Grant aims to transform teacher training

$40 million donated by Bush Foundation intended to increase student-teaching time, improve recruitment

By: Amy Dalrymple, INFORUM

Three area universities are part of a $40 million effort to prepare more effective teachers.

North Dakota State University, Minnesota State University Moorhead and Valley City (N.D.) State University are among 14 campuses to receive funding through a Bush Foundation grant.

The goal is to produce at least 25,000 new and effective teachers over the next decade to replace teachers who are expected to leave or retire in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

NDSU, MSUM and VCSU will share $5 million of the funding for their partnership.

Ten other Minnesota public and private colleges and the University of South Dakota also are participating.

“Nothing makes a bigger difference than the effectiveness of a teacher,” said Peter Hutchinson, president of the Twin Cities-based Bush Foundation.

The effort will focus on improving recruitment, preparation, placement and support for new teachers.

The revamped curriculum will be in place starting fall 2010.

One of the major changes under the Bush program will be increasing student-teaching time.

“We are going to get the students out in the field a lot earlier on so they can see what it’s like to teach students a lot earlier,” said Steve Shirley, president of VCSU.

Also, education departments will recruit potential college students earlier.

Stacy Duffield, assistant professor at NDSU, said recruitment is something schools haven’t done before.

“We’ve just let the students come to us and tell us they want to be teachers,” Duffield said. “We’ve never really gone looking for the people who would be the right teachers.”

Providing mentoring to new teachers for up to five years is a unique part of the program, said Hutchinson, adding it has not been tried anywhere in the country.

Shirley said schools teaching educators now often tell their graduates: “There you go, good luck.”
Virginia Clark Johnson, NDSU’s dean of Human Development and Education, said the grant has the potential to transform teacher education.

“The funding will allow us to do some added things that maybe we thought 10 years down the road we could,” she said.

Sue Severson, chairwoman of MSUM’s School of Teaching and Learning, said although the three campuses place graduates in many of the same schools, the campuses have not worked together before.

Now schools that work with student teachers will notice more similarities, Severson said.

“When our students go out into the fields, there will be some consistency,” Severson said.

Officials estimated that each year MSUM graduates about 200 teachers, NDSU about 100 and VCSU about 75.

The Bush Foundation, established in 1953 by 3M executive Archibald Bush and his wife, Edyth, awards grants in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

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