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Teachers use military experience in the classroom

ANDREW HARP The News-Enterprise

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Teachers in both districts in the county are using their previous experience in different military branches into their educational careers.

At New Highland Elementary in Elizabethtown, four staff members are veterans including Principal Chalis Packer and nurse Darlene Cecil.

Packer was in the U.S. Army from 1988 to 1992, and traveled all over the world including Germany and Japan.

“It (military experience) provided me with a unique experience to see the world, and so I can bring all of those experiences with me to Elizabethtown, Kentucky to my kiddos,” Packer said.

Cesshecka Benson is a first grade special education teacher who started working at New Highland this year.

Benson said she joined the U.S. Navy in 2002 and served until 2013 as a culinary specialist. She served on a ship for four years before going to the naval hospital, she then went to Naval Station Great Lakes and became a naval military training instructor, which prompted her interest in education.

After getting married and having children, Benson studied in Hawaii and earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

She’s been working in the education field for four years. For her, the planning aspect of her military experience has aided her.

“You always have to plan. Always have to plan. If it doesn’t work right the first time, try it again a different way. Be flexible,” Benson said. “You’re always learning, no matter how far up or down the totem pole you are you’re always learning something new.”

Derisa Hindle, a workforce readiness coordinator at Elizabethtown High School, before had taught math and social studies for 12 years at T.K. Stone Middle School, and was in the Navy.

After high school, she went to college but decided after to join the Navy and attended boot camp in Orlando, Florida.

While in the Navy, Hindle said she worked on planes that landed on aircraft carriers, and worked with top secret messages and organizations, before easing into more office work. She was in the Navy for five and a half years and finished in 1997.

Hindle stayed with her children for a bit and then decided to start taking business classes at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College.

In high school, Hindle said she had talked herself out of becoming a teacher, but decided to pursue it anyway. She transferred to Western Kentucky University to study middle school math and social studies.

She said in the military, she learned teamwork, self discipline and perseverance, skills she said are important for a teacher, and working with people from different backgrounds while in the military also has carried over into her career in education.

Donna Slatton is a first-year teacher of a second and third grade split classroom at New Highland. She served in the Navy from 1986 to 1990 and did four years in active reserves.

After marrying her husband, who is career Army, she left the Navy. While at different duty stations, she studied and eventually finished her degree at WKU, and has been a teacher for 12 years.

Slatton said her experience in the military allowed her to become a leader and speak in front of people. She said in college, she was unable to do a speech classes, but while in the military, she became proficient in it as part of her training.

“It gave me the voice that I needed to be an educator,” Slatton said.

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