Chuck Bruce is looking forward to becoming a permanent fixture in the business and technology department at Holyoke JR/SR High as he prepares to step into a number of roles within the Re-1J School District.

For the past month, Bruce has been shadowing Kristina Ham, who has been an educator in Holyoke for the past 17 years. Ham had planned to retire at the mid-point of the school year but due to stipulations in the Public Employees' Retirement Association, she will take all of February off before finishing out what will be her last year.

Bruce will take over her classes for February and then will continue to work in the district as a substitute teacher, helping with FBLA, working at the after-school center as well as possibly becoming a junior high track coach.

Teachers in the district are given contracts for the year during the spring, at which point Bruce will find out if he will be taking over permanently for Ham.

Ham praised the school for allowing Bruce the opportunity to step into the classroom and familiarize himself with the curriculum and the students before making the transition to full-time teacher.

"To be able to allow someone that transition period and not make them jump in really is setting them up for success," Ham said.

After working in corporate finance and for an asset management company briefly, Bruce realized that his true passion was teaching, citing that he enjoyed witnessing students reach that ah-ha moment. Upon acquiring his master's degree in career and technical education from Western Michigan University, he moved to Phoenix where he taught for the past six months.

Bruce grew tired of the hustle and bustle of the large city and began looking to transition to a rural setting like that of Northern Michigan where he grew up. He is hoping to call Holyoke home for the remainder of his early career.

“The people in Holyoke are really receptive,” Bruce said. “I grew up in the Midwest so it is a very similar community to what I am used to, and I really like the atmosphere and the environment. People have been very helpful in the school and also in the surrounding community.”

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