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WKU establishes key tool for schools

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The employment shortfall shows few signs of going away.

When COVID-19 restrictions sent thousands of workers home, including many shuffled onto unemployment rolls, it created an unintended consequence. The economy has struggled to bounce back because employers can't find help. People are anxious to bounce back into the work-a-day world.

Regardless of who you blame, this is a new reality.

It impacts restaurants and retailers, manufacturers and personnel services and even further complicates the economic recovery because our supply lines suffer the same fate with a shortage of truck drivers and warehouse workers.

The nation's schoolhouses are not immune.

Western Kentucky University, which has trained generations of skilled educators, is trying to offer a solution.

The WKU College of Education and Behavioral Sciences is working with Hardin County Schools to implement its "WKU Grow Your Own" program.

The partnership is designed to take non-teaching school employees — known as certified staff in the education jargon — and prepare them to move to the classified or teaching side of the business.

HCS has identified 58 classified staff members with an expressed interest in becoming a teacher. The list include bus drivers, child nutrition workers, a custodian and instructional assistants.

These people already know the school culture and have an affinity for the students. Their interest indicates the clear potential of this program.

Many professions offer apprenticeships and other means for employees to enter the field in non-traditional ways. WKU has a good idea and HCS is bound to be one of many districts taking full advantage of the opportunity.

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