Forum editorial: Looking to future of teaching

Television spots designed to remind viewers of the importance of good teachers have been aired in the Fargo-Moorhead market for about two weeks. They are impressive, not only for their excellent production values but also, and most importantly, for the value of their message. The ads are one visible element of a new partnership that aims to underscore the importance of good teachers and convince good students to go into teaching.

Led by the Bush Foundation, the partnership includes 14 colleges and universities in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. In the immediate area, North Dakota State University, Concordia College, Minnesota State University Moorhead and Valley City (N.D.) State University are participating. The schools have a storied tradition of educating teachers for the classroom. The Bush initiative is investing $40 million with its partner universities to improve how new teachers are recruited, trained, placed and supported in the classroom. The TV ad campaign is a key element for recruiting.

Why such an effort now? Bush has completed one of the most comprehensive analyses of public education that has ever been done in the three states. The findings reveal that as baby-boomer-era teachers retire – the first wave is retiring this year – the three-state region will face a shortage of 25,000 teachers. Unless more college students choose teaching as a career, shortages will be severe.

But students will bypass teaching if the profession is not seen in the proper context, given the respect the work deserves, and rewarded commensurate with other professions that require a college education. The Bush effort addresses all those factors, not only with data, but also with serious money.

Administrators of partner universities and public education officials are enthusiastic about the program. The foundation’s staff worked for many months to determine needs and assess the most effective use of funds. The knowledge and experience of university and local public school officials were folded into the project. The result is visionary and practical, two characteristics that made it attractive to educators and school officials.

The ads will run through May. Their theme will resonate with anyone who remembers one teacher who made a difference. And that’s what the foundation’s partnership is all about: recruiting teachers with a lifelong commitment to the classroom and finding and training teachers who will make a difference.

Forum editorials represent the opinion of Forum management and the newspaper’s Editorial Board.