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Lenape's Kevin Henson: A teacher of teachers



MEDFORD — During the school year, Kevin Henson's primary students are the boys and girls in his high school science classes.

But this earth science and chemistry instructor at Lenape High School also has another group of students during the year and in the summer. He's a teacher who teaches fellow teachers. This week, Henson, 31, of Evesham, will present two seminars during the annual summer education summit of the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation. The

summit will be held over three days in Cherry Hill with about 200 science and math teachers from around the country.

The national foundation, started by Harry and Janet Knowles of Moorestown in 2000, focuses on a teacher-to-teacher network that provides fellowships, professional development, and mentoring to beginning teachers of high school math and science.

Harry Knowles, the inventor of the handheld bar-code scanner and a member of the New Jersey Inventors Hall of Fame, has said the foundation was created to recruit and retain quality teachers. The Business Higher Education Forum points to a projected national shortfall of more than 280,000 new mathematics and science teachers by 2015.

Henson earned one of the highly competitive fellowships the organization offered in 2003 as he was finishing his master's degree at Rowan University in Glassboro.

"The fellowship program was a very valuable resource for a new teacher. You can feel very isolated in the classroom, especially in those early years," Henson said. "Through the program, I was part of a group of other beginning teachers and we could support each other, troubleshoot and share ideas."

The father of two began his career at Lenape in 2003 and will begin his eighth year in September.

“I’ve always had a passion for science, and I love teaching, watching students learning the material, developing ideas on their own. It’s really rewarding,” he said.

As a Knowles science fellow, Henson has been able to take part in unique experiences that he brings back to the classroom, such as professional development programs.

On one trip, he met the authors of a new chemistry curriculum. His and other fellows’ insights and feedback helped the authors make changes in the next edition of their series, and the Knowles foundation, through grant money, helped Henson fund materials used in his classroom.



Part of the fellowship, which is renewable for five years, includes attendance at the summer summit and other events during the year. Now Henson is a presenter at the conference.

This year, one of his sessions will focus on strategies for making the most out of the first week in school with students.

“We’ll talk about the first day of school, the message to students, and how to set expectations for the year,” Henson said.

He said as a science teacher, he finds it helpful to let his students tackle their fears and nerves early on about what, for some, can be a difficult subject, to then allow them to focus on learning.

Henson said it can be tough instructing other teachers, too.

“The biggest thing when teaching your peers is really finding what do I have to offer them and how can I help them,” he said.

“Teachers definitely make good students because they are engaged, have a high level of interest, and are passionate about what they do. They’re also able to share some of their own experiences, so it’s not just what I bring to the discussion. I learn a lot from them.”

At Lenape, Henson is also the junior varsity boys soccer coach as well as one of the school’s new-teacher training instructors. He works with second-year teachers during a

three-day summer workshops. All Lenape Regional High School District teachers must complete the sessions required of first- to third-year teachers.

“It’s a way to bring everybody together and make sure we’re all working on the same page,” Henson said. “We talk about creating interesting and innovative learning and classroom experiences.”