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Final interim education committee brings up several recruitment ideas

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At the final meeting of the interim joint education committee before the 2024 General Assembly, several legislators shared ideas to recruit and retain more teachers.

Kentucky's schools have recently been understaffed amidst a teacher shortage. The legislature has tried to address this, including by creating Option 9 in 2022, an expedited route to certification while candidates earn their bachelor's degree.

But there is more progress to be made.

The Education Professional Standards Board is responsible for setting the standards and requirements for obtaining a teaching certificate in Kentucky.

While the majority of teachers still use the traditional path — enrolling in a college or university teaching program, meeting GPA and test score requirements and getting field experience before a final semester of student teaching — Kentucky's nine alternative paths have gotten more attention in light of the teacher shortage.

The alternative routes include people with expertise in a specific field, Teach for America participants and one year part time adjunct instructors, said Cassie Trueblood, policy advisor and counsel in the Office of Educator Licensure and Effectiveness at the Kentucky Department of Education.

Since 2018, a significant majority of alternative certifications come from Option 6, the university-based alternative route.

Participants who have a bachelor's degree may enroll in a post baccalaureate teacher preparation program at a participating Kentucky college or university, while simultaneously teaching in a Kentucky school district. It's a one-year certification that can be renewed up to four times.

Legislators' ideas

Several legislators spoke up at the committee meeting to suggest various ideas to improve recruitment and retention efforts.

Co-Chairman James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, suggested making the various alternative options easier to understand for prospective teachers.

Trueblood responded that improving communication and publicizing that information is one of EPSB's goals for next year.

Sen. Shelley Funke Frommeyer, R-Alexandria, asked whether they were working on creating interest in the education field from a young age, maybe in middle schools.

Trueblood said that Educators Rising chapters are their vehicle for introducing high schoolers to teaching.

"It has been embraced and we are seeing the interest, at least in the numbers of students participating," she said.

Rep. Killian Timoney, R-Nicholasville, said that Kentucky should focus more on alternatives like Option 4, which might allow experts in a remote field like computer science to give two hours of their day to teaching without having to quit their day job or go through many educational hoops.

Rep. Timmy Truett mentioned the complications of trying to hire a former high school teacher in an elementary school without further education.

Trueblood said that emergency certifications are possible for those who already have teaching certifications, but that Truett wouldn't be able to hire that former high school teacher when there are other qualified applicants.

Rep. Kevin Jackson, R-Bowling Green, said that he's heard from superintendents that the average experience of teachers in their school districts is about three years, and the lack of experience concerns him.

He asked whether paying student teachers might help. Trueblood said that the EPSB would support that, particularly in the form of a state-level stipend.

That would offset student teaching costs without placing a burden on districts, especially smaller ones who would be less financially able to recruit student teachers if they brunt the stipend cost.

Jackson also asked about the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program, a program that helped new teachers adjust during their first year in the classroom. Trueblood said that KTIP lost its funding in 2018, but that the EPSB would love to bring it back if the funds were provided.

Several legislators wanted to collect more data on why people left teaching positions for administrative roles or other employment options after only a year or two.

Dr. Corinne Murphy, dean of the WKU College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, said that she'd like to strengthen the connection between universities and recent graduates.

"Re-engaging that very close tie from undergraduate and graduate initial preparation into the first two to three years of a teacher's professional career in their school district is really important to making sure that these content standards are applied in the evidence based way that they were taught originally," Murphy said.

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