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APS Commends President Obama’s Plan for ‘Regional Centers’ to Train STEM Teachers

New T-TEP report calls for centers to develop highly trained teachers in physical sciences

WASHINGTON, DC -- The American Physical Society commends the inclusion of regional centers in President Obama’s Fiscal Year 2014 budget to develop highly trained STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) teachers who will prepare students to meet the demands of an increasingly technical workforce.

Called the STEM Master Teacher Corps, the president’s plan is consistent with recommendations in a four-year study recently completed by the Task Force on Teacher Education in Physics (T-TEP). The T-TEP report stresses the importance of providing specialized professional preparation to teachers in the physical sciences. Just 47 percent of physics and 46 percent of chemistry classes are taught by teachers with a degree in the subject. By comparison, 73 percent of biology teachers have a degree in the subject. APS developed the report in conjunction with scientific societies in the physical sciences, including the American Institute of Physics and the American Association of Physics Teachers.

“I applaud President Obama for proposing the creation of regional centers in association with the STEM Master Teacher Corps. The centers support the vision of the T-TEP recommendations and will serve as models for the preparation and professional development of teachers of all STEM disciplines. With in-depth focus on education research into teacher professional preparation and student learning, we can make STEM pre-college education the best in the world,” said Stamatis Vokos, professor of physics at Seattle Pacific University and chair of T-TEP. “We must make sure our students are ready to compete in a high-tech economy, and that means making sure they are taught by highly qualified physics and chemistry teachers.”

Additionally, the T-TEP work underscores the necessity of 100 regional centers across the nation: The more centers there are, the greater the opportunity for all STEM teachers to participate in in-depth professional development. The T-TEP report also emphasizes pre-service training to ensure teachers develop in-depth content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

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