Massachusetts Awarded $1.5 Million to Increase Diversity Among Math and Science Teachers

National Science Foundation Grant is First of its Kind Awarded to a State Higher Education System

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Boston, MA – July 23, 2018 – The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education has been awarded $1.5 million by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to develop MassTeach, a new model for increasing and diversifying the ranks of educators who are prepared to teach science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) in high-need school districts.

The five-year grant was awarded through NSF’s Robert Noyce Scholarship Track (Award # 1748400). It is the first of its kind awarded to a state higher education system and will be used to simultaneously address two critical issues: the overall shortage of trained and licensed STEM instructors and the lack of under-represented minorities currently teaching in the Commonwealth’s K12 classrooms. The new program, intended to be both sustainable and scalable, will utilize “A2B” (Associate to Bachelor’s) degree pathways that are part of the statewide MassTransfer system. MassTransfer allows students to begin their undergraduate education at one of the state’s community colleges and then transfer to any state university at a substantial cost savings and without a loss of credit.

The MassTeach Scholars will receive $20,000 scholarships as well as academic advising to keep them on track to transfer, graduate with a STEM degree and obtain a STEM teaching license. By drawing from the highly diverse community college population, MassTeach will cultivate a culturally rich pool of potential educators who are often the first in their family to attend college and likely to reside in economically disadvantaged urban districts where the need for qualified and diversified STEM instructors is most acute.
“What’s exciting about MassTeach is that it is not a stand-alone initiative that will end once the federal grant is spent,” said Carlos E. Santiago, Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education. “This program is built on the solid foundation of our new transfer system, regarded as one of the most comprehensive and student-friendly systems in the nation. We’re very pleased that the NSF has recognized our ability to effectively move STEM teacher candidates from community colleges to state universities to urban districts where their talents can be put to good use.”

“As we build upon our already strong teacher workforce, we hope to see more people at the front of the classroom who are reflective of the students in the seats,” said Jeffrey C. Riley, Massachusetts commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “I am hopeful that MassTeach will attract strong candidates from diverse backgrounds who otherwise might not have considered teaching.”

Currently, 90% of Massachusetts teachers are white, compared with an overall student population that is 60% white. A wide body of research indicates that students often perform better academically when they are taught by teachers they can identify with. One of the unique aspects of MassTeach is that it will place new teachers in urban communities where they grew up and attended school, allowing grant evaluators to gauge whether educators’ local roots serve as a catalyst for their retention in the classroom.

DHE developed the program in collaboration with campus administrators, faculty, and staff. The grant’s pilot phase will be launched by three regional partnership teams:

- Berkshire Community College, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Pittsfield Public Schools
- Holyoke Community College, Westfield State University, Springfield Public Schools
- Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester State University, Worcester Public Schools

“We are so excited that we could participate in this important project that will help increase access and opportunities for more students interested in a future career teaching STEM in our public school systems,” said President Ellen Kennedy of Berkshire Community College. “This funding from the National Science Foundation will help us take an important step in closing the diversity gap between teachers and students in our schools. Bringing a program like this to scale will be another huge win for multiple sectors of public education across the Commonwealth.”

"Worcester State University has been educating teachers for the region's schools since 1874, including Worcester's first two African-American teachers," said Barry M. Maloney, President of Worcester State University. "We are looking forward to contributing to MassTeach. That work will complement existing programming we offer with Worcester Public Schools and Quinsigamond Community College to make sure those leading our classrooms reflect the diversity we see within those classrooms."
Community colleges will recruit potential candidates for entry into the program beginning in fall 2018. Many of the candidates are expected to come from existing STEM Starter Academy programs which give high school students a chance to take STEM college classes and learn more about STEM careers. The goal of MassTeach will be to expand to students at all 15 community colleges and nine state universities in the Commonwealth within three years, eventually placing 50 new teachers in STEM classrooms with 50 more teacher candidates in the post-secondary pipeline. Further, it is hoped that MassTeach will serve as a new national model for recruiting, training and retaining STEM educators.

“Highly qualified, effective and diverse educators is a strategic focus of the Springfield Public Schools. It is intentional and embedded in our mission because teacher quality is a key determinant of student success,” said Daniel J. Warwick, Superintendent of the Springfield Public Schools. “We are so pleased about the MassTeach grant and how it aligns so closely with the district’s “grow your own” initiatives. MassTeach will enable us to move closer to our goal of a more diversified teacher workforce, especially in the area of STEM where there is a critical shortage not just in Springfield but also nationwide.”

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