

New approach for science education

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Area high school students next school year will begin seeing a different approach to how teachers deliver science education, thanks to a \$1.4 million grant from NASA.

The award pairs educators from the Alameda County Office of Education and Cal State East Bay together in a two-year pilot program in which classrooms will be engaged in NASA mission research.

"We want teachers to be trained in rigorous science so that young people can be exposed and be excited in science and technology," said Rachelle DiStefano, director of professional development programs at ACOE.

About 25 teachers will be trained this summer by scientists and Cal State East Bay faculty in developing curriculum based on NASA missions related to lunar exploration, DiStefano said.

The program is dubbed NASA LIFTOFF, or Learning Inspires Fundamental Transformation by Opening Future Frontiers. Officials hope the program will help transform science teaching at a dozen of the county's high schools, including San Lorenzo High, East Bay Arts High School in San Lorenzo, and San Leandro and Tennyson high schools in Hayward.

LIFTOFF aims to target low-income students, particularly minorities who are underrepresented in the field.

Officials said the program should help address the achievement gap and revitalize California's and the nation's homegrown field of scientists and engineers.

"We are really falling behind on the number of students going into science and engineering," said Jeffery Seitz, chairman of Cal State East Bay's Department of Earth and Environmental Science. "My hope is that we can capture the imagination

of more students who would then consider science as a career option."

Seitz and three other faculty members from Cal State East Bay will work with educators from the Alameda County Office of Education and NASA scientists to train local teachers.

The program will be expanded during its second year to include faculty from San Jose State and Cal Poly Pomona. School districts from Santa Clara and Los Angeles counties will also participate in the program.

Some officials see a revamped way of delivering science education as a way to preserve a subject that has lost some attention as teachers battle constant pressure to raise test scores.

"In this time of high-stakes testing, it is important that we don't lose critical subject matters like science," said Sheila Jordan, superintendent of the Alameda County Office of Education.

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