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State reboots equity in teaching academy

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Students of color made up nearly 25% of Kentucky's overall student population during the 2019-20 school year, a reality that isn't represented by the state's teacher workforce, which is about 95% White.

It's a problem the Kentucky Department of Education and other state agencies are hoping to address by reviving the Kentucky Academy for Equity in Teaching, which aims to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching workforce.

On Thursday, Gov. Andy Beshear and Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman joined Education Commissioner Jason Glass and other state education officials to announce the reboot of the program.

"Research has shown that when students see a teacher who looks like them or shares their background, they do better in the classroom," Thomas Woods-Tucker, Kentucky's deputy commissioner of education and the department's first chief equity officer, said in a news release.

The program will help Kentucky “recruit, develop and retain a highly effective, diverse and culturally competent workforce of teachers and school leaders,” Beshear said.

The governor called it an “urgent goal” to enable the success of every student, school, district and community in Kentucky and said he’s committing state funding to the effort.

The Kentucky Academy for Equity in Teaching will launch a “grow-your-own” grant program for school districts and postsecondary schools to collaborate and build a steady stream of educators for hire.

The academy also wants to provide mentoring and coaching for new teachers participating in the program. The students will get one-on-one support in developing a study plan and help with getting into an educator prep program.

Participants will also be reimbursed for “assessment-related expenses,” a news release said, along with guidance to shepherd them through their high school, college and education careers.

For teachers who are already on the job, the Kentucky Academy for Equity in Teaching will also develop a series of courses for implicit bias training and consult with focus groups to “develop a strategic plan to support the recruitment and retention of a diverse educator workforce,” the news release said.

“We have too few people wanting to become teachers and too many teachers leaving the field shortly after they start,” Glass said. “We especially have too few people of color, too few men and too few individuals from lower-income backgrounds currently in the teaching profession. It’s important for our students to see people who look like them at the front of a class, whether we are talking about race, ethnicity, economic background, disability or gender.”

The academy is a partnership between the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the Kentucky Board of Education and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet.

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