

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 10, 2014

The evaluation panel met on December 10, 2014 at the Coordinating Commission office in Lincoln. Eight proposals were submitted by partnerships that involved four different institutions (UNL, UNK, Doane College, and Wayne State College), Nebraska Educational Technology Association, 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 (available funds have been reduced over the past several years, most recently due to federal sequestration).

At this time, the total amount of funds available for awards in 2014-2015 is \$275,855. The total amount recommended for the following five projects is \$276,114. While this slightly exceeds the current available amount, a previous project director has indicated that he will be returning funds later this year. Other previously funded projects could also return funds at the end of the grant. All returned funds 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 2015-2016 competition.

Below are synopses of the five 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.

Staff recommendation: concur with the panel's recommendations. Approved by the Commission Jan. 22, 2015.

Strengthening Mathematics Instruction for Teachers of Primary Grades in the Nebraska Panhandle

Project Director: Dr. Michelle Homp

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL, Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL, Center for Science, Mathematics & Computer Education**
- **High-need LEA: Scottsbluff Public Schools**

With increased rigor in standards and persistent achievement gaps, today's primary grade teachers, more than ever, are responsible for starting students off with a solid mathematical foundation. This project would provide an opportunity for 20 grade K-3 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: \$59,327

Amount Recommended: \$59,327

Engaging Math: Professional Development through the Flipped Classroom Model

Project Director: Dr. Amy Nebesniak

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNK, College of Education/Teacher Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNK, College of Natural & Social Sciences/Mathematics & Statistics Department**
- **High-need LEA: Grand Island Public Schools**

Designed for 30 teachers in grades 3-5, the project would focus on technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge. Priority would be given to teachers from schools with low performance in math. Faculty instructing the four face-to-face workshops and three online learning modules would extensively utilize technology and model the use of a flipped classroom for teachers who wish to implement it.

Amount Requested: \$74,398

Amount Recommended: \$73,000; contingent on additional private schools being contacted

Reason for Reduction: Eliminate costs for equipment that is available elsewhere; reduce server and software costs

Building Teacher Competency in World Language Classrooms through Authentic Performance Based Assessment

Project Director: Dr. Ali Moeller

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL, Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL, College of Arts and Sciences**
- **High-need LEA: Grand Island Public Schools**

The goals of this project are to build language and cultural competency among 15 world language teachers and to develop skills in creating valid and reliable classroom-based language assessments through a 15 week graduate course. The course would be offered in blended format, with two face-to-face meetings and numerous online segments. Following completion of the professional development, it would be converted into three four-week modules. The teachers would become turnkey trainers who would work with their local ESUs, including implementing the four-week modules.

Amount Requested: \$63,797

Amount Recommended: \$58,347; contingent on providing private schools in Grand Island being contacted

Reason for Reduction: Eliminate food costs (not allowed under federal regulations) and attendance at a national conference; reduce teacher sub pay that was over-estimated; eliminate instructional costs for UNL (if the institution charges tuition, the grant cannot pay instructional costs)

Water for Elementary Teachers of Science Nebraska (Nebraska WETS)

Project Director: Cory Forbes

- **Higher education partner (teachers college): UNL, College of Education and Human Sciences**
- **Higher education partner (arts and sciences): UNL, School of Natural Resources**
- **High-need LEA: Hastings Public Schools**

Research has shown that K-5 students hold many alternative ideas about water and need to learn to reason about complex systems. In addition, many elementary teachers do not possess strong science content knowledge or science instructional strategies. In this project, 20 elementary teachers would learn about water systems and the use of standards, assessment, and other instructional tools to improve science instruction and student learning about water systems. There would be a four-day workshop in summer 2015 and a follow-up two-day workshop in summer 2016, with new or retooled water units presented to the Nebraska Association of Science Teachers (NATS).

Amount Requested: \$71,140

Amount Recommended: \$71,140

Improving Social Studies Instruction Using the Student Atlas of Nebraska

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**
- **Additional partner: Geographic Educators of Nebraska (GEON)**

The Geographic Educators of Nebraska set as one of its goals the development of an atlas of Nebraska that could be used in the elementary classroom, especially in fourth grade when history and geography of Nebraska are taught. Funding was secured and the atlas is in production. However, many elementary teachers have never taken a geography course. This project would provide targeted geographic content knowledge and map-reading skills to 50 teachers (25 in summer of 2015 and 25 in summer 2016); GEON would provide 25 atlases for the classroom of each participating teacher so that every child would have access to an atlas (1,250 atlases).

Amount Requested: \$12,300

Amount Recommended: \$14,300

Reason for Increase: The project director indicated that additional atlases would be available. The increased amount would provide stipends and materials for ten additional teachers (matching atlas availability). No additional workshops would be needed.

Panel for Evaluating Improving Teacher Quality Proposals

December 10, 2014

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.

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

Sharon Katt
Adult Program Services
Nebraska Department of Education
Lincoln

Mike Musil
English
Papillion LaVista South 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