

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION PANEL December 11, 2013 **(Approved by the Commission Jan. 23, 2014)**

The evaluation panel met on December 11, 2013 at the Coordinating Commission office in Lincoln. Fifteen proposals were submitted by partnerships that involved three different institutions (UNL, UNO, and Nebraska Wesleyan University), Nebraska Educational Technology Association, and a variety of school districts and educational service units (ESUs). This is the largest number of proposals the Commission has received in over a dozen years. Unfortunately, the funds available were reduced, primarily due to federal sequestration, forcing the panel to select only four projects out of a pool of many quality proposals.

At this time, the total amount of funds available for awards in 2013-2014 is \$294,145. The total amount recommended for the following four projects is \$298,638. 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. If there should be remaining funds, those will be available for projects that may have more participant applications than slots funded or other unexpected costs or will be carried forward for use in the 2014-2015 competition.

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

Committee recommendation: Committee members concur with the panel's recommendations. (Approved by the Commission Jan. 23, 2014)

Nebraska Blast 2.0 Improving Teacher Quality through STEM workshops

Project Director: Dr. Bradley Barker

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNO, College of Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL, Institute of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (IANR)**
- **High-need LEA: Santee Community Schools**

Leveraging existing resources within the Nebraska Department of Education (21st Century Community Learning Centers) and the University of Nebraska at Omaha (NASA Nebraska Space Grant Consortium), this project will offer a workshop focusing on wearable technologies. An extension of robotics, wearable technologies use micro controllers, sensors, conductive material, and LEDs to create a “smart” textile. Teachers will learn to merge engineering design, problem solving skills, artistry, and entrepreneurial skills to teach about STEM. Approximately 64 teachers will be able to select one of four workshop locations across the state.

Amount Requested: \$81,872

Amount Recommended: \$75,130

Reason for reduction: Reduced stipends, hotel costs, and indirect costs

Teaching Literacy with Historical Documents

Project Director: Dr. Iain Anderson

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): Nebraska Wesleyan University, Department of Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): Nebraska Wesleyan University, University College, Historical Studies Program**
- **High-need LEA: Omaha Public Schools**
- **Other identified partners: Archdiocese of Omaha Catholic Schools, Concordia Academy, and Nebraska State Historical Society**

The goal of this project is to close the achievement gap in reading between elementary grade students at persistently low-performing schools and their peers in Omaha. A two-day summer workshop and four half-day workshops during the academic year will introduce the concept of “close reading” within the context of an elementary social studies curriculum. Close reading involves teaching students to read for deeper meaning rather than simply searching for information. The activities will be available to 50 3rd through 6th grade teachers from Omaha public and private schools.

Amount Requested: \$65,766

Amount Recommended: \$65,766

Enhancing Nebraska 6-12 Teachers' Knowledge of Earth Science Content

Project Director: Dr. Mindi Searls

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL, College of Education and Human Sciences**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL, College of Arts and Sciences**
- **High-need LEA: Omaha Public Schools**
- **Other identified partners: Mount Michael Benedictine, Dundy County Public Schools, Garden County Public Schools, Hayes Center Schools, McPherson County Schools, and Potter-Dix Public Schools**

This professional development opportunity will be offered four times over two summers with one workshop for rural communities (held in Cedar Point) and one for urban communities (held in Omaha) each summer. The first year will focus on the hydrosphere and the second year on the geosphere. Since many K-12 educators teach earth science but don't have a background or certification in the field, the four-day workshops will provide content knowledge for an earth systems approach and in accordance with state standards. Two follow-up support sessions will be held in the fall.

Amount Requested: \$84,539
Amount Recommended: \$82,042
Reason for Reduction: Eliminated meal expenditures for Omaha

Strengthening Upper Elementary Mathematics Instruction in the Nebraska Panhandle

Project Director: Dr. Michelle Homp

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL, Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, College of Education and Human Sciences**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL, Center for Science, Mathematics and Computer Education, College of Arts and Sciences**
- **High-need LEAs: Scottsbluff Public Schools, and Educational Service Unit #13**

Today teachers of grades 4 through 6 with an elementary teaching certification are being expected to teach algebra preparatory content formerly introduced in higher grades. This project will provide an opportunity for 25 teachers in the Panhandle of Nebraska to deepen their knowledge of mathematics content and pedagogy through two week-long summer workshops followed by a third workshop during the academic year.

Amount Requested: \$78,934
Amount Recommended: \$75,700
Reason for Reduction: Reduced housing costs and instructional salaries

Panel for Evaluating Improving Teacher Quality Proposals

December 11, 2013

Voting Members

Jim McGahan
Grand Island Northwest High School
Chemistry and Physics (Retired)
Grand Island

Pat Madsen
Teacher Education Program Specialist
Nebraska Department of Education
Lincoln/Stuart

Mike Musil
9-12 Language Arts
Lincoln North Star High School
Lincoln

Mattie Olsen
Instructional Technologist/Social Science
Creighton Preparatory School
Omaha

Staff

Kathleen Fimple
Academic Programs Officer

Miste Adamson-DaMoude
Administrative Assistant

Kadi Lukesh
Office Manager