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Bush grant to help SCSU produce new teachers

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ST. PAUL — St. Cloud State University is among 14 higher education institutions in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota that will share \$40 million in the next 10 years to produce 25,000 teachers.

The money comes from the Bush Foundation and requires the institutions to transform their teacher education programs and guarantee the effectiveness of their graduates. The grant announcement was made Thursday in St. Paul.

St. Cloud State will get as much as \$4.5 million through 2017 if it reaches certain milestones, said President Earl H. Potter III, who attended the announcement. The university graduated 340 students from its education program in 2007. The goal for the Bush Foundation program is 375 potential teachers per year.

"This is a national problem that this group of 14 institutions and the Bush Foundation are going to try to take on and do some things that have not happened in this country," Potter said. "We think it can be done, but there are significant challenges."

Statistics cited by the Bush Foundation highlight the need. There were about 70,000 teachers in Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota during the 2006-07 school year. About 30,000 new teachers will be needed in those states during the next decade, according to the foundation.

The goal of the grant is more than just educating students and helping them find jobs after graduation. The money also is intended to help recruit the best teaching candidates and then support them in the early years after they leave college.

Those goals will be met by creating or strengthening partnerships with districts that have employed the most St. Cloud State teaching graduates in recent years.

St. Cloud State already has been working with St. Cloud school district and will engage other districts in discussing what both partners need to do to make the program a success, Potter said.

Questions remain, such as how to measure whether graduates are successful, he said. Those criteria will be determined after conversations with school district stakeholders, legislators and university officials.

"The measures we choose will reflect a community consensus that we are truly looking at teacher effectiveness," Potter said.

He said Thursday's announcement was a bit like the beginning of a marriage; there are still questions to be answered but both parties believe the relationship can succeed.

Likely changes at St. Cloud State include capping enrollment, creating separate admissions standards in the teacher education program and creating a campaign to recruit the best teacher candidates.

"We're perfectly comfortable sending coaches out to recruit the best athletes," he said.

A similar effort is likely necessary to find and attract the best teacher candidates, he said.

St. Cloud State plans to have the first cohort of Bush Foundation teaching candidates on campus in 2012.

The other institutions participating in the program are: Augsburg College, Bethel University, Concordia University-St. Paul, Hamline University, Minnesota State University-Mankato, University of Minnesota, Minnesota State University-Moorhead, North Dakota State University, St. Catherine University, University of St. Thomas, University of South Dakota, Valley City State University and Winona State University.
