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GRANTEE'S REPORTING FORM

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

Date of Final Expenditure: June 30, 2008

ZSR Grant:

Date Approved	Total Granted	Amount and Date of Payment
May 19, 2006	\$95,000	\$95,000 – July 24, 2008

1. 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?

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.

2. 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 participated in the project 2006-2008, each paying for an additional e-mentor to meet the needs of the increased number of 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 grant between Western Carolina University and Alleghany County). Summit Charter School in Jackson County joined the project in January 2008.

A part-time coordinator was hired to design the CSBT 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. One hundred fifty-two first-year teachers participated in 2007-08 from twelve systems and twenty-seven e-mentors from seven systems and CEAP were hired. The average beginning teacher/e-mentor ratio was 5:1. Teachers participated in two six-week online sessions – October – November and late January – March. E-mentors participated in the Beginning Teacher Symposium as facilitators for the 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.

Initially, public school e-mentors were recommended by beginning teacher coordinators or participated in the pilot online support program during the prior school year. In 2007-08 e-mentors submitted an application (see interim report, #4. Improvements to the project). E –mentors are recruited, as the number, grade level and content areas of the newly hired first year teachers were determined. In 2006-07, the project coordinator trained them informally and a training session was held at Western for university faculty fall 2006. A two-week online e-mentor training program was developed and offered online in the second year of the grant (see interim report, # 4. Improvements to the project). The training program included activities for first-time e-mentors and separate activities for returning e-mentors. Common discussion prompts were created to build community among the group and to allow returning e-mentors to share their perceptions and “lessons learned” with e-mentors participating in the program for the first time.

New teachers were grouped with others teaching a similar age group and/or content area, forming small learning 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 that would be helpful to beginning teachers.

Evaluation –

Year One (a full report (*Western North Carolina Beginning Teacher Induction Program: 2006-2007 Survey Report* can be

downloaded at: <http://csbt.wcu.edu/9742.asp>.)

Responses to online surveys completed by 52% of participating beginning teachers at the end of year one, indicated that e-mentor comments in the online support program were helpful (74%) 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 their teachers 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 in gathering resource files. When asked what beginning teachers need the most, a significant number of e-mentors reported the need for more emotional support, having 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 online program needed to be tracked better in order to ensure their involvement.

Year Two - A comprehensive report is in progress and will include comparisons of perceptions among beginning teachers, mentors, and principals made on common survey items. Preliminary results show:

- As in year one, 72% of beginning teachers who responded reported that the most helpful component of the online support program was getting advice/suggestions from others.
- 81% of e-mentors reported that support and accessibility were the most important elements of the beginning teacher support program
- 80% of school-based mentors believed that having a supportive and accessible mentor was most positive element of the beginning teacher support program

Two booklets were published as part of Project START in 2006-2007:

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

Publications for 2007-08:

- *Western North Carolina Beginning Teacher Induction Program: 2006-2007 Survey Report*
- *2007-2008 Tips for New Teachers*
- *2007-2008 Supporting New Teachers: Tips for Mentors* (in press)
- *2007-2008 Survey Report (to be published fall 2008)*

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

Exceptional Good Poor

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

Based on participant surveys and informal focus groups held at the system-level, it is recommended that formal online conversations not be required fall semester. The beginning of the year is very stressful for new teachers as they are establishing classroom rules and procedures, building classroom community, forming relationships with colleagues and parents, and becoming familiar with school policies. Instead, a variety of online supports should be accessible on an "as needed" basis. New features should be added to better meet the needs of the "Millennials," those born in 1978 and later, as they move into the teaching profession. The new format:

- Fall online support program
 - Podcasts
 - "Ask a Mentor"
 - Information, articles, online resources, and webquests on common topics
- Spring online support program – focused online discussions in grade or content-alike groups

Other forms of technology, such as Apple iChat could be used to form grade or content alike groups of new teachers and e-mentors.

The iChat project capitalizes on new technologies that can open classroom doors, providing opportunities for teachers to share their practice within the safety of a networked community. Using the Apple MacBook, beginning teachers can capture discipline specific video clips of classroom activities and events, samples of student work, reflections, and interact/conference instantly with career teachers outside of geographic boundaries.

5. 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.

Three school systems, Cherokee Central, Mitchell and Yancey County school systems, joined the network and contributed paid each for e-mentors. Summit Charter School in Jackson County joined the project in January 2008 and provided funds for additional e-mentors. In addition, Alleghany County Schools participated with funds from the NC QUEST: SCIENCES grant. Western Carolina University provided in-kind funds totally \$32,041 which included release time for the project director and program assistant; salary for the project coordinator; and funds for travel and office supplies.

6. If the project/activity is a continuing one, briefly summarize future plans and funding prospects.

- Western's CSBT will continue to offer the online program to WNC school systems who will provide funding for e-mentors
- CSBT will seek additional funding to add podcasting and to pilot an iChat project.
- Online surveying, informal focus groups, and consultation with Beginning Teacher Coordinators and the CSBT Advisory Board will continue to be used to inform the direction of the project

7. 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 twelve WNC School systems, including traditionally prepared and those entering the profession through an alternative route.

8. How many people have been served to date: 283 First-Year Teachers; 57 Career Teachers /University Faculty; approximately 15,000 WNC P-12 children

