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## Nelson County unveils teacher apprenticeship

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Tuesday, Nelson County Schools announced a first-of-its-kind teacher apprenticeship program to students and community members alike.

Next fall marks the start of the rollout of the program with applications for apprenticeships opening last Friday.

The new apprenticeship program is in partnership with Elizabethtown Community and Technical College and Western Kentucky University.

Nelson County students can gain experience with the program as soon as freshman year through the Education Collab. Juniors and seniors are given the opportunity to apply for the apprenticeship, which places them in classrooms alongside certified educators.

“I’m excited for the opportunities for our students,” Teresa Henderson, Director of NEXT Gen Learning P-5, said. “When we really think through what’s the possibilities for the Education Collab and how they are able to explore deeper into the classroom and be provided with these opportunities that didn’t necessarily exist before. I’m excited for them, but not only now is it for students, but it can be for anyone in Nelson County that is appointed as long as they have an associate’s degree. That’s even exciting to think through other possibilities for people that we know are capable of going to the program.”

In addition to the hands-on experience in the classroom, students are given the opportunity to earn up to 59 credit hours for college and 24 hours toward certification. Through the new program, students who begin freshman year can be on track to finish college in two years.

Others who apply for the apprenticeship program will be employed by the district working as student teachers while enrolled at WKU. Henderson said they aim to have

just five individuals in the first cohort of the apprenticeship, but she knows there are several eager students who want to apply.

Courtney Newton, Director of NEXT Gen Learning 6-12, said: “We think about this notion of live, work and grow in Nelson County. That’s what we would like to enable to happen. So, whether that’s students who are in Education collab or community members that are already employed with us or want to be employed with us, you know, we want to create as many opportunities and options for them to get certified as possible and do it in a way that’s really a high level of depth.”

Henderson explained that the program was created in part with the Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK) youth apprenticeship model from the U.S. Department of Labor. She said this allows them to submit the progress of candidates, which requires more than 6,000 hours in the apprenticeship program.

Newton said the possibility of this program initially began with their students. In the Education Collab, they have 2.5 hours in the classroom, but educators with the collab agreed they could be doing more with that time for their students.

“When we were discussing what are the things that we can accomplish within that time, we can accomplish so much more,” she said. “And so there’s where the discussion came from of well, how many more observation hours or what other dual credit opportunities can we provide? Or what are the other things that we could explore to help better prepare these students? That was already in place and that’s when we started discussing what are the potential partners that can come to the table and what can this look like for future.”

Henderson said they have already gotten feedback from students who are looking to get involved with the program, like the incoming high school freshman. She said through Open House meetings, she saw an interest for the program from parents and

students alike, and with the current high school students, she added they were eager for the opportunities.

Looking ahead, the first cohort of teacher apprenticeships will begin in the fall and students in the Education Collab will begin earning hours toward their degrees and certifications. However, Newton added this program for students and community members will feed back into Nelson County. Henderson said for the students it becomes a way to give back.

“I mean, for me, it’s amazing because I taught some of these students, and so I’m seeing them now become educators,” she said. “It is a full circle for me. I love seeing how prepared they are but it’s deeper than that. When I look at how we can help these students gain confidence in themselves and better prepare themselves and feel that they are ready to have their own classroom and on a much deeper level than if they went to a four-year prep program. That’s what I’m excited about for them.”



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