Georgia Signs on to STEM Teaching Initiative

By Alyssa Morones on March 4, 2014 5:30 PM

By guest blogger Alyssa Morones

An initiative focused on better-preparing educators to teach STEM subjects gained traction this week, when Georgia signed on to the program, the first southern state to do so.

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal announced on Monday that the Peach State would join the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship initiative, reported the Atlanta Journal Constitution. The fellowship aims to increase the number of outstanding teachers in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., was announced in 2007 as a way to promote changes in university-based teacher preparation. In addition to Georgia, Michigan, Indiana, New Jersey, and Ohio are part of the fellowship program.

Five of the state's higher-education institutions were selected as fellowship sites. As part of the program, each institution will develop master's-level teacher programs that will include yearlong classroom experience.

Each institution will select 12 fellows each year for three years. As Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows, each will receive $30,000 stipends and will commit to teach for three years in a high-need urban or rural school. During this time, the fellows will also receive support and mentoring.

These schools are often in need of new teachers, due to their higher-than-normal turnover rates.

The foundation will coordinate with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, with support from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation, to administer the $9.4 million program. Each participating university will receive $400,000 matching grants to develop their programs.

The Georgia Partnership for Education, founded by the state's chamber of commerce, is a partnership between business, education, community, and government leaders to work toward improving education in the Peach State.

With the increasing emphasis on STEM education, teacher preparation to teach these subjects has come under the spotlight in the last few years.

In 2011, the Center for America Progress, a Washington think tank, released a report arguing that a focus on strengthening the selection, preparation, and licensure of elementary STEM teachers is a vital avenue to improving STEM learning.