Teachers' workshop may lose funding

JACKSONVILLE — A federally funded teachers workshop at Jacksonville State University might be discontinued after eight years of training Alabama educators. IMPACT/SEED, a program that provides money for conferences, professional development and other educational programs, is part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Teachers at Jacksonville State University have said that, after the program ends in May, the school will not be able to provide the same level of training for educators.

The program, called IMPACT/SEED, is funded with money provided by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Teachers at Jacksonville State University have said that, after the program ends in May, the school will not be able to provide the same level of training for educators.

Supporters of IMPACT/SEED worry that, if the No Child Left Behind Act program ends in May, the school will not be able to provide the same level of training for educators.

However, the school's executive director, Jon Hedges, said that the school will continue to provide some training for educators after the program ends. Hedges said the school will continue to provide some training for educators after the program ends.
FUNDING

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Rick Brown holds two biology degrees and is a long-time educator. He retired from teaching at Georgia schools after 30 years only to return to the profession one year later in Randolph County, where he has been for almost a decade. He said that without the program, students in his classroom could be at a disadvantage.

Brown said the money is particularly important to pay for lab supplies because in Alabama, classes for all subjects receive the same amount for funding, even though some are more expensive to provide. Now that the recession has taken hold, the money is needed more than ever.

"This has really been helpful because science was at a disadvantage in Alabama compared to Georgia," Brown said. "I was concerned my students (in Alabama) would be at such a disadvantage because of the lack of equipment."

Brown has been participating in the program almost as long as he has been teaching in the state. He has used the funding to purchase equipment, such as Bunsen burners, which he said students need to be familiar with to excel at the collegiate level.

Barbara Dorsett, a chemistry teacher at Westbrook Christian School, began teaching five years ago and began participating in the program soon after. She said the program is beneficial both as a source of funding and ideas.

"It has made a complete difference in my success as a teacher," Dorsett said. "We exchange ideas: things that work, things that don't work, successes, failures."

She touted the program for the funding it provides for lab exercises, which she credits with engaging students' interest in the sciences.

"(Losing the program) would be terrible because funding has been cut across the board for the state," Dorsett said. "There isn't any extra funding from the state for the labs and the labs are how we teach the kids in.

And getting students to engage in the sciences early is key, according to Nouredine Zettilli, a physics professor at the university who helps organize IMPACTSEED. It is important, he said, not only for the student's personal development but also for workforce development and long-term economic strength.

"If we don't intervene at the high school level it's too late, because that is where the students will decide what to major in at the university level," Zettilli said.

Zettilli said at the root of the problem is a lack of teachers qualified to teach the subjects, not just in Alabama, but across the country. That problem is created, in part, by teachers who have backgrounds in other subjects but are called on to teach chemistry and physics, and creates a perpetual need for the program.

"That is the reason the program continues to be relevant," Zettilli said. "This is a national problem, it's not only local. However, in this area it's exacerbated."

Zettilli said after almost a decade of providing IMPACTSEED, tangible results are being identified locally. The program has led to improved test scores and an increased number of students pursuing degrees in the sciences at JSU, he said.

He too is concerned the program might lose funding, but said it could continue if the community comes together.

"It would be a terrible loss," Zettilli said. "We are probably going to seek support from the local community and businesses."

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