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## Better science teaching is goal of unique program

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BY SHARON STURDEVANT

SPECIAL TO THE KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

HICKORY CORNERS Area teachers are picking the brains of scientists and education experts to better teach science to young people.

A three-year partnership program involves scientists at the Kellogg Biological Station in Hickory Corners, education professors from Michigan State University and teachers from more than 11 southwestern Michigan school districts including Plainwell, Galesburg-Augusta and Parchment.

"We're testing a model," said Mike Klug, director of the Kellogg Biological Station. "We're not going to completely change how science is taught in three years, but we hope that these teachers will become leaders and change agents in their schools."

The program based on a two-year program involving the station's Long Term Ecological Research Center and 22 teachers from four area middle schools is being funded with a \$1.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

"Our premise is that teachers who have access to the most current knowledge and technology, who are skilled in the pedagogy of teaching for understanding, and who have effective mentoring



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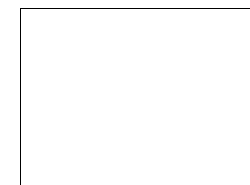


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will be more likely to continue as educators," said Jim Gallagher, an MSU teacher education professor.

Gallagher and Klug have organized the partnership program, which is being constantly evaluated by an outside group.

The program brings together teachers from diverse school districts with scientists and education professors for six daylong workshops during the school year. The workshops include hands-on scientific studies, discussion about teaching methods and using technology.

Teachers also are asked to attend two weeklong summer institutes, one focused on science topics and a second on leadership skills. Program goals include helping science teachers have a maximum impact on students, Klug said. "It's becoming harder and harder to bring students to scientific sites for what equals a one-shot adventure," Klug said. "If you work with the teachers, they will be working with hundreds even thousands of students over the course of time." Klug said the partnership is modeled after a smaller program operated during the past two years for 22 teachers from the Plainwell, Galesburg-Augusta, Delton-Kellogg and Gull Lake school districts.

That program focused on bringing middle school science teachers together with the Long Term Ecological Research scientists and MSU education staff. It was funded with a \$15,000 LTER Schoolyard Ecology Program grant from the National Science Foundation.

Plainwell's participation in the program earned the district a 2001 Education Excellence Award from the Michigan Association of School Boards. "We've been able to get a lot of resources from the station," said Marty Green, an eighth-grade science teacher in Plainwell. "It has helped improve communication between staff members. It helps us feel more comfortable teaching and understand what is being taught in the other levels." Green, who participated in the original program and now leads Plainwell's participation in the expanded partnership, said the program enables teachers to connect with new ideas and experiences.

The partnership also enables MSU staff to learn

about what works or doesn't work in today's K-12 classrooms, Klug said.

"We really want the input from teachers at all levels," he said. "We really don't know what the best way is and, certainly, as university scientists, we don't know what it is like to be in the classroom." Klug said 40 teachers from the Plainwell, Delton-Kellogg, Gull Lake, Galesburg-Augusta, Parchment, Pennfield, Marshall, Harper Creek, Olivet and Gull Lake school districts and from St. Charles in Coldwater already are enrolled in the partnership. Partnership organizers hope to enroll 20 more teachers from three or four more districts. "We really wanted to get a mix of schools," Klug said. "We wanted to work primarily with rural school districts, and we wanted to cover the gamut of schools doing well or not so well on (Michigan Educational Achievement Program) scores."

Grant funds from the National Science Foundation cover the costs of the workshops, materials for teachers and an outside evaluation of whether the program is helping teachers improve, Klug said. The grant also provides stipends for four graduate students and one post-doctoral student to work with the teachers. Participating districts agree to release the teachers for six workshops during the school year and pay for substitute teachers to cover the absences, Klug said.

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