FISHERSVILLE — Chris Martin has the formidable task of teaching college-level physics to Shenandoah Valley Governor's School students this fall and replacing a legendary teacher at the school, the recently retired Thomas O'Neill.

Martin's new job is also sweeter by his ties to the area. He is a Waynesboro High School graduate and former Governor's School student. Martin recalls taking the same physics class he will now teach.

"It was a very tough class and I felt truly challenged," he said during this week's orientation activities for new Governor's School students. "I really had to buckle down."

But buckle down he did. Martin went on to earn both a B.A. in physics from Virginia Tech and a master's in education at the Blacksburg university. He considered teaching jobs in Blacksburg, but leaped at the chance to replace O'Neill.

"I wanted to give back what I got at the Governor's School," he said. Martin knows he is working with talented students, and knows the knowledge to teach them. But his goal goes beyond his students learning physics.

"My objective is to get them to approach problems critically, objectively and creatively," he said. Students will spend three days a week in class and two days in labs dealing with resolving different physics questions.

Martin is one of three new teachers at the Governor's School this year, according to the school's director, Lee Ann Whitesell. Whitesell said students would spend this week before classes receiving orientation guidance, including workshops on such issues as time management.

She said time management is a concern for students at the school because "these kids tend to be involved in everything."

Whitesell said this year's new class of 118 is the biggest in memory. Students at the Governor's School are enrolled in the arts and humanities area or science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Students attending the Governor's School come from the Waynesboro, Staunton and Augusta County school systems.

Like Martin, Whitesell said an important goal of the school is to make the students "better critical thinkers."

Shenandoah Valley Governor's School's physics teacher Chris Martin tests the effects of different tensions on the velocity of circular motion.