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No more pretend classrooms for Borders

By GREG THOMPSON THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE
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Caroline Borders is preparing for her first year as a teacher and her first year at West Hardin Middle School in Stephensburg. She will be teaching sixth grade language arts and social studies. Sitting in her classroom Monday afternoon she cut out numbers for the bulletin board in the hallway just outside her classroom.

GREG THOMPSON/

The News-Enterprise

EDITOR'S NOTE: First in a five-part series featuring new area teachers.

From a pretend classroom set up in a playroom at her childhood home, to a real one at West Hardin Middle School in Stephensburg, Caroline Borders is about to embark on her life's dream: Being a teacher.

The 21-year-old sixth grade language arts and social studies teacher sat cutting out numbers Monday afternoon for the bulletin board just outside her classroom. There a mixture of emotions as the first day of school fast approaches.

"It's definitely a combination of excitement but also being nervous," Borders said. "You can do all the clinical hours, you can do your student teaching ... until you're actually doing it, you're never going to get quite prepared for it."

The support system she already has experienced even before the first student walks into the school has been comforting. Sara Sams is in the classroom next to Borders and she reached out to her as soon as she was announced as one of the new teachers at West Hardin Middle.

Now, she won't feel "so weird asking questions of her" since Sams contacted her so early on.

Several new teachers are joining the staff at West Hardin Middle, according to Principal Christin Swords.

"Miss Borders has really hit the ground running," Swords said. "She's been decorating her class since the day she was hired."

One of the things the administration does at the school is hold an orientation to assist new teachers in preparing for the school year. Throughout the year, new teachers will work with other teachers new to the district on such tasks as how to contact a parent, the ins and outs of Infinite Campus — the district's grading system, and tools and skills that will help build their confidence.

Borders and other new teachers are assigned a mentor teacher and a mentor administrator in the building who will work them on a regular basis answering any questions.

"The new energy and the new ideas they bring into the building is very exciting," Swords said. "The first year can also be a stressful time for new teachers so we are here to help them in every way we can."

Throughout Borders first year in the classroom, she not only has the support of her peers at the school but she also has a mentor she can turn to.

"So you can lean on someone who is more experienced than you," Swords said.

The Western Kentucky University graduate was somewhat emotional the first time she set eyes on what would be her classroom. The way it is set up has a purpose for her students as she desires for it to give off a feeling of being welcomed, of belonging.

"There are a lot of kids that don't have good home lives, so this is their home away from home," Borders said. "Kids have a safe spot in my room."

Being given the key to her classroom and sitting in on professional development sessions has made it feel more real.

Time has been spent diving into new curriculum for language arts and curriculum for social studies. She has taken a hard look at lesson planning and making decisions as to what she believes "will be best for my kids."

One of the tools that has been handed on to her is a curriculum map designed by language arts and social studies teachers from other schools in the district. The map tells her what units to cover when and which academic standards they teach “and that’s been really helpful and I can see it visually.”

Borders is following in the footsteps of a lengthy line of educators in her family.

Her grandfather, Mike Byers, served as principal of Lincoln Trail for a number of years. Her mother, Beth Borders, teaches at G.C. Burkhead Elementary School. She will be retiring soon.

Borders also has had influence from aunts and uncles who were educators.

“I have always seen that lifestyle and gravitated toward it,” she said. “I have also had so many amazing teachers throughout my years of school and I could name a slew of people.”

Asked to pick one song that would be her theme for the first year of teaching came somewhat difficult. Borders had to think hard and take a look at the classroom playlist on her phone that she will use occasionally while students are working. She finally came up with what she thinks is the perfect one.

“You know, it might be ‘The Climb’ by Miley Cyrus, just because that song talks about persevering and getting over battles,” she said. “I think no matter who you are, your first year doing anything is a bit of a battle and a bit of a learning curve. When hardships come that’s what I want my attitude to be, to persevere from it and learn from it.”

No lesson plans have been laid out for the first day of school. Borders knows the first day is designed to cover expectations, set rules and focus on positive behavioral intervention to build a culture where students are shown how to support each other.

“I know I’m going to be excited, but super nervous,” Borders said, “but I can’t wait to meet all these kids.”

Outside of the classroom you can find Borders on the lake with a rod and reel in hand but, when November rolls around, she and her boyfriend will be out in the blinds looking for that buck to bring down.

She’s also a homebody that just likes to relax, watch a good movie or enjoy reading a book.

Once the new year is behind her, Borders would like to her extracurricular activities to include helping with cheer, the Beta Club or possibly the yearbook.

“I’m big into school spirit,” she said.

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