafts and several home arts divisions.

The majority of attendees come from the Tri-State area, per Kippley, with most arriving from within a 150 miles radius. The Brown County Fair Board consists of 22 volunteers, who organize and execute the weeklong events, and supported fair and fairground Staff.

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