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ALERT FEATURED

## WKU, SCC team up for elementary ed. program

By CARLA SLAVEY Commonwealth Journal  
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SCC and WKU officials signed the agreement that would give SCC students looking to become elementary teachers a way to earn their degree without leaving Somerset. Pictured are, from left, SCC's Senior Vice for Academic Affairs Clint Hayes, SCC President Dr. Carey Castle, WKU President Dr. Timothy Caboni and WKU Provost Dr. Bud Fischer.

Carla Slavey

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Those in the Pulaski area looking to become an elementary school teacher have a brand new opportunity to earn their degree without having to travel too far from home. On Thursday, Somerset Community College (SCC) and Western Kentucky University (WKU) announced a new program through SCC's University Center of Southern Kentucky (UCSK) to offer four-year bachelor degrees in elementary education.

The program will be available on SCC's Somerset, Laurel, Casey, Clinton McCreary and Russell campus centers.

The program starts in the fall of 2022, and will feature a hybrid of both in-person and online formats.

Trent Pool, director of UCSK, said the program will offer what he called a "two-plus-two transfer agreement" where SCC students can earn their two-year degree through SCC, then transfer to WKU's bachelor program for elementary education without having to leave their home campus.

That is a vital help to students like Wayne County resident Kaeli Pitman, who has signed on to be the program's first student.

"I would have not been able to go to WKU if it was only on their campus," Pitman explained, saying she needs to stay close to home because of her 7-month-old son Wade and her full-time job.

"I'm not able to really travel far, so this is perfect for me."

She said she had always wanted to teach, but when she was first out of high school she started out on a different path.

Her current job, a customer service position where she helps clients with any questions they have, has helped remind her why she wanted to teach. She said she enjoys helping them learn and loves seeing what she calls the "aha" moment when someone figures something out.

When asked if she thought the program would help more students in her position, she replied, "Definitely. The location's convenient, and SCC's definitely an affordable college in my opinion."

Making it easier for students to enroll in the program is an important step in helping to fill many of the shortages that elementary schools and districts across Kentucky are facing, said Dr. Corinne Murphy, Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at WKU.

"We live in an era where teacher shortages are accepted as a fact of life," she said. "Our fields have focused on critical shortage areas of special education, STEM education, early childhood education and world languages. Meanwhile, the hiring pools for elementary education teachers continue to shrink."

She said that at the start of the 2021 school year there were around 400 elementary education teacher positions open around the state. Many human resource directors told her that where there was once 40 applicants for each position, they are now lucky to get four or six. In some cases, she said, the schools would receive no resumes at all.

SCC President Dr. Carey Castle said that building this new pathway to helping students become teachers would have an impact on the community for a long time to come.

He noted that local superintendents such as Pulaski County's Pat Richardson, who was in attendance at Thursday's announcement ceremony, are very supportive of the new program.

"We will continue to work in whatever ways we can to help schools get the teachers and people they need to do their jobs, because in the long run it's better for all of us," Dr. Castle said.

"The agreement we will be signing this morning is a huge step in helping SCC reach it's own vision and mission to be the choice of students for higher education that results in the economic growth and enhanced quality of life for all of our people."

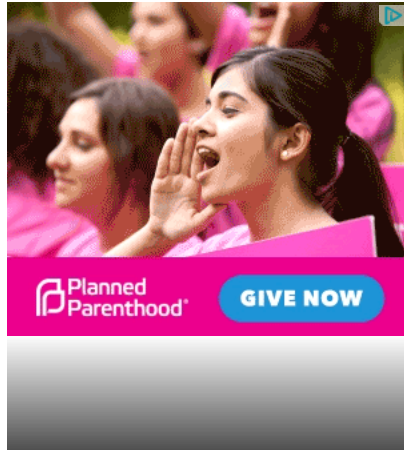
It was a special moment for WKU as well, according to the university's president, Dr. Timothy Caboni.

"Our job as a university is to elevate communities and transform lives. We do that by providing experience for folks that we think is accessible, affordable, and in their best interests to grow and prepare for their futures," Dr. Caboni said.

UCSK got its start through the work of U.S. Congressman Hal Rogers, and while Rogers could not attend the official announcement for this new chapter of UCSK, his spokesperson Danielle Smoot spoke on his behalf.

"This project, the University Center, is something that he has dreamed about for many years," she said.

“... I've always heard Congressman Rogers say 'If we can just keep one generation here at home, our best and brightest students here for one generation, we can transform our region.' And he's right.”



### TRENDING VIDEO

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### Commonwealth Journal Events

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Fri, Dec 03



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Bear Wallow Farm

**Burnside Annual Christmas Parade 2021**  
Downtown Burnside



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