

**Improving Teacher Quality
State Grant Program**

**2016 - 2017 Allocation
to the State Agency for Higher Education**

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IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY STATE GRANT PROGRAM

The purpose of the Improving Teacher Quality State Grant Program is to increase student academic achievement by helping to ensure that highly qualified teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals have access to sustained and intensive high quality professional development in core academic subjects. The program provides grants to partnerships comprised of Nebraska institutions of higher education and high-need local educational agencies (LEAs)* for projects to improve the skills of teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals. Once the required partners are established, partners from any other LEA, higher education institution, or entity may be added to the project.

The Improving Teacher Quality grant program was authorized under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The Every Student Succeeds Act, replacing NCLB, was signed on December 10, 2015. The Improving Teacher Quality program was not included in that legislation. However, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 provided FY 2016 funding for the program—funding for the projects below. Moving forward, Improving Teacher Quality grants will no longer be available.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION PANEL December 7, 2016

The evaluation panel met on December 7, 2016, at the Coordinating Commission office in Lincoln. Ten proposals were submitted by partnerships that involved four different institutions (UNL, UNK, WSC, and Creighton University) and a variety of school districts and educational service units (ESUs). The panel ranked the proposals based on the degree to which they met the criteria identified in the RFP, discussed the proposals, and made their recommendations, attempting to fund as many quality projects as possible.

At this time, the total amount of funds available for awards in 2016-2017 is \$364,111. The total amount recommended for the following seven projects is \$366,544. While this exceeds the current available amount, previously funded projects often return funds at the end of the grant, funds that can be applied to the current grants.

Below are synopses of the seven proposals the panel has recommended for funding. The title of the project is listed, followed by the project director, the partners required by federal statute, and any other partners. Projects that are open state-wide may not have all additional partners identified until after their recruitment phase.

Committee recommendation: concur with the panel's recommendations.

The Coordinating Commission approved these recommendations Jan. 26, 2017.

** High need LEAs are defined by statute as school districts having at least 20% or 10,000 children of school age living in poverty, as identified by the U.S. Census, with some portion of the teachers teaching in areas for which they are not endorsed.*

Increasing Scientific Literacy through Inquiry-Based Professional Development in Genetics, Muscle Biology, Microbiology, and Nutrition

Project Director: Dr. Nathan Conner

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL - Agricultural Education, Leadership, and Communications**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL - College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (Animal Science Department)**
- **High-need LEA: Sumner-Eddyville-Miller Schools, Scottsbluff Schools, Keya Paha County Schools**

This project would address U.S. high school students' lack of proficiency in science. A two-day workshop for 30 teachers in summer 2017 (10 teachers at three sites), three online meetings during the 2017-18 school year, and a summer workshop in 2018 would prepare teachers to present science content in the context of genetics, muscle biology, microbiology, nutrition, and inquiry-based teaching methods.

Amount Requested: \$60,623

Amount Recommended: \$60,623

Note: Travel to a national meeting was eliminated in order to provide a second day for each summer 2017 workshop.

Husker Writers: A Public Writing Collaborative Partnership

Project Director: Dr. Robert Brooke

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL - Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL - English Department**
- **High-need LEA: Omaha Public Schools**
- **Other partners: Lincoln North Star High School, Brownell-Talbot School (Omaha)**

The goal of this project is to develop teachers' capacity to engage student writers by providing real community audiences and real purposes for civic writing. Twenty high school teachers would pair with a mentor from UNL or one from a civic agency during a week-long summer workshop in 2017, project development during the school year, and a conference in summer 2018.

Amount Requested: \$95,012

Amount Recommended: \$75,708

Explanation of Reduction: Reduce teacher stipends, workshop leader stipends, materials, and indirect cost rate

Preparing Paraprofessionals to Work Effectively in the Early Childhood Classroom

Project Directors: Dr. Jean Hearn and Dr. Lynn Olson

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): Creighton University - College of Arts & Sciences, Education Department**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): Creighton University - College of Arts & Sciences**
- **High-need LEA: Omaha Public Schools**
- **Other partners: Schools of the Omaha Archdiocese**

This project would allow highly qualified paraprofessionals, as well as preservice teachers, to increase their content knowledge in math and science while working with high-risk students in early childhood classrooms. Preservice teachers would also gain knowledge and experience dealing with adult workers in the classroom. Thirty participants would attend six after-school (4:30 to 7:00 p.m.) workshops spread throughout the 2017-18 school year.

Amount Requested: \$37,649

Amount Recommended: \$36,929

Explanation of Reduction: Reduce food costs

Water Education Leaders for Secondary Science (WELS²)

Project Director: Dr. Cory Forbes

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL - Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL - School of Natural Resources**
- **High-need LEA: Harvard Public Schools, Omaha Public Schools**
- **Other partners: The Groundwater Foundation, Millard Public Schools, Hastings Public Schools, Lincoln Public Schools**

The project director recently received funding from the USDA to provide the WELS² program to high school teachers. This project would fund 10 middle school teachers to participate in the same 15-month professional development. Teachers would learn about water resources and methods to translate their knowledge into curricular resources. Participants would receive nine hours of graduate credit. Each funding source would function separately.

Amount Requested: \$65,311

Amount Recommended: \$62,037

Explanation of Reduction: Reduce administrative costs.

Improving Social Studies Instruction Using the Student Atlas of Nebraska, 2017-18

Project Director: Dr. Randy Bertolas

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): WSC - School of Education and Counseling**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): WSC - School of Natural and Social Sciences**
- **High-need LEA: Omaha Public Schools**

With the goal of improving the geographic content knowledge and map reading skills of fourth grade teachers, this project was funded in 2014. Five one-day workshops were held in summer 2015 and again in 2016. Fifty teachers participated, each receiving 25 atlases for classroom use. This project would repeat the workshops, offering them in summers 2017 and 2018 to 50 different teachers. Each workshop would be held at a different site and would be open to teachers, both public and private, state-wide. The atlas has received the support of the Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission and will be made available online.

Amount Requested: \$17,300

Amount Recommended: \$17,300

Helping Rural Middle School Science Teachers Create Classroom Aquaponic Systems Enhancing Soft Skills and Career Readiness

Project Director: Dr. Matthew Bice

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNK - College of Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNK - College of Natural and Social Sciences**
- **High-need LEA: Anselmo-Merna Public School, Gibbon Public Schools, Loup County Public School, Maywood Public Schools, Sumner-Eddyville-Miller Schools**
- **Other Partners: ESU 10, North Platte School District, North Platte Catholic Schools**

This project would promote active learning in the middle school science classroom utilizing an aquaponics growing system. A series of three workshops would provide 24 teachers with an aquaponics system for their classrooms and the knowledge and skills to integrate its use into the curriculum.

Amount Requested: \$67,866

Amount Recommended: \$59,766

Explanation of Reduction: UNK will cover the cost of graduate assistant tuition. Adjustment to incorrect listing of indirect costs.

Using Hands-on Technology to “Energize” Elementary Teachers’ Physics Instruction

Project Director: Dr. Dena Harshbarger

- Higher education partner (teachers college): UNK - College of Education
- Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNK - College of Natural and Social Sciences
- High-need LEA: Anselmo-Merna Public School, Gibbon Public Schools, Loup County Public School, Maywood Public Schools, Sumner-Eddyville-Miller Schools
- Other Partners: ESU 10

This six-month professional development program would provide 24 teachers with hands-on opportunities to learn and use interactive kits, simulations, videoclips, mobile devices, and rapid-response classroom-polling apps to explore physics content. The three face-to-face workshops and two online modules would focus on the laws of motion, optics, electricity, and magnetism.

Amount Requested: \$59,381

Amount Recommended: \$54,181

Explanation of Reduction: Reduce personnel budget. Cut number of circuit sets from eight to six. Reduce number of participants from 25 to 24.

IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY STATE GRANTS: SUMMARY SHEET – 2016-2017

Projects in bold are recommended for funding by the Independent Review Panel (recommendation may be for a lesser amount)

PROJECT TITLE	INSTITUTION/ DIRECTOR	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT REQUESTED
1. Increasing Scientific Literacy through Inquiry-Based Professional Development in Genetics, Muscle Biology, Microbiology, and Nutrition	UNL / Dr. Nathan Conner	Workshops for 30 teachers at three sites preparing them to teach science concepts within the context of animal and food science	\$60,623
2. Husker Writers: A Public Writing Collaborative Partnership	UNL / Dr. Robert Brooke	Develop capacity of teachers to engage student writers with real world experiences; 20 teachers paired with UNL or civic partners	\$95,012
3. The Next Generation of Family and Consumer Science	UNL / Dr. Guy Trainin	Create a cohort of mentors that will infuse STEM content into Family and Consumer Science classes via webinars; 15 teachers and 15 mentors	\$51,984
4. Strengthening Mathematics Instruction in Intermediate Grades in Southeast Nebraska	UNL / Dr. Michelle Homp	Deepen knowledge of math content and pedagogy for 20 teachers of grades 4-6; six college courses for 18 hours of graduate credit	\$100,216
5. Teacher Boot-camp in Economics	UNL / Ms. Jennifer Davidson	3-day camp for 30 teachers providing the foundation for teaching economics	\$39,100
6. Preparing Paraprofessionals to Work Effectively in the Early Childhood Classroom	Creighton Univ./ Dr. Jean Hearn & Dr. Lynn Olson	30 paraprofessionals increasing math and language arts knowledge and learning best practices for working with at-risk students	\$37,649
7. Water Education Leaders for Secondary Science (WELS²)	UNL / Dr. Cory Forbes	Improve knowledge of water resources and related curricular development; 10 teachers over 15 months	\$65,311
8. Improving Social Studies Instruction Using the Student Atlas of Nebraska, 2017-18	WSC / Dr. Randy Bertolas	Improve geographic content knowledge and map reading skills for 25 fourth grade teachers in one-day workshops in summer 2017 and 25 teachers in 2018	\$17,300
9. Helping Rural Middle School Science Teachers Create Classroom Aquaponic Systems enhancing Soft Skills and Career Readiness	UNK / Dr. Matthew Bice	Promote active science learning utilizing an aquaponics growing system; three workshops for 24 teachers	\$67,866
10. Using Hands-on Technology to “Energize” Elementary Teachers’ Physics Instruction	UNK / Dr. Dena Harshbarger	Learn and use hands-on technology to teach physics; 25 elementary teachers	\$59,381
TOTAL REQUEST			\$594,442

December 7, 2016

Voting Members

Members are selected who have expertise in a variety of fields. Many are recipients of local or regional awards or recommended by a curriculum specialist from the Nebraska Department of Education. As a partner with the Commission in promoting quality education for Nebraska students, the Department of Education is always asked to provide a panel member.

Mike Baumgartner
Executive Director
Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

Pat Madsen
Adult Program Services
Nebraska Department of Education

Nicole Miller
Life Science
Lakeview Junior-Senior High School, Columbus
2016 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching

Mike Musil
English
Papillion LaVista South High School

Staff

Kathleen Fimple
Academic Programs Officer

Miste Adamson
Administrative Assistant

Kadi Lukesh
Office Manager