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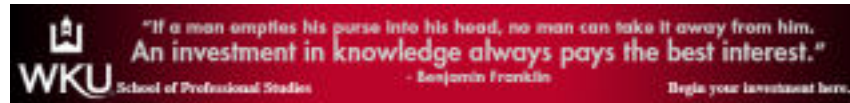


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WKU helping districts with teacher recruitment needs

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 51 min ago



Corinne Murphy

With openings for math, science, special education and other teaching positions across the state, Western Kentucky University is doing what it can to get young people interested in becoming educators.

“There’s never really been a better time to go into education,” said Corinne Murphy, the dean of WKU’s College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, who is leading efforts to work with regional school districts on their hiring needs.

In December, Murphy spoke to regional superintendents at the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative, acknowledging a need for more high-demand teachers and a more robust pipeline between the college’s teacher-prep programs.

Last week, Murphy briefed the group again on progress toward that goal. That includes efforts to improve communication around state and federal loan forgiveness programs for aspiring teachers, along with a tuition discount for existing ones.

WKU's teacher college doesn't stand alone in facing that recruitment challenge.

A report from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education said in August that declining enrollments are hobbling teacher colleges as they try to meet the personnel needs of America's schools. There are often mismatches between the college majors students choose and the teachers that schools most need, it said.

“For us, it's a matter of helping the districts make those connections,” she told the Daily News.

Kentucky's Department of Education recently unveiled its Kentucky Academy for Equity in Teaching program, a renewable loan forgiveness program meant to identify and prepare diverse public educators.

Through the program, undergraduate students can receive up to \$5,000 a semester over the course of three academic years, with a maximum of \$20,000, for example.

For graduate programs, WKU also offers the Kentucky P-12 Educator Tuition Discount for certified teachers and school personnel. The current rate is \$415 per credit hour, and more information is available online at www.wku.edu/ketd.



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Math, science, middle grades and special education teachers are in high demand across the state, Murphy said. Early childhood education specialists are also needed.

“Early childhood is probably one of the greatest needs in the region right now,” Murphy said, adding the area is one the Kentucky Department of Education has singled out as something that can move the needle toward improving long-term learning outcomes for kids.

Entering kindergarten prepared to start school can make a big difference for young students, who need to know not just their letters and numbers, but the social and emotional skills necessary for making it through the school day.

“Learning is a skill and you learn that skill as part of that preschool setting,” Murphy said.

For Murphy, a high school student who knows their options might be just enough to push them to take the plunge and become an educator.

“For us it’s a matter of helping the districts make those connections,” she said.

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

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