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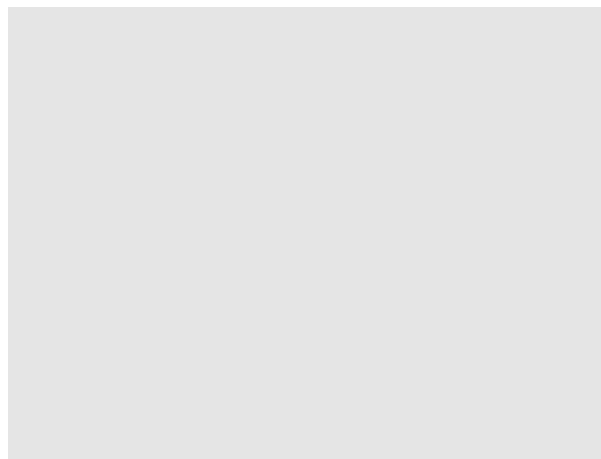
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WKU working to address teacher shortage

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 11 min ago



Corinne Murphy

Of 65 new teachers graduating from Western Kentucky University this weekend, only six are math teachers.

That mirrors a nationwide shortage as teacher education colleges struggle to draw students into high-need fields such as math, reading and science.

For Corinne Murphy, dean of WKU's College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, it is rare to meet with a district superintendent who hasn't asked for a specialized teacher or group of teachers.

“We’ve talked about the enrollment pipeline into our teacher-prep programs,” Murphy told a group of regional superintendents Wednesday at the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative. “We know those numbers need to be higher, and so we’ll continue our efforts around that.”

In recent years, WKU’s College of Education and Behavioral Sciences has seen a sharp drop in the number students studying to become teachers. Asked about the decline during the meeting Wednesday, Murphy put the number at about 30 percent.

“Even in elementary education, which is not something that we often see decline in, we have seen a 30 percent drop in that enrollment,” Murphy told the group, adding that WKU isn’t alone.

In August, a report released by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education showed that declining enrollments are hobbling teacher colleges as they try meet the personnel needs of America’s schools. It noted there are often mismatches between the majors students choose and the teachers that schools most need.

“Of the high-need fields identified by the U.S. Department of Education (bilingual education and English language acquisition, foreign language, math, reading, science, and special education), only special education is among the most popular degree fields,” the report noted. “This mismatch has contributed to teacher shortages in these fields in some states and localities.”

The challenges extend beyond just recruiting more of the in-demand teachers, such as rapid attrition among new teachers and a lack of teachers that adequately reflect the diversity of the nation’s students.

In fact, the report highlights that, at least at the undergraduate level, education is the second-least diverse field. Only agriculture has a larger percentage of white students.

To help reduce the shortages in qualified teachers some Kentucky school districts are seeing, Murphy said the college is reforming its curriculum. That means surveying working teachers in regional school districts and communicating its efforts online

through www.wku.edu/teacherreform.

“This is all an effort to re-establish that pipeline that people can access teacher-prep programs very early on in their academic careers,” Murphy said.

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