

By Bill Husfelt

Superintendent, Bay District Schools

***This is the first in a four-part series highlighting some of the civic-minded men and women who have stepped up to help alleviate the teacher shortage that is occurring nationwide. This week, we're focusing on some of our alternative certification high school teachers.***

It's all too easy these days to get bogged down in the stories of shortages, supply chain issues, inflation and other things we're dealing with but there's SO MUCH good in our world as well and I want to use our time together this week to talk about that.

We all know there's a teacher shortage and that shortage has prompted people in our community (and communities across the country) to decide to invest in the lives of children by becoming teachers ... even though that's not what they went to college to learn. These content experts haven't had the benefit of formal teacher training BUT that doesn't mean they're not doing amazingly well in our classrooms and I want to share some of their stories with you.

Let's consider, to begin with, Tony Mixon at Rutherford High School. I first met Tony when he was a young reporter at the Panama City News Herald. Tony grew up in our community, and graduated from Rutherford, and returned here as a rookie journalist looking to get his career started. After several conversations, it became clear that Tony wanted to give back to his community in more meaningful ways and so, last year, he bravely stepped into a mid-year vacancy at Rutherford and hasn't looked back since.

While he didn't go to college to become a teacher, Tony's degree and background in journalism and communications prepared him well to teach English Language Arts. And he's already realizing the impact teachers have on their students.

"After my first week of teaching, I missed a day because I was sick and I received about a dozen emails from my students saying they missed me," he said. "It surprised me, and made me feel great, that I made such a difference in my first week." Teaching, Tony said, is allowing him to really see the fruits of his labor, noting "already, I've seen the impact that I can have on young lives in the new school year."

Those sentiments are echoed by our BDS Rookie Teacher of the Year Emily Partington. Emily, who graduated with degrees in Russian, Spanish and Middle Eastern Studies, has only been teaching for two years but says, "seeing students grow in not only Spanish but acceptance in others and oneself is the most rewarding thing, and why I teach." Emily says she wasn't sure what she wanted to do after graduating from college but is now "glad I took a chance on myself and learned on the job how to be a high school teacher through alternative certification."

Amy Hughes, a Latin teacher at A. Crawford Mosley High School, is also very grateful she was brave enough to "jump in" to the classroom. "I went to college for a degree in English Literature because I wanted to be an editor," she said, noting those positions were hard to find. "I ended up working as a restaurant server for five years and then my former teacher/administrator/sister convinced me to apply for the Latin position at Mosley. I was SO nervous to teach and had only

taken one education class in college. I knew Latin was one of my favorite classes at Mosley when I attended and I pushed my anxieties aside and applied.”

And the rest is, as they say, history. Amy has been teaching for nine years now but remembers that her first year was not easy. “I struggled with being a first year teacher and thought about quitting many times,” she said. “Over time, though, I began to build up my confidence and now, nine years later, I have built the Latin program to include all four levels.” Amy says she’s grateful she had the confidence to change careers and added, “I look forward to coming to work every day and my students mean the world to me. I can’t imagine doing anything else for a career even though I never thought I’d be a teacher.”

Making a difference in the lives of others is also what brought marketing executive Crystal Bullock to the classroom for the first time 12 years ago. “As a marketing professional, I didn’t feel like I was fulfilling my desire to make an important impact on my community,” she said. “I longed to make a difference, specifically in young people’s lives. My mom and husband were both teachers at the time, so education had always been a big part of my life; I naturally gravitated to that field.”

Crystal, who was Bay High’s Teacher of the Year and one of Bay County’s Top Five teachers in 2020, currently teaches AICE English Language and AICE Thinking Skills at Bay High School. Her pre-teaching “real-world experience” makes her the textbook example of the kind of content experts our children need. “Even though I didn’t have a degree in teaching, my field experience in communications made me an ideal English and public speaking teacher. I was able to show my students real-world articles I’d written, press releases I edited, speeches I’d given, etc. Twelve years later, I’ve helped hundreds of students earn college credit, receive scholarships, and pass vital exams,” she said.

But it’s some of the “lessons” from outside the classroom that have stuck with Crystal the most. “I’ve taken students to get their drivers’ licenses and prom dresses and have helped send athletes to camps and clinics,” she said. “At Bay High, I get to celebrate with them when they learn they passed my exam (and others) to earn their AICE diploma, making them first-generation college students in their families. The fulfillment I get from being a teacher is immeasurable, and it’s all thanks to the alternative certification program.”

While there are certainly many challenges, the rewards overshadow them most days as Amy noted. “While it’s hard to stay positive about the direction education seems to be heading, being there for the students each day and showing them they can be successful is worth it,” she said. Hearing students say ‘I look forward to your class all day’ or ‘thanks for showing us you care’ helps me know I’m doing the right thing.”

Teaching isn’t for everyone but it is definitely the right career path for many .... including some of those who didn’t go to college to become teachers. Many of us went to college to learn one particular skill or career field only to find out it’s not what we expected when we translate that college education into the real world. Teaching gives you a chance to use those skills in a different manner, however, and to use them in a way that benefits our entire community while

giving you a family-friendly career path. And in education, you can count on learning something new every day!

We invite anyone interested in getting started on the path toward certification to email us at [BDScomm@bay.k12.fl.us](mailto:BDScomm@bay.k12.fl.us) so we can answer questions and outline the steps. This is a GREAT time to step up and give back to our community, and our children, and we're grateful for all of those civic-minded citizens who are answering this need.

Stay safe and God Bless! Stay tuned next week as we highlight more of our dedicated alternative certification teachers.