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Our view: Grant will enhance teachers' training

St. Cloud Times Editorial Board

"Narrowing the achievement gap" is a popular phrase these days among people trying to improve public education.

Well, thanks to a strong partnership between St. Cloud State University and the St. Cloud school district, the federal government is willing to invest \$5 million during the next five years in Central Minnesota to help narrow that gap.

This Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant will allow the university to redefine how students are trained to be teachers. It will implement a co-teaching approach between classroom teachers and student teachers. University and district officials believe that will help narrow the achievement gap between white and minority students.

Joane McKay, dean of the university's College of Education, said the grant also will help institutionalize co-teaching and could help develop a master teacher program, which seeks to get the best classroom teachers to share their knowledge.

But the biggest impact will be on how teachers are trained.

With this grant, student teachers no longer will simply take over the classroom after adequate observation. This grant will provide the resources to help experienced teachers share their knowledge and strengths with teaching candidates. Educator and student teacher will work together throughout the student's assignment.

The emphasis on co-teaching also should last beyond student teaching. Research indicates such collaboration can improve everything from student performance to teacher retention.

The benefits for classroom students should be plentiful. Primarily, it means having two trained educators in the classroom at all times. That should allow

for more small-group and individual instruction, which will help the many different learning styles.

The grant will allow the university to train experienced educators in co-teaching, and hopefully convince more teachers to work with student teachers.

It will start with the St. Cloud district, but the university would like to expand it to other area districts.

The grant also pays for creation of instructional videos on co-teaching as well as use of personal digital assistants in evaluating how student teachers are performing. With these PDAs, the experienced educator will be able to do consistent and timely evaluations of student teachers.

McKay and Gayla Holmgren, assistant superintendent for special projects with St. Cloud schools, credited the university-district partnership for the grant, especially being part of the prestigious National Network for Educational Renewal. The two organizations gained admittance to NNER in 2001.

The university is moving quickly to act on the grant. McKay said the goal is to start implementing it by January. That's a big job. The university places about 1,800 student teachers every semester and graduates about 600 teachers a year.