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N.J. to recruit top scholars as teachers

State, Princeton-based foundation team up for 'high need' high schools

By Jenna Portnoy
and Jessica Calefati
STAR-LEDGER

New Jersey will partner with a Princeton-based foundation to recruit top collegiate science and math students to become high school teachers in the state's neediest districts, Gov. Chris Christie said yesterday.

The Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship Foundation will recruit teachers to fill vacancies in Trenton, Ewing, Lawrence, New Brunswick and eight other school districts. The teachers will receive \$30,000 stipends and, in exchange, must promise to teach in "high need urban or rural schools" in New Jersey for a period of three years.

The College of New Jersey

will develop a program in line with fellowship guidelines in order to transform the way teacher candidates are prepared.

TCNJ spokesman Matthew Golden said the college was chosen to participate because of its strong background in training teachers.

"It's so connected to our mission," he said. "We have a historically strong School of Education and urban education programs. We

also partner with a lot of local districts."

Golden said the college is very connected to the community and the goal of the fellowship is aligned with how the college currently prepares its students.

SEE TEACHERS, PAGE A07

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Gov. Chris Christie

Teachers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A01

TCNJ will take in around 10 students during the first year of fellowship, which will commence in the fall of 2014, he said.

Christie said the program will give underserved students a chance to learn from some of the brightest scientists and mathematicians in the state. The effort, he said, will also boost the state's economy once these new teachers join the work force.

"We're recognizing what research has shown us for years, that great teachers matter and so their effectiveness matters for our kids," Christie said. "I believe our work demonstrates unequivocally that we're going to expect nothing less for any of New Jersey's children no matter what their ZIP code."

A consortium of foundations and private donors including the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the PSEG Foundation contributed \$9 million to the program, which also operates in Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. The model mirrors an organization with a similar mission called Teach for America.

In recent years, New Jersey and other states have been grappling with a shortage of science, math and technology teachers, and students from poor communities have suffered the most.

Some students in districts like Newark, Camden and Trenton do not have access to working science labs. Others are forced to share math textbooks and take classes taught by permanent substitutes.

When the program starts in two years, state education officials expect those disparities to diminish.

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Woodrow Wilson Teaching
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there are not people prepared to fill them. We hope this will address some of that. Performance in the STEM subjects in the state isn't as high as it needs to be. We hope this program will address that," fellowship president Arthur Levine said.

"We hope this will be a Rhodes scholarship for teachers," Levine said. "Most fundamentally, what we want to do is transform teacher education in New Jersey and the nation and create models to guide the 21st century."

The four other state universities participating in the program are Montclair State University, William Paterson University, Rowan University and Rutgers-Camden.

Fellows will spend the first year of the program shadowing master teachers in the districts where they will teach. Those who complete the program will earn master's degrees in education from the partner universities.

Times staff writer Christina Izzo and Star-Ledger writer Salvador Rizzo contributed to this report.