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Lipscomb University College of Education*

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode):

00:00:02:10 - 00:00:30:10

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00:00:31:01 - 00:01:03:19

I'm Karen Marklein and I'm an Assistant Professor in Lipscomb University's College of Education and Director of Programs in the Ayers Institute. Thanks for joining us for this 'spotlight' episode focused on innovative pathways to teacher certification. Today, we will be talking with Chris Dial, Teacher Residency Liaison with Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools, and Jermaine Purdie, Eighth Grade ELA Teacher Resident in Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools. Chris is a dear friend to the Ayers Institute, and I had the pleasure of having Jermaine in one of my classes here at Lipscomb.

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00:01:04:10 - 00:01:11:09

We're so happy to spotlight this innovation in teacher certification today. Chris and Jermaine, thank you for joining us today.

00:01:11:24 - 00:01:12:21

Thank you for having us.

00:01:13:05 - 00:01:14:07

It's a pleasure to be here.

00:01:14:13 - 00:01:20:18

All right. So let's start with some introductions. Chris, tell us a little about your background and your current work.

00:01:21:22 - 00:02:36:01

I started in education when I was in college. I worked as a night janitor at a primary school and had zero interest in becoming a teacher at the time. And that introduction to working around kids and I had some ability to talk to parents and talk to kids in an after school program where I was a night janitor. Kind of sparked some interest in working with kids. And then I graduated from college with a degree in sociology. So I was, you know, inherently unemployed. And I was working like three jobs at the time and was honestly looking for something with some stability and health care and ended up finding work in metro Nashville schools, where I served alongside school social workers and sort of a truancy attendance support capacity and was really encouraged strongly by my building level admin and just teacher colleagues and friends through the industry to pursue teaching.

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They thought that I would do very well and I really loved the formation of relationships and rapport with kids in that setting. So I decided to go back to school and get my graduate degree in teaching and then became a classroom teacher for nine years. And now, in addition to serving in this liaison capacity, I support the academic and personal success of students experiencing homelessness. And I'm right back to working with school social workers. So it's been a cyclical journey.

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Okay. It sounds like you've had a broad experience, so thank you for that introduction. All right. How about you, Jermaine, A little about your background and your current work.

00:03:23:03 - 00:04:18:24

Well, I gradually graduated from Elizabeth City State University. I have graduated with a bachelor's in business administration that I was also in ROTC. So that led me straight into a second lieutenant in the United States Army. I had an 11 year successful Army career, and after that I got into the management jobs side. I had a couple of management jobs and realized it's fun. But, you know, it's always fun being in charge of stuff. But it wasn't satisfying my it just wasn't satisfying me. And I realized while I was in the Army, I enjoy training soldiers. And so I kind of dip my toes into substitute teaching and educational assistant and realized that is what I wanted to do. And this opportunity came along and I jumped on it.

00:04:18:26 - 00:04:49:29

Okay. All right. Well, thank you for that. So I'm really excited to text in the conversation that we started in part one about this innovative teacher certification pathway. And so this spotlight does have two

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parts. We've already had part one from the director design perspective, and this one will be more from the practitioner or the, you know, the boots on the ground kind of perspective. So let's just dive in, Chris, and we'll start with the question with for you. I would love to hear you describe the specific need.

00:04:50:08 - 00:04:54:09

This residency program in Clarksville-Montgomery County schools is meeting.

00:04:56:08 - 00:06:29:11

So the very obvious need that's being filled most directly by the design of the. Program is to staff our classrooms with highly qualified people. Yes, we're experiencing the same shortage in Clarksville-Montgomery County schools that, you know, schools are likewise facing throughout the nation. Beyond that, though, the design of the program also prioritizes and is inclusive of diversifying our teaching workforce. So students are not only being taught by people who, you know, look like them and might have backgrounds that are relative to the student background, which is the priority. They're also being served by people who have incredibly diverse perspectives and, you know, work histories like Jermaine references had, you know, and full career in the military and can bring that perspective in. We have people who have served on faith capacities. We have people who have been managed households for 20 years and are coming into the job with, you know, unique perspectives that are you just you can't teach that in a in a pedagogical university coursework. And so, you know, I think really if I could sum up the need in two words, it's one well, I guess in two words, the phrase would be "diverse staffing."

00:06:30:17 - 00:06:33:11

All right. All right. Thank you. So all of that.

00:06:35:24 - 00:07:21:01

Can add on to that real quick. So he had that the main point and that's the main need. But there's a I think there's a subset of needs that was also filled. And this is one of the needs I had because this is basically second career time for me and I needed something to do and I needed something to have job satisfaction with. And this was it for me. So it filled my need of job satisfaction. And that's because we could, you know, I could go off and do other things. But since this is second career time, for me, it's not logical or just not reasonable to spend four, three, five, six years in school again, to do this. So there's opportunity done. All right.

00:07:21:03 - 00:07:38:15

So, yes, it seems extremely reciprocal. You know, there is this need that it's fulfilling for the community in Clarksville, but it's also fulfilling very specific needs for the professionals on this journey. Absolutely. Okay. So, Jermaine, how did you get involved in this program? How did you learn about it? What drew you to it?

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Well, as I said earlier, I was dipped in my toes in the substitute teaching and educational assistant. So I was an educational assistant in an elementary school, and I just happened to see a flyer on a bulletin saying residency program and just started to ask questions and go along that route. And I sent the email to the person in charge of it. They said, Hey, we'll put you on the email distribution list and you will know that next time applications are due or information is coming out, you'll be the first to know.

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So yeah, it was just an interest and it was just happen to see.

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Okay, so at this point in our conversation, where are you in the program? How long have you been a resident and where are you in your educational journey?

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So I've been a residence for the well, right now it's December in the fall, so I've been a resident since the summertime. We took about three classes in the summer and I've already. So during this fall semester I took I've taken one class and completed it and I am currently in my second class and I should be complete and within the next two weeks.

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And that was it just, you know, like, where are you? How long have you been a resident and where are you in your journey?

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Yeah. So that's pretty much where I'm at. So in I guess in the psychological part of my journey, I am at the point where I say to myself every day, I got to get this homework done and this opportunity, I cannot let slip through my hands because I can see the light from where I'm at now if I need to.

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All right. So that kind of just goes right into my next question, which was, Jermaine, what has been your biggest challenge in this program?

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Well, for me, the challenge was myself. The biggest challenge is myself because I was not a good student when I was in. When I was younger, I wasn't a good student and I wouldn't say I'm the best student now. So once I get over myself and take myself to the library and do my work, the only challenges I have is the practice getting ready for a practice test. But I'm sure that's everybody's challenge. But I'm getting over my own hurdles and getting over myself. That's that was my biggest challenge and it's so doable that I am already.

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I'm not a student because I got to be, but I'm above my 3.0 mark and I'm still, you know.

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Okay. So that's definitely, you know, speaking about the program and in your own classes kind of challenges, what about when you think about school, like, you know, when you're at school, what's been your biggest challenge when you're working with students or working with other professionals in the school setting?

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Oh, I have to say that I am on the lucky side of it. I've got a great school and I got a great mentor teacher. So the only challenge is in that setting is just getting over my nervousness. Nervousness when it's time for me to teach because my mentor teacher, she pushes me to get in front of class and sometimes I might get a little nervous and not want to do it. But as I continue the challenges, they fade away. So it's not it's not.

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Very encouraging to hear. So what? What makes your school so great? I want more information about that.

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Well, my, um, my principal, Dr. Courson, she they said, Hey, this is what you're here to do. So is that like I'm there to be a substitute teacher? When everybody needs a substitute teacher, I am there to be a teacher. Resident. I'm there to learn. And under my mentor, a teacher and my mentor a teacher, she she'll sit inside with me and she'll talk to me as we're peers. He doesn't talk like she's over me now. She does understand. She does have years more experience, but she's willing to learn from me, just like I'm willing to learn from her.

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And it's a peer discussion on what can happen, what needs to happen, where I may need to improve. And it's those types of interactions and those type of interactions that helps me grow because she does bring me into the fold because other teachers will come in and they'll talk to her and she'll say, Hey, this is Mr. Purdie, and she'll explain what I'm doing there. And she's always excited and she has that happiness in her voice that makes me think, Hey, I think I'm supposed to be here!

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Okay. And it's just really encouraging to hear, as I said. Okay, so those were some challenges. And then what makes your school so great? What? During this program, what has been your biggest reward or your greatest success?

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Oh, well, I guess I have. It's a twofold answer. One of my biggest rewards was just seeing getting out in front of a classroom. And at one point of the class, while I'm teaching a class, I just stop, stop talking and I'm looking at the class and they are eager to hear what I'm about to say next. So that was a really big reward for me because they were paying attention and I was actually influencing, influencing them. And just to hear the next day, my mentor teacher came to me.

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She said, Hey, second period really was excited about your lesson yesterday. They enjoyed it and they couldn't wait to tell me about it. So when my students can't wait to tell the my mentor teacher how great idea. It's an awesome feeling. And then I guess the second part to that answer is I had another educational assistant come to me and asked me about the program. She wanted to know everything she could. And of course, she's already talked to certain people that's in the program, as in the leadership.

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And, you know, leadership is going to tell you all the great things and nothing wrong with that. But she said, I want to know what's not good about this program. I want to know where you're going to be tripped up and where I'm not going to be and handle it. And to be able to sit down and look you in the face and say, Hey, my biggest challenge was myself. And this is how I overcame that challenge. And then look at it as that. Yeah, that's pretty much all I got when it comes to my biggest challenge is in my own. What I don't like about the program.

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So just try to influence somebody else and to talk to them about maybe possibly joining the program, the residency program there. That's another teacher that we can mark on our books hopefully in the future and say, Hey, go out there and do good things. So I'm always about furthering education and furthering yourself professionally and just to bring another educational assistant up into the teacher ranks.

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I think you know what, I love talking to prospective teachers. It's like there's really no greater profession. Like I can't imagine doing anything else. So I'm sure when teachers come to you, they see that in each train. So let's switch to Chris for a second. And you know, I know that your role is to support these residents. So in that role, what has been a challenge that you have faced?

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Working in any new program, I think presents inherent challenges because you are constantly adapting and evolving with the changing parameters of that program. So I don't know if in contextually people understand that this is a very, very new program I'm in. I'm in my second year in the program through CMC. SS involving other pathways with other education preparation providers is really only, you know, past its third year.

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So for all intents and purposes we are still, you know, brand new and very nascent in in our development. So things do change a lot and it's my job to kind of shield residents from those changes becoming barriers or inhibitors to their success. So it is challenging to respond quickly and appropriately to challenges that I can't foresee. But that is my job and it is very difficult. There have been—

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Jermaine is super supportive of the program and I think the world of this program and the opportunities. But there have been some complications just in the, you know, getting it up off the ground and running. And that has that has caused some frustration to some of my residents. And that's also challenging whenever there is kind of any inconvenience or frustration for the people that I'm trying to support and to. To acclimate to the education profession when there are things that are beyond really the program administrators that are affecting the residents themselves, that's just kind of emotionally challenging because I you know, I want for these residents to be as unburdened as possible so that they can appropriately address their coursework, so they can feel comfortable in the classroom. But I think that those sorts of challenges are also inherent to programs that are partnership based.

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So, you know, you have people who are direct stakeholders in CMC assets and you have other professionals who are direct stakeholders working in Lipscomb, but they don't really represent the entire complexity of either organization. And so, you know, complications from one organization often affect the other organization. And at times I can get kind of stuck in the in the middle to navigate, you know, diplomatically, navigate how to smooth through those challenges, how to resolve those challenges, and then generally how to marry sort of the parameters and expectations and requirements of both organizations so that we can seamlessly get, you know, recruit these people and provide them adequate training to be successful in the classroom.

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You know, it is it's a very complicated innovation, you know, and I know that there are so many things that we have had to consider as a programming educator, preparation provider. How do we differentiate for these cohorts? But still upholding the academic rigor that we are held to as well. So it is it is a very complicated when you look at the entirety of the of this, the scope, it's very complicated. Yeah. And I would.

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Generally just I think that because it is such a unique opportunity and not that there are any silver bullets, but I mean if there is anything close to helping resolve the shortage crisis, you know, providing a no cost or it comes at no cost to the residents, but to provide essentially a no cost opportunity in a cohort design model where you've got a bunch of people going through the same exact process at the same time, that because it is so innovative, it is going to come with its own challenges because it this is a response to a bunch of challenges. So I'm not mad about it or anything. It's just it's been an interesting it has been interesting, rather, to watch the growth and evolution and substantiation of this program.

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Yes. So you brought up the cohort model and then, you know, just removing the barriers of, you know, education and funding and all of those things. I wonder, Jermaine, how would you respond to those elements of this innovation, like how helpful is it that it is cost free to you? How helpful is it that it is a cohort model?

00:20:27:05 - 00:21:10:03

Well yeah, I was actually just thinking about it. Um, just the whole. It, it is. It's an opportunity. So I've come from places where opportunity has always had these little marks. Okay, it's an opportunity. But then you got it is, But then you get it is. This is a genuine opportunity to do better. So I, I understand and I've seen some of the struggles that Chris has to deal with because he's dealing with two different entities that has to come together as one. And I understand that from me being in the military, I used to have to speak to the Iraqi police and I was in the military and we had to bring those you two unity or two entities together as one to make things work.

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So I totally understand those delicate things that has to be completed. But me just being one of the ones that gets to benefit from those difficulties that Chris has to go through, I'm very fortunate and I'm grateful to be here in in this environment and be able to take part of this opportunity. And working together as a cohort is definitely just being a male. So I had to bring it up.

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I'm being a male in the cohort and I'm the only male with all females in my cohort. It's it basically mirrors what's in the teaching profession. So it does definitely make it mirrors that. And sometimes it can be difficult for me just because I'm a male and there used to be two other males in my cohort, but they are not there no more. So it's difficult for me because sometimes I don't think that.

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I think like the other fellow students in my cohort and it's worrisome. But at the same time, I was in a class, oh, I think it was the person that's doing this interview right now. I was in her class and I had to sit down with some of my cohort and be like, Help me out because it was getting difficult for me. But those same people that sometimes I had difficulties talking to, they understood what I was going through as well and say, Hey, let's sit down and get this done. And we sat in the lab, our library, and Dr. Marklein

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was actually she ZOOMed in with us to help us out and get our work done. So I definitely can say that cohort thumbs up, but I could also say, yeah, the cohort sometimes it no, it always mirrors the profession and you need to is better to get into it with your cohort than to wait till you get into the actual teaching profession and think that you're going to see something different. It is what it is, is time where.

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I know from an instructor side of that, you know, we, we talk so much with prospective students about the power of collaboration. And what I see within this cohort is that it's really coming to life for you guys, how important it is to have that network of support. You know, one of the main factors in retaining teachers is how well supported are they in that first year of their teaching career? And y'all are y'all are supporting each other right now in that role.

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And I just it really excites me to see it happening. And, you know, nothing makes me happier than to zoom in to a library study session and everybody's working together and it's just wonderful. You know, I'm sure Chris feels the same way about that.

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It's incredibly fulfilling to me to be able to identify and observe if there are problematic trends, because I do have a cohort. You know, this is not a one on one or singular sort of relationship. And so it's great to be able to see like, okay, everybody's kind of struggling with this or people have been confronted by this challenge from this entity. And so this is a collective problem that I can be an instrument of resolution.

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And those are always really, really happy moments because they ultimately contribute to, you know, the productive success of the program and of the residents. And that all translates to, you know, being able to serve students.

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That's especially important to me now that I just left the classroom in May. And so there is like I'm struggling a little bit with feeling distant from students. I'm seeing them on one on one 1 to 1 capacity now for the most part. But when I know that I have helped to resolve an issue that is affecting a bunch of people. Similarly in the cohort, I know that ultimately I've been. Part of making life better for the students that they serve at large.

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Absolutely. Well, thank you for that. So I'm going to ask one final question to each of you. It'll be similar, but different in a way so germane if a prospective resident were to ask you for advice, maybe, just maybe to enter the program or not into the program, what would you say?

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Well, I would ask you, what are your goals in life? If you want to teach, then any deprogramming? What do you have to lose if this is what you want to do? Because it's a I'm not I haven't paid a dollar yet to be in the program. I'm actually in in a school in a school setting. And I have a mentor teacher to mentor me. So what do you have to lose? Do it.

00:26:19:04 - 00:26:32:15

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Okay. All right, Chris, the question for you is, if another school district were to, you know, reach out and say, hey, you know, tell me about this residency program. What advice would you give me to get it started? What would you say?

00:26:33:09 - 00:27:51:19

Well, I'm very happy to report that. I think really, especially given the success of Clarksville-Montgomery County's "Grow Your Own" programs, the state of Tennessee has really increased their support through communications about growing your own programs. They've also increased the funding considerably to prioritize, grow your own initiatives. So I think that that really speaks to the efficacy of this model. And we now have not only, you know, a partnership, we have multiple partnerships and experienced stakeholders that can help to guide that that production and that execution of the grow your own program in a way where you're not going to have to figure it out on your own. Clarksville-Montgomery County has already done like all of the legwork for you. We now have great support networks, access to more funding, and I think that the continued success of our model projects, the longevity of this program being an actual tool for a change for the foreseeable future.

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All right. Well, thank you. Thank you both so much for sharing this information with us today. And thank you especially for your work in education.

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Thanks again for having us.

00:28:05:01 - 00:28:05:16

You're welcome.

00:28:07:09 - 00:28:28:18

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