

To: Dr. Gary Niehaus, Superintendent
Board of Education Unit 5 Schools

From: Dr. Dawn Green, Director of Secondary Education

Re: Mentoring and Induction Grant

The traditional method of beginning a teacher's career centers on the myth that graduates of teacher-credential programs are prepared to teach unassisted in a classroom. Historically, we treat new teachers the same as we do veteran teachers. That means we give them a key to their room, provide them with needed materials, give them their schedules and class rosters and wish them well. That system hasn't proven to provide the support needed for new graduates. Up to fifty percent of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching, and this is at a time when the country is in desperate need of qualified new teachers. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 2 million new teachers must be hired by 2010 due to class-size reduction, a demographic bulge of teachers approaching retirement, and a scandalously high attrition rate among new teachers.

What we've come to understand in the last decade is that novices entering teaching, like those entering any profession, need what we call an induction phase -- a developmental process in which new teachers receive ongoing support, opportunities for professional growth, and a means of receiving continuing feedback during the first few years. Regardless of the quality of their preparation, teachers in their first year face an overwhelming number of concerns, such as setting up a new classroom, developing curricula for a new group of students with wide ranges of abilities, grading papers, learning to talk with parents, and dealing with an endless cascade of paperwork and other details. Often, as is the nature of day-to-day classroom teaching, these issues must be dealt with quickly and, in the traditional system, without anyone to turn to for advice. New teachers working in isolation navigate a slow and painful learning curve. Using this trial-by-fire method exacts a high price on new teachers, their students, and the entire school community. Faced with a multitude of problems and a lack of support, new teachers quickly become disillusioned, and many leave the profession.

It is for these reasons that the Illinois State Board of Education funded ten pilot sites last year for mentoring and induction. These ten sites received continuation funding for the 2007-2008 school year along with the additional funding of thirty-one new pilot sites. In April our district received confirmation of receiving a Beginning Teacher Induction Pilot Program grant for \$134,617 from the ISBE. Due to the late notification, this grant period is from February 1st, 2008 to August 31st, 2008. The purpose of this grant is to prepare and train new teacher mentors in preparation of becoming full time release mentors. These full time release mentors will provide mentoring for Unit 5 teachers that are new to the profession. Shortly, we will be writing an additional grant for the 2008-2009 school year that will include financing requests for the paying of salaries and benefits of three full time release mentors as well as a mentor coordinator of this program.

It is with pleasure that I recognize Megan Novotney as our mentor coordinator of the program, and Vickie Buerkett, Michele Kraft, and Jenny Snyder as district mentors. We look forward to working with this group as they seek to increase classroom performance of our new teachers through on-going support and professional development.

