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## Teach For America Matches Grads, E. Ky. Schools

### *Appalachian Focus Brings 22 New Teachers to State*

Nearly two dozen recent college graduates from across the country started working this fall as classroom teachers in eastern Kentucky when Teach For America, a national teaching corps, started working in the state for the first time.

"At this point, principals seem satisfied and districts are contacting us about possibilities for next year based on what they are hearing from these schools," said Will Nash, executive director of Teach For America Appalachia.

Nash is working from an office in Hazard as 22 teachers from 10 states are launching the group's efforts in classrooms in Barbourville Independent and Floyd, Knott, Knox, Laurel, Leslie, Letcher and Martin counties. Whitley County is a partner that will add corps members next year.

Teach For America is a national corps of college graduates who commit to teach for two years in urban and rural public schools and become lifelong leaders in improving education. The program now involves more than 8,000 teachers in classrooms across the country.

"Teach For America has been working to find the right entry point into Appalachia for a number of years, and we're grateful for the leadership of the state legislature and the Education Professional Standards Board in reaching this point," said Wendy Kopp, founder and CEO of Teach For America. "We're excited to join the region's ongoing efforts to strengthen its education system and look forward to recruiting and developing individuals who will work alongside other committed educators to expand educational opportunity for eastern Kentucky's children."

#### **'WE HOPE THEY STAY'**

Nash said the new Kentucky corps members graduated from college with an average 3.6 grade-point average and nearly all held significant leadership positions in an organization during their college experience. Two Teach For America teacher leadership development managers are working with the new teachers, making regular classroom visits and offering coaching. The corps members also attend monthly professional development with the organization outside of their regular school duties.

At the time of its 20-year anniversary last May, Teach For America reported that among its ranks last year, some 85 corps members were from or attended school in Kentucky. Teach For America received nearly 48,000 applications for its 2011 corps, including more than 600 from individuals in Kentucky, the organization reported.

Mary Ann Blankenship, executive director of the Kentucky Education Association, said the group's representatives were able to meet with the new Kentucky

corps members recently and were impressed with their enthusiasm and dedication.

The teachers' union has expressed concerns about the lack of professional training and sometimes short tenure of Teach For America corps members, though Blankenship said she was gratified to see the group recruiting more participants with stronger professional knowledge and more interested in pursuing master's degrees or other professional preparation in education.

Blankenship added that KEA President Sharron Oxendine, a native of Knox County, saw the placement of teachers from outside eastern Kentucky as a plus for many students. "Broadening the horizons of students that way is a great idea," Blankenship said. "We welcome the Teach For America corps members and hope they stay."

### *Connecting Policy, Practice*



Rep. Wilson Stone, D-Scottsville, second from left, and Sen. David Givens, R-Greensburg, right, visited the Allen County Preschool Center last May as part of an ongoing statewide effort to invite legislators to quality local pre-k programs. Stone and Givens are pictured with Janet Cooke, director of special education in the Allen County schools and an unidentified student. Photo courtesy of The Citizen-Times.