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EDUCATION

'Grow Your Own' teachers? New Fayette County schools program looks to solve shortage

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEARS

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Students during Venecia Proctor’s 4th grade language arts class at SCAPA, the School for the Creative and Performing Arts, on Lafayette Parkway in Lexington, Ky., Monday, Oct. 17, 2022. BRIAN SIMMS bsimms@herald-leader.com



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A local solution to the national problem of recruiting and retaining teachers was introduced in Lexington Monday.

A new program called “Grow Your Own” is aimed at recruiting high school students exploring an education career, Fayette employees interested in getting certified to teach, community members considering a teaching career, and Fayette educators and staff who want leadership roles, district officials said.

The program to help Fayette schools “grow” their own teachers will recruit, develop and retain educators who are connected to the Lexington community and who have “lived experiences” with Fayette students, officials said in a statement.

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The Fayette school district “is taking the next step through Grow Your Own to live out our mission and recruit the students, employees, and community members we need to build a workforce that truly represents Lexington and the students and families that we serve,” said Superintendent Demetrus Liggins. “We are excited to kick off what we believe will be a local solution to the national problem of recruiting and retaining talented educators.”

As of last week, Fayette County Public Schools had eight Special Education teacher vacancies (seven elementary and one high school). Other teacher vacancies include six high school positions (two math, one science, two social studies and one vocational), three middle school positions (one math, one intervention and one in a suspension prevention program called SAFE), and one elementary intervention position, said Fayette schools’ Director of Communications Katie Williams.

Gov. Andy Beshear recently said Kentucky had [11,000 teacher](#) vacancies.

“Grow Your Own” is an initiative aimed at supporting education-related career opportunities for Fayette County Schools’ students, staff, and community members.

The program's new [website](#) launched Monday.

Research indicates that a diverse workforce can have positive impacts on students' academic achievement, behavior and social-emotional development, Liggins said. The Grow Your Own program provides solutions for aspiring educators who face employment, financial and other challenges, and it opens the way to a diversified workforce, stronger schools, and a connected community, he said.

Liggins said the Fayette County Education Association brought the idea of Grow Your Own to him hoping to see more diversity among teachers. He said some students have gone through school without seeing a teacher that looks like them.

Partnerships with universities and organizations across Kentucky will empower participants in the program through scholarships, localized support and resources, and immediate practice in Fayette schools.

Representatives from Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative, Fayette County Education Association, Eastern Kentucky University, Kentucky State University, University of Kentucky College of Education and Western Kentucky University were at a Monday afternoon news conference, according to a news release.

Amanda Sewell, a Tates Creek High School teaching and learning educator, said her students who want to be educators are already showing strong skills.

"As we reimagine recruitment, support, and retention, the FCPS Grow Your Own program will advance the education profession to support student learning. This essential element will enhance our highly effective and culturally responsive workforce," said Lori Bowen, director of educator development for the school district.

There will be a Grow Your Own Kickoff Celebration from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. November 7 at Frederick Douglass High School cafeteria, 2000 Winchester Road. Admission is free. RSVP by noon November 7.

VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEARS



Staff writer Valarie Honeycutt Spears covers K-12 education, social issues and other topics. She is a Lexington native with southeastern Kentucky roots.

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