

The Anniston Star

https://www.annistonstar.com/news/education/ivey-pushes-for-scholarship-to-fill-math-and-science-teacher/article_d58d6412-61d1-11e7-b919-d7b44e961213.html

Ivey pushes for scholarship to fill math and science teacher void

Samantha Hill, Star Staff Writer 16 hrs ago

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education will offer \$325,000 in scholarships for prospective teachers who want to specialize in math and science in Alabama.

Officials with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education said the details of the scholarship, like how many will be offered and how much each scholarship would be, is still being determined.

Malissa Valdes-Hubert, public information manager at the Alabama Department of Education, said the issue with the teachers stems from a shortage of teachers with science and math backgrounds. He said all the teachers in the school system have the proper degrees to teach, but some have been moved from other subjects into math and science classes.

“Due to shortages of math and science teachers, other teachers are asked to teach math and science,” Valdes-Hubert said.

Former state school superintendent Joe Morton, now chairman of the Business Education Alliance, said he was also familiar with the problems, saying they stemmed from when he served as superintendent.

“If you’re offering math and science coursework, it’s best to have a teacher that’s certified,” Morton said.

Morton said Jayne Meyer, director of teacher certification and teacher education for the state Department of Education, sent him information about certification in Alabama from a federal report from the Department of Education from fall 2016. He said about 842 teachers in Alabama are teaching math and science without having full certification in those subjects.

Valdes-Hubert said the teacher shortage is statewide, but rural areas are hit hard by teacher shortages. Younger teachers, she said, are often hard to attract to rural areas.

“There’s just less for a young teacher, man or woman, to do out there,” Valdes-Hubert said.

A separate federal Department of Education report from May 2017 tracked teacher shortage areas from the 1990-1991 school year up to the 2017-2018 school year. According to this report, Alabama has needed more math and science teachers for seventh grade through 12th grade every year since the 2004 school year through the 2017 school year. It also said that need expanded to include sixth grade starting in the 2013-14 school year.

Morton said he met with Gov. Kay Ivey in May to discuss this problem and how these scholarships could help the state. Later that afternoon, he said, Ivey spoke to Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, chairman of the Senate Education Budget Committee, expressing her support. At that point, Morton said, the House and Senate were in a conference committee finalizing the education budget. He said because of her support, the scholarship made it into the final budget approved on May 19.

“She did the legwork and heavy lifting to get it in the budget,” Morton said.

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education officials said the scholarships will be for high school students who want to become math and science teachers. They also said teachers certified in other subjects and math and science professionals who want to become teachers can also qualify for the money.

Tim Vick, the commission’s director of operations, said the agency is developing a survey to target information related to graduates in math, physics, science and chemistry.



“What we’re doing is trying to get a feel of who’s producing graduates in what field,” Vick said.

Vick and Margaret Gunter, the commission’s director of communications and governmental relations, said they want to reach out to high school upperclassmen, primarily seniors.

“The main objective now is to get people in the state that we can get to work here in the state,” Gunter said.

Vick and Gunter expressed their excitement to work with Ivey and said nothing like this scholarship has been done before in Alabama. Morton said that over time, the scholarship could help improve student achievement on state assessments by bringing in additional qualified teachers. He also expects students to have a better chance at obtaining jobs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.

“There’s not a downside to this story,” Morton said.

Samantha Hill
Staff Writer