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INTERIM REPORT

This form is in addition to the Grantee's Reporting Form which was sent to you when payment of the grant was made. You are still required to complete the Grantee's Reporting Form at the appropriate time.

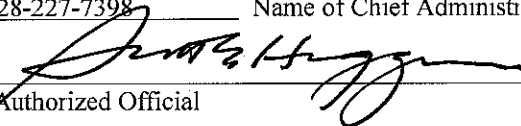
Name of Organization: Western Carolina University

Address: Cullowhee, NC 28723

Telephone: 828-227-7398

Name of Chief Administrative Officer: Dr. Scott Higgins

Signature of Authorized Official



Title

Dean, Graduate School

Date

August 7, 2007

Title of Project/Activity: Project START: Supporting, Training, And Retaining Teachers, College of Education and Allied Professions

ZSR Grant:

Date Approved
May 19, 2006

Amount Granted
\$50,000

Date Paid
July 30, 2007

Date of this Report
August 7, 2007

1 Length of time this project/activity has been operating: 1-year 1
Years Months

2 What were the original goals and expectations for the project/activity supported by the ZSRF grant? If applicable, how have these goals and expectations been revised or refined during the course of the project to date?

The original goals of Project START were to support the retention of beginning teachers and their transition to the classroom through web-based and on-site mentoring. Because the awarded grant was smaller than the requested amount, the decision was made to eliminate the on-site mentoring, focusing instead on establishing an online network of support connecting beginning teachers, mentors, and university faculty.

3. What has the project/activity accomplished with the ZSRF grant funds? Please include factual information to support conclusions and judgments about the project/activity's impact.

Project START created a partnership among Western Carolina University and Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain County Schools. Additionally, because of the information shared by the Beginning Teacher Coordinators from these school systems, Mitchell and Yancey County Schools joined the group, each paying for an additional e-mentor to meet the needs of their beginning teachers. Alleghany County requested to join the online support program as well. E-mentors to support their beginning teachers were funded by the grant NC QUEST: SCIENCES (a collaborative project between Western Carolina University and Alleghany County).

A part-time coordinator was hired to design the CSBI Portal (<http://ustream.wcu.edu:8500>) and coordinate the online program. One hundred thirty-one first year teachers were served during the 2006-2007 school year. Twenty-one public school teachers and nine university faculty members served as e-mentors. Public school e-mentors were recommended by beginning teacher coordinators or were selected from participating teachers in the pilot online support program during the prior school year. The average beginning teacher/e-mentor ratio was 5:1. Teachers were engaged in two six-week online sessions. The first session dates were October 2 – November 17, 2006 and the second session dates were January 15 – February 28, 2007. Initially, ten e-mentors were trained July 25 and 28, 2006 on the campus of Western Carolina University. Those E-mentors participated in the Beginning Teacher Symposium August 15 – 16 as facilitators for the beginning teacher online training session. This provided an opportunity for the beginning teachers in each group (PK-2, Grades 3-5, Middle Grades, High School, and K-12 certified) to meet their e-mentors face-2-face before interacting with them online in October.

Additional e-mentors were recruited, as the number, grade level and content areas of the newly hired first year teachers were determined. The project coordinator trained them informally. A training session was held at Western for university faculty fall 2006. They joined the conversations in January when the focus was content driven.

The teachers were grouped with others teaching a similar age group and/or content area, forming small communities to offer support and suggestions to one another in online conversations. Each group included at least two e-mentors who helped guide the conversations, answer questions, and offer experienced perspectives on how to best meet the needs of students in the classroom. E-mentors also posted collections of resources helpful to beginning teachers.

In online surveys completed by 52% of participating beginning teachers at the end of the 2006-2007 school year, 74% of respondents indicated that e-mentor comments in the online support program were helpful, and 78% indicated that comments from other beginning teacher were helpful. When asked about the year-long beginning teacher support that included the online program, 82% of respondents indicated that the support had enhanced their teaching practices and made them better teachers, and 71% indicated that the support had increased their likelihood of continuing in their teaching careers. Specifically, the teachers reported that the most helpful element of the online support program was sharing new ideas. Secondly, the online support program provided a sense of community to beginning teachers who were comforted to know that there were others dealing with similar experiences.

The e-mentors were also surveyed and preliminary results of that survey indicate that the e-mentors felt that the on-line program was useful for the beginning teachers who participated. They reported that the number of teachers that they mentored at one time was generally appropriate; their match with the teachers they mentored was good, their role was clear, and the teachers generally felt comfortable asking for help. The e-mentors reported spending the majority of their time posting and reading discussion items but a significant amount of time was also spent by most e-mentors gathering and posting resources. When asked what beginning teachers need the most, a significant number of e-mentors reported that beginning teachers need emotional support, someone to listen to, and encouragement as they faced difficult situations. They indicated a desire to work with other e-mentors in identifying how to provide that support better. They also indicated that the participation of the beginning teachers in the on-line program needed to be tracked in order to ensure their involvement.

For a copy of the preliminary report on the beginning teacher surveys, mentor surveys, and principal surveys see <http://www.ceap.wcu.edu/csbt/Datacollectionandanalysis.htm>. A comprehensive report is in progress and will include comparisons of perceptions among beginning teachers, mentors, and principals made on common survey items.

Retention data for this group of beginning teaches will be available from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in October 2007.

Two booklets were published as part of Project START:

- *Teacher Tips: A Collection of Ideas, Plans, and Strategies for New Teachers by New Teachers*
- *Supporting New Teachers: Tips for Mentors*

Teacher Tips is a collection of teacher tips posted by Project START first-year teachers to share with one another and with other new teachers. Beginning teachers in the program, their principal, and beginning teacher coordinators were mailed copies of the publication. The first-year teachers hired in these systems for the 2007-2008 school year will also receive a copy. *Tips for Mentors* (in press), information, plans, and strategies for mentors, will be distributed to the e-mentors in the project, principals, and beginning teacher coordinators. In addition career teachers in Western's mentor training program and the 2007-2008 e-mentors will be given a booklet.

4. From your organization's standpoint, please rank the overall results of the project/activity as follows:

(X) Exceptional () Good () Poor

5. Based on experience, how could the project/activity be improved in the future?

As a result of reflection on the first year of Project STARTI, a few changes will be made in the program. E-mentors will be selected through an application process. This will ensure the best possible candidates can be chosen for this role and will encourage applicants from all participating school systems (e-mentors for the 2007-07 year did not inc Also, e-mentor training will be offered on-line to accommodate all schedules and to allow for the preparation of e-mentors who join after the initial phase of the project. Advanced e-mentor training will also be provided for those who served as e-mentors during the 2006-2007 school year.

Based on responses in the beginning teacher survey, a greater number of open-ended conversation prompts will be included in the discussion forums, allowing teachers to focus on topics of their own choosing. Also, e-mentors will be asked to offer more specific pedagogical support while still providing emotional support to beginning teachers.

Project staff members are working with the College of Education and Western's graduate program to provide an opportunity for e-mentors to receive partial credit for a graduate course, EDCI 613: The Teacher Leader.

The remaining changes involve a refining of the online portal used as the website for Project STARTI in order to track respondents for the frequency and type of use

6. List any other funds or in-kind resources, by source and amount, donated to the program/activity during the period of the ZSRF grant support.

Two school systems, Yancey County and Mitchell County, joined the network and contributed \$1200 each to pay for two extra e-mentors. Also, Alleghany County Schools participated with funds in the amount of \$3800 from the NC QUEST: SCIENCES grant. Western Carolina University provided in-kind funds totaling \$21,786 which included release time for the project director and program assistant; salary for the project coordinator; and funds for travel and office supplies.

7. Briefly summarize future plans and funding prospects.

- Project STARTI will continue with the 10 school systems from the 2006-2007 school year.
- Four additional school systems have contacted WCU as potential participants and will pay for e-mentors.
- E-mentors will submit applications and receive stipends according to the number of beginning teachers they mentor:
 - Six – eight first year teachers \$1,400 stipend
 - Three – five first year teachers \$1,000 stipend
 - One – two first year teachers \$ 750 stipend

8. Does this project/activity serve a special population group? If so, please specify (youth, elderly, minorities, women, etc.)

The project serves first year teachers in the participating systems.

9. How many people have been served to date: 131 first-year teachers, 21 public school e-mentors and 9 university e-mentors

10. **ON A SEPARATE PAGE, ATTACH AN ITEMIZED REPORT ON HOW ZSRF'S GRANT FUNDS HAVE BEEN SPENT TO DATE.**

REPORT SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE FOUNDATION BY:

(Continued on Reverse Side)