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WKU unveils new recruitment tool for school districts

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com   Dec 18, 2018

Melissa Biggerstaff, associate executive director at the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative, engages with school personnel during a meeting Tuesday at the cooperative.

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A new tool Western Kentucky University unveiled Tuesday promises to help fill school principal vacancies by offering information and access to candidates on the cutting edge of school leadership.

"You're going to be able to drill down to those individuals to see what kinds of experiences they have," said Melissa Biggerstaff, associate executive director of the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative.

While still under development, the digital tool aims to offer detailed information on potential candidates' education and experience, along with data on their school's demographics and performance.

It's the work of a partnership between WKU and GRREC that began in 2016 as part of a $47 million project funded by The Wallace Foundation. At the time, WKU was selected as one of seven universities across the country to help improve school principal preparation.

Corinne Murphy, dean of WKU's College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, told the Daily News that the tool is only one aspect of the initiative's work.

For the past two years, she said, the college has been reviewing its curriculum with the project's national partners and asking, "What do our curriculums look like across the nation and what do principals of today's schools really need?"

That work has prepared the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences to launch a new principal training program that will welcome its first cohort next fall.

"We're excited to have a new crew of people engaging in the curriculum that we've really built working across a national platform of experts," Murphy said, adding she expects the cohort to contain at least 20 students.

Once the students complete the preparation program, school districts will need a way to find them. That's where the new tool comes in. Currently, it's working with personnel data from five area school districts.

While seeking feedback on its design and applications, Biggerstaff asked school district superintendents to imagine what the tool could be.

"If you are going to be hiring a principal, instead of just waiting for those applications to come in, the leader tracking system is going to give you the ability to go into the system to see everybody in the GRREC region," she said. GRREC represents 47 school districts in Kentucky.

Employers would have access to information they've never had before, Biggerstaff said.

"If they've been a principal, how successful were they?" Biggerstaff asked.

The tool will also provide student achievement data and feedback from school staff through the state's TELL survey.

"You're going to be able to drill down to get information that you currently can't get at your fingertips," she said.

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