

HCC-Westfield State-Springfield schools among 3 Massachusetts partnerships aiming to increase, diversify STEM teachers

By [Hope E. Tremblay](#)
hopetremblay72@gmail.com
Special to The Republican

Westfield State University will partner with Holyoke Community College and Springfield Public Schools on a new initiative to train more science, technology, engineering and math teachers.

The schools are one of three regional partnerships that will use a \$1.5 million National Science Foundation grant to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education to develop MassTeach, a new model for increasing and diversifying the ranks of STEM teachers in high-need school districts.

The other regional partnerships teams are:

- Berkshire Community College, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Pittsfield Public Schools
- Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester State University, Worcester Public Schools

"We at Westfield State are thrilled to work with Springfield Public Schools and Holyoke Community College to help educate aspiring STEM teachers and increase the diversity of teachers in our area schools," said Westfield State President Ramon S. Torrecilha.

Community colleges will recruit potential candidates for the program this fall. According to Westfield State, many of the candidates are expected to come from existing STEM Starter Academy programs, which give high school students a chance to take STEM college classes and learn more about STEM careers.

"The goal of MassTeach will be to expand to students at all 15 community colleges and nine state universities in the Commonwealth within three years, eventually placing 50 new teachers in STEM classrooms with 50 more teacher candidates in the post-secondary pipeline," the release said.

"While Massachusetts is a national leader in K-12 education, there is a sense of urgency to recruit and diversify the STEM teacher pools, and in particular to serve our Latino and black students," HCC math professor Ileana Vasu, coordinator of HCC's STEM program, said.

Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education Carlos E. Santiago said, "What's exciting about MassTeach is that it is not a stand-alone initiative that will end once the federal grant is spent. This program is built on the solid foundation of our new transfer system, regarded as one of the most comprehensive and student-friendly systems in the nation."

According to the release, 90 percent of Massachusetts teachers are white, compared with an overall student population that is 60 percent white. "One of the unique aspects of MassTeach is that it will place new teachers in urban communities where they grew up and attended school, allowing grant evaluators to gauge whether educators' local roots serve as a catalyst for their retention in the classroom," the release said.

"Worcester State University has been educating teachers for the region's schools since 1874, including Worcester's first two African-American teachers," Worcester State President Barry M. Maloney said. "We are looking forward to contributing to MassTeach. That work will complement existing programming we offer with Worcester Public Schools and Quinsigamond Community College to make sure those leading our classrooms reflect the diversity we see within those classrooms."

The five-year grant is the first of its kind awarded to a state higher education system and will be used to address the overall shortage of trained and licensed STEM instructors and the lack of under-represented minorities teaching in Massachusetts' K-12 classrooms.

The MassTeach Scholars will receive \$20,000 scholarships as well as academic advising to keep them on track to transfer, graduate with a STEM degree and obtain a STEM teaching license.

"Highly qualified, effective and diverse educators is a strategic focus of the Springfield Public Schools," Superintendent Daniel J. Warwick said. "It is intentional and embedded in our mission because teacher quality is a key determinant of student success."