

WV eMentoring program in need of more volunteers

Article Courtesy of Nicole Lemal, The Times West Virginian

RACHEL — Growing up, Dana Powell, community resource coordinator at North Marion High School, had no direction.

With so many options and not nearly enough guidance, she was baffled as to where she wanted her career path to go. After knowing first-hand the difficulties in choosing a profession at such a young age, she was happy to hear of the West Virginia eMentoring program, a program of the Education Alliance, and signed up NMHS to take part.

Over a 10-week period, students are connected with a working professional from the field of their interest. Students are brought to a mobile lab in their school once a week, where they complete one of 10 online activities geared toward preparing them for post-secondary education and life after school. From there, they are able to communicate with their mentor online and benefit from their professional experience.

Approximately 1,600 students from nine schools are being mentored through this program, and Powell is one of 192 mentors from 90 fields and organizations who are participating.

“I’m very excited that we’re able to offer this, and I’m thankful that Jessica Wintz has gone through loops to help us set that up here in Marion County,” Powell said.

Because the program has grown to the level it has, Wintz, the West Virginia eMentoring program director, is seeking more volunteers. Within just 30 minutes a week, a mentor can make a world of difference by sharing their career story and answering any questions the student may have, she said.

“It’s an opportunity for the student to kind of get a real world perspective on what to expect after high school and what comes next after high school, and for our mentors this is a great way for them to give back to the community,” Wintz said. “Most people believe that you have to have an in-person, a face-to-face contact to have a meaningful impact on a student. Through West Virginia eMentoring, you’re able to have that same meaningful impact with a student but you’re able to do it from your home, or you’re able to do it at work.”

Statistics speak loud and clear regarding the overall success of the program. According to research, 96 percent of participating students felt their eMentor was valuable in helping them complete this program, and 83 percent reported the program assisted them in identifying a possible career path.

In October, NMHS implemented it in freshman classes but had to discontinue the program in early January due to some technical issues and lack of time from participating in Innovation Zone classes simultaneously.

However, Powell and Wintz anticipate the program will be back in operation at NMHS by September, at which point they will be promoting it through their feeder middle schools at Barrackville, Monongah, Mannington and Fairview. College 101, a three-hour credit elective for seniors, will also be offered.

“Hopefully, we have gotten a lot of our bugs out of the system, and we’re really excited about bringing the program to seventh graders at middle schools because we think it’s so important to educate them on the careers that are available to them,” Powell said.

“By participating in the West Virginia eMentoring, they get a lot of that education through the activities that take place before the actual mentoring happens.”

Wintz has noted a tremendous response from the NMHS area. At least 20 community members are participating and offering their real life experiences to students, showing them the opportunities are endless and they aren’t limited to just one option.

“There seems to be a lot of interest in having that program in the community,” Wintz said. “The one thing we’re seeing great success with is just the fact that our students are becoming more aware of their options.

“I think it’s a great way to explain to our students that they have other options other than going to that four-year college. They can pursue their interests there, right at their school or right there in their own back-yard.”

To inquire about participation in the West Virginia eMentoring program, visit www.wvmentoring.org and click on the “Register as WV eMentor” link.

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