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Featured Researchers | Jeff Boles and Jeremy Wendt

TITLE

Project Inspire

INVESTIGATORS

PI: Jeff Boles, Chemistry

Co-PI: Jeremy Wendt, Curriculum and Instruction

FUNDING

Awarded by the National Science Foundation for \$2.8 million



PROJECT SUMMARY

Teachers with undergraduate degrees in math and science are being recruited from across the United States in Project INSPIRE, a \$2.8 million grant led by TTU's Jeff Boles, Chemistry chair, and Jeremy Wendt, interim chair of Curriculum and Instruction. The goal is to make a difference in the way science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) disciplines are taught in urban areas.

The project candidates go through a competitive three-day screening process to be part of a year-long residency program in Chattanooga.

"It's a strong process in which the candidates are interviewed, participate in a teamwork activity, and must teach a mini-lesson," Wendt said. "The original 30 applicants were narrowed down to 12 in this process."

The program will graduate the teachers, who are placed in a classroom with a resident coach, in August 2016 with a curriculum and instruction master's and a teaching license.

"After that, they are almost guaranteed a STEM teaching position in Hamilton County schools," Wendt said.

The teachers earn a stipend during their residency, in which time they move to Chattanooga and integrate their lives in the school systems, where, according to Wendt, "hopefully they will stay."

"Retention of teachers is very important in this program."

According to Boles, this project is a high priority for the state of Tennessee. "We're attracting these student teachers to a high-need metropolitan area, and if successful, we potentially could get state funding to continue it. It takes money to keep the project going."

So far, Wendt says that the teachers are all positive about the work and forming good support networks with their mentors, coaches and each other. An important piece of the networking is the interdisciplinary nature of the project.

"Residents in the program will also benefit from a lot of resources that these connections provide," Boles said. "These resources are not available to the typical new teacher."

Since the residents are technically considered TTU graduate students, they also have access to all of the resources and support that the university provides.

According to Wendt and Boles, Hamilton County is excited to have the opportunity to gain teachers trained in teaching the important aspects of the STEM curriculum.

"This group is very diverse and talented," Wendt said. "We are excited to see how they can benefit the Hamilton County school system and the state of Tennessee, while representing Tennessee Tech."

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