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## Through new scholarship, teacher ambassadors aim to draw more diverse talent

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com)

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In June, following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis by police, a group of Bowling Green professionals banded together and set off on a mission to achieve equal access and workforce opportunities for the local African American community.

Now, through a new scholarship program in partnership with Western Kentucky University and both local public school systems, Gamechangers is stepping into the education arena.



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“We’ve got to make the pathway easier for people to navigate,” said Terry Daniels, executive director of The Foundry Christian Community Center and a member of Gamechangers.

WKU recently announced its new Gamechangers scholarship, made possible by support from the organization, Warren County Public Schools and the Bowling Green Independent School District.

With the goal of enhancing opportunities for Black and under-represented individuals in the education sector, the scholarship program offers an avenue for current school district employees to earn teaching credentials through WKU’s graduate education programs.



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To achieve that goal, the program has recruited in-district ambassadors, WKU College of Education and Behavioral Sciences Dean Corinne Murphy previously told the Daily News.

“Each district has a Gamechangers representative working in the district,” Murphy said. “They are actively recruiting professional staff at the district level into the program and making sure that those professional staff (members) are aware of the opportunity.”

Michael Coleman, an educator recruiter for Warren County Public Schools, has stepped up to become the district’s representative for the referral-based program.

Bringing young Black men into the education profession has been a years-long project for Coleman, who helps organize WKU’s Young Male Leadership Academy each year. Through regular workshops and a camp held during the summer, the college prep and recruitment program aims to draw young men from diverse backgrounds into the teaching profession while building up their professional skills and networks in the process.

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So far, Coleman has helped refer a teacher’s assistant at Briarwood Elementary School seeking teaching certification, a curriculum coordinator at Jennings Creek Elementary School hoping to go into administration and a substitute teacher aspiring to be a social studies teacher, he said.

“That’s why I’m invested in the program,” Coleman said of the Gamechangers initiative. “I want more minorities in the school system because we are quite a diverse school system,” he said, referring to both WCPS and the Bowling Green school district.

When under-represented students see someone who looks like them in the classroom, Coleman said, it expands their conception of what’s possible.

“It gives them also something to strive for,” Coleman said. “They can look at that principal, they can look at that teacher, and say ‘I can do that.’ ”

That’s true even if students don’t end up becoming teachers, Coleman said.



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“They can say ‘There is someone in a leadership role ... Whatever I pursue, I can become a leader. There are people in leadership roles that look like me,’ ” Coleman said.

Coleman said under-represented students often steer clear of majoring in education in college because of perceptions about the profession – mainly concerns about low teacher pay. One of Coleman’s students in the Young Male Leadership Academy, for example, originally planned to go to medical school, later changing his mind when he dipped his toe into teaching.

“Once he started in the graduate program, he started teaching graduate classes and now he is a science teacher at Warren East High School,” Coleman said. “These types of programs I think change the mindset.”

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