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Newer teachers share motivations, experiences

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Becky Riley, a first-grade teacher at Creekside Elementary School in Sonora, is entering her fourth year of teaching this school year.

TREY CRUMBIE/The News-Enterprise

While some students are beginning their first year of education this week, some of their teachers will be beginning their careers alongside them.

Morningside Elementary School's Kayla Hindle is entering her first year as a third-grade teacher in the Elizabethtown Independent school district. She said her career choice was influenced by past teachers.

"They made a big impact on my life," she said. "That made me want to be able to do the same for my students."

Hindle is looking forward to meeting the students of her first class.

“It was a lot setting up a classroom, but I’m excited to meet my students and work with their families,” she said.

For the first day, Hindle wants to focus on ice breaker activities, teaching classroom rules and reading the “The Rainbow Fish” by Marcus Pfister. She said her overall goal for the year is to build relationships.

“We are a family,” she said. “I think that’s key. Even if the kids know nothing else, just to be loved by their teacher and cared for is crucial.”

Hindle, who graduated from Western Kentucky University and is a 2015 graduate of Elizabethtown High School, said she originally wanted to be a high school special education teacher but decided to teach younger children while she was student teaching.

“The more that I was in elementary schools, the more that I fell in love with it,” she said. “The kids are just so sweet and they work hard. It’s just a fun age to be around.”

The Elizabethtown native said she wanted to teach at Morningside Elementary School after serving as a substitute teacher for the school while in college.

“I just fell in love with the teachers, the staff, the way the school ran,” she said. “So after I saw that they had a position open, I was just ecstatic. I couldn’t wait to put my application in.”

In a different school, about 15 miles away, Becky Riley will be entering her fourth year of teaching. She is a first-grade teacher at Creekside Elementary in Sonora in Hardin County Schools.

Riley said she was motivated to become a teacher while teaching her son, Chase, about math. Riley said her son struggled with the addition of larger numbers and while working with him she broke down the math problems into smaller, one-digit numbers to show her son the numbers still were the same.

“I think that’s when I fell in love with it,” she said. “Being able to show him a different strategy that led him to a way of understanding.”

Riley, originally a nurse, went back to school and graduated from Western Kentucky University. During her time at WKU, she was motivated by university instructor Anne Patterson on how to teach students.

“She had a motto. ‘If you go into this career, you give them your best because that’s what they deserve,’” Riley said. “And that’s why I try to do. I come in every day and I give them the best because that’s what they truly deserve.”

Riley said transitioning careers was not hard.

“You would think so, but being a nurse you took care of people, being a teacher you’re taking care of people,” she said. “You’re still doing the same thing. As a nurse, you love them. As a teacher, you love them.”

Riley, who is entering her third year teaching first-grade, said she loves teaching the age group because of the growth of students.

“It’s remarkable,” she said. “You have a student that comes in that can’t read maybe three or four words a minute. To leave your classroom reading a chapter book is absolutely spectacular.”

Following her first year of teaching, Riley learned a few things, such as quickly spotting students who struggle academically.

“When you get into your second and third year, you start to notice the students that are lingering or shy because they know academically they’re behind,” she said.

In her career so far, Riley recalled at least one student last year who developed during the school year. The student did not like school and didn’t want to read out loud because he wasn’t capable, she said.

“At the end of the year, he was teaching class,” she said.

Riley said the Creekside Elementary School staff is supportive and she is thankful to work at the school.

“I think God couldn’t have put me in a better position than where I am right now,” she said.

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