



The Improving Teacher Quality Program: 2008 Grants and Current Research

Introduction

Every year, the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program issues a Request for Proposals (RFP) to award funds provided annually from the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In recent years, each RFP has focused on a specific objective tied to state priorities in teacher quality. Since 2005, the grants have required scientifically based evaluation research in each project. The intent is to extend project evaluation beyond evaluating whether grants effectively carried out the promised activities, and to look for evidence that the activities actually changed teacher practice and improved student achievement.

The 2008 Request for Proposals

The 2008 RFP focuses on eliminating the achievement gap in elementary grades through whole-school reform that involves teachers as leaders. The availability of funding was advertised early in the year to all California colleges and universities, school districts, and other interested stakeholders. Thirty proposals were received by the mid-May deadline. Experienced peer reviewers met in June to identify those proposals that warranted further consideration. A review committee interviewed teams from 11 selected projects and followed with additional questions to clarify issues. The panel reviewed responses and recommended to the ITQ administrator the projects they believed should be funded. With the administrator's concurrence, the recommendations were sent to Executive Director Haberman in early September for approval.

The following six grants were awarded. Five of the grants provide four years of funding. They are:

Bell Gardens Science Project: A partnership of CSU Long Beach and Montebello Unified School District serving all 50 teachers in Bell Gardens Elementary School. The project integrates English language development strategies into science instruction and builds on a current ITQ K-2 science education grant. Grant amount: \$945,222.

Science and Academic Literacy: A partnership of CSU Chico and Gridley Unified School District to train all 52 teachers in Gridley's two elementary schools. The goal is to increase science content knowledge and narrow the achievement gap between English language learners and English speakers. Grant amount: \$978,884.

Algebraic Learning in Elementary Grades: Results, Independence, Achievement (ALEGRIA!): A partnership of CSU San Bernardino and Ontario-Montclair School District to provide professional development to 31 teachers in Vineland School in mathematics and English language development. The project will help teachers develop algebraic reasoning skills to support math success in young students. Grant amount: \$991,404.

Teacher Efficacy Affects Math and Science Success (TEAMS!): UC Irvine will build on an existing partnership with Compton Unified School District to extend its K-2 science and mathematics training to all teachers in eight Compton schools. A total of 105 teachers will be served in a model based on professional learning communities. Grant amount: \$999,494.

Advancing Collaboration For Equity In Science (ACES): A partnership of UC Berkeley, the Lawrence Hall of Science, and Oakland Unified School District will provide professional development in elementary science to 52 teachers in two low-performing Oakland schools. Teachers will blend science and writing training to support student achievement in both areas. Grant Amount: \$960,143.

A sixth grant has been awarded for one year and may be extended for an additional three years depending on its progress in the first year. Because the partnership is new, the Commission wishes to re-evaluate the grant after a year before extending it for the entire four-year period.

Making Algebra Accessible Project (MAAP): A partnership of Claremont Graduate University, Pitzer College, and Pomona Unified School District will provide algebra-based mathematics professional development to 68 teachers in two Pomona elementary schools. The goal will be to substantially reduce the racial/ethnic achievement gap. Initial grant amount: \$262,572. Total if funded for four years: \$935,090.

Quality of Proposals Received

Some general conclusions about successful and unsuccessful proposals can be drawn from the application process. Successful applications were submitted by experienced teams that represent the partnership required by the law — a university school of education, a university arts and sciences school or department with strong content expertise, and a fully-committed, high-need local school district. The best teams included early and active participation from the targeted school or schools, whose principals and teachers helped design the project. The best projects were clear as to exactly what achievement gap or gaps they hoped to reduce or eliminate, and had well-defined strategies for achieving that goal. The proposals identified how every teacher at the school site will be engaged, how to sustain the projects after funding ends, and how to measure their progress in improving student achievement.

Fewer proposals were deemed fundable than what was expected. To the extent this was the result of substantive weaknesses in the content of proposals, it may reflect the difficulty of fitting a project into an educational environment where many pressures on school districts and university partners make it difficult to create a coherent plan. Sometimes, a project like ITQ cannot compete with existing interventions, or teachers are feeling bombarded with initiatives and are not open to new ones. The grants are targeted to the highest-need schools — but these are also the schools most likely to be in federal “Program Improvement” status or under pressure by local and state officials to make changes.

Unsuccessful proposals tended to have a less balanced partnership with unconvincing plans for ensuring participation. Many showed no evidence that teachers would even agree to the intervention, and some could not clearly identify the specific achievement gap they wished to reduce (racial/ethnic, English learners, socioeconomic, or some combination of these). Some proposals did not respond to the grant requirement for meaningful efforts to improve elementary teaching and learning at the “whole school” level. They either failed to address one or more entire schools, or to build a sustainable learning community within that school. Unsuccessful proposals failed to explain how teacher leaders would be selected and trained, or what their roles would be.

Two other issues may have contributed to the lack of competitive proposals. The program’s effort to closely target specific needs and seek to address them in the context of the state’s priorities may be too constricting, at least in the short term, for university-based professional developers who are accustomed to a more flexible kind of funding. Some institutions do not have existing partnerships capable of responding to initiatives like this.

Successful proposals were built on the scaffold of long-standing partnerships with a good record of collaboration. Increasing the outreach to potential proposers to inform them of project requirements, even

outside of the regular RFP cycle, may enable more universities to lay the groundwork for competitive proposals by building partnerships essential to successful projects.

Other Program Activities

Project Monitoring

The period between June and late August is historically a busy time in the ITQ program. In addition to managing the annual RFP process, the program staff monitors projects during their major activity period. Almost all projects hold summer institutes, academies, or other workshops designed to provide intensive content information and teaching strategies. Contractor Jason MacCannell and Commission staff member Jessika Jones assisted ITQ Administrator Karen Humphrey in visiting every directly-funded project and most subgrants in the 2006 Math and Science Teacher Retention Project that held institutes this summer.

It was very heartening to see content workshops where teachers were fully engaged in improving their knowledge of subject matter and identifying strategies to help their students learn that content. A memorable visit was to the CSU Long Beach science institute for teachers in the Montebello Unified School District — a day of science lessons punctuated by the magnitude 5.4 earthquake that struck Los Angeles and Orange counties on July 29, 2008. Fortunately, the earthquake caused little damage and few injuries — and one of the CSULB instructors labeled it a great “teachable moment.”

The visits also highlighted the work most projects are doing to try to support year-round, site-based activities that will create learning communities and sustain what teachers learned this summer by moving that learning into the classroom. Although many ITQ and Eisenhower projects have encouraged and even funded these ongoing, site-based activities, they were not an expected component of all projects until the most recent RFPs. It is likely that all future competitions will require such activities to be included. Research shows that collaborative models of teacher professional development (such as Professional Learning Communities, Lesson Study, mentoring and coaching) are highly effective and lead to greater improvement in teacher skills and increased project sustainability.

Research on Professional Development

This summer, UC Santa Cruz student Courtney Logan was assigned to the Commission as a UC Scholar. Her strong interest in education, especially K-12 teaching, and discussions with staff, resulted in her choice to research the state of professional development in California school districts. Ms. Logan talked with staff at the California Department of Education on programs administered by the department, and reviewed reports by CDE, the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, and others. She designed an online survey for school district staff on what professional development is actually provided in the field. The survey received a surprisingly large number of responses with some still coming in, and results are now being prepared. Ms. Logan’s tenure with the Commission ended in late August, and she will soon begin a M.Ed. program at the University of San Francisco. She plans to attend the December 2008 Commission meeting to report on her findings and what they suggest for future research on professional development.

Presentation on Research Projects

Since 2005, all RFPs have required applicants to provide systematic, scientifically based evaluation research on the outcomes of their projects. The 2008 grants will be the fourth group of projects to include this research. Two research directors will make presentations at the Commission meeting, explaining their projects, what they have learned so far, and the challenges of this type of research. Abstracts for each of their projects are attached.

Biographies of Presenters

Robert Land. ITQ-02-337 — UC Irvine and Lynwood Unified School District

Robert Land Ph.D. began working with a UC Irvine project in Lynwood Unified School District in 2005. He and his team are entering their final year of data collection and analysis, with a final report due in September 2009.

Dr. Land is a Professor of Education at the Charter College of Education at CSU Los Angeles, where he was selected as an Outstanding Professor in 2006–07. He serves as Associate Director of the Reading Language Arts Clinic, Co-Director of the Central Los Angeles site of the National Writing Project, and Associate Chair of Curriculum and Instruction and Vice Chair of the Academic Senate.

Dr. Land has written 22 articles, many on issues related to teaching reading and writing to second language learners. He has served as the outside evaluator for the Pathway Project (predecessor to ITQ-02-337) since 1996, and has received two research awards of studies co-authored with project director Dr. Carol Booth Olson. Their seven-year study won the Alan Purves Award for research most likely to impact educational practice.

Robert C. Calfee. ITQ-07-412 — Chapman University and Anaheim City School District

Robert C. Calfee, Ph.D. is heading research on a Chapman University project with the Anaheim City School District. It was funded in 2007 and held its first teacher institutes in the spring and summer of 2008.

Dr. Calfee, Professor Emeritus of Stanford University and a former Dean at UC Riverside, is respected nationally as an educator who combines the theoretical and the practical to promote school change. A cognitive psychologist by background, he is interested in the effect of schooling on the intellectual potential of individuals and groups. He earned his degrees at UCLA and spent nearly 30 years in the School of Education at Stanford University, then was appointed Dean of the School of Education at UC Riverside, from which he retired in 2003.

Dr. Calfee works as a researcher, evaluator, and author in the areas of language, literature, and culture. His Project READ-Plus and The Inquiring School programs have been implemented in hundreds of schools nationally. He conducts workshops and seminars for educators, and works with teachers and schools to demonstrate innovating techniques. He has published more than 200 articles and books, including *Teach Our Children Well*, describing his work with schools.

Project description for ITQ-02-337

California Postsecondary Education Commission			
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program			
Project Description			
Project Title	Accelerating Academic Literacy: A Pathway to College Success		
Grant Amount: \$885,820	Grant Period: October 1, 2005 – September 30, 2009		
Grade Level: 6 - 12	Subject Matter: English		
Institute of Higher Education	<input type="checkbox"/> University of California, Irvine (UCI)		
Local Education Agency	<input type="checkbox"/> Lynwood Unified (Lynwood High, Firebaugh High, Cesar Chavez Middle, and Hosler Middle)		
Additional Partners:	<input type="checkbox"/> UCI Department of Education/ UCI Writing Project <input type="checkbox"/> Program in Academic English/ ESL, School of Humanities, UCI <input type="checkbox"/> Paramount Unified School District		
Need for Project/ Population To Be Served:	<p>Lynwood Unified School District in Los Angeles County is comprised of fifteen schools serving 18,786 students. According to the 2002 U.S. Census, 27.7% of the student population, ages 5-17, comes from "families in poverty." 70.8 % of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Lynwood High School and Firebaugh High School, the district's two high schools, serve 4,905 students—87% of whom are Chicano/Latino and 12% of whom are African-American. Two thousand Lynwood High students are classified as English Learners. Only 37% of all students tested in Lynwood USD passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in 2006. Lynwood High has an API ranking of 2 and the school is in Program Improvement. Paramount Unified School District in Los Angeles County is comprised of twenty schools serving 16,674 students. 19 % of Paramount families are classified by the US Census as living below the poverty level. 82 % of Paramount students receive free and reduced lunch. Paramount High School serves 4,046 students, 83% of whom are Chicano/Latino and 11% of whom are African-American. Approximately 1,600 Paramount High students are classified as English Learners. Only 48% of all Paramount students tested in 2006 passed the CAHSEE. Paramount High has an API ranking of 3 and the school is in Program Improvement.</p>		
Project Goals:	<p>To develop a long-term educational partnership between UCI, Lynwood, and Paramount Unified School Districts to improve teacher quality and positively enhance student outcomes over a three year period, and beyond; To enable Lynwood and Paramount to raise their API base above the 700 mark (the current base is 617 in Lynwood and 668 in Paramount) and to move up and ultimately out of Program Improvement; To replicate the efficacy of the Pathway Project, a cognitive-strategies based reading/writing intervention that was highly successful in SAUSD, in Lynwood Unified and Paramount which has a similar population, socio-economic status, and performance profile.</p>		
Summary of Activities:	<p>This is a professional development program which aims to accelerate students' academic literacy by improving the quality of their teachers through exposure to rich, scientifically research-based reading/writing instruction. Activities will include: six professional development seminars and monthly after-school meetings per year on teaching reading/writing interventions to struggling secondary students and English language learners using a cognitive strategies approach; training in strategies to help students become strong, independent readers; training in strategies to help students meet <i>English/Language Arts Content Standards</i> including literary response and analysis, comprehension and analysis of informational nonfiction texts, and development of clear, coherent, focused essays. Teachers will also participate in administering a pre/post literature-based writing assessment and will collaboratively analyze student work; develop classroom libraries and Book Club activities; communicate with parents and attend a Pathway Parent Night; attend an Author's Day with their class; and assess student growth over time.</p>		
Outcomes Expected:	<p>To improve the quality of teachers' literacy instruction through intensive staff development in order: To increase students' language arts G.P.A, attendance rates, redesignation rates from LEP to FEP status, retention rates, and college-going rates; To demonstrate growth of at least one-half of a letter grade on the pre/post Pathway Assessment of Literary Analysis and to outscore control teachers by statistically significant margins; To increase experimental students' scores on standardized measures including the E/LA portion of the STAR and CAHSEE; To show growth in academic English as measured by the Vocabulary Profile (Cobb, 2002).</p>		
Teachers Served	34	Students Served	1190
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Project description for ITQ-07-412

California Postsecondary Education Commission			
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program			
Project Description			
Project Title	Project SMART: Integrating Science, Mathematics, Reading and Technology in the Primary Grades		
Grant Amount: \$901,405	Grant Period: 2007-2011		
Grade Level: K-2	Subject Matter: Science, Math, Reading and Technology		
Institute of Higher Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Chapman University, Orange		
Local Education Agency	<input type="checkbox"/> Anaheim City School District		
Additional Partners:	<input type="checkbox"/> Orange County Department of Education		
Need for Project/ Population To Be Served:	Project SMART will serve an estimated total of 90 practicing K-2 teachers, 90 aspiring elementary school teachers enrolled in their teacher preparation program at Chapman University, and 2250 K-2 students.		
Project Goals:	Project SMART aims to embed literacy (reading and writing) instruction within the content areas of science and math at the primary grades, and to infuse technology throughout the curriculum, with the goal of raising teachers' content and pedagogy skills and student achievement in all areas.		
Summary of Activities:	<p>The 90 K-2 teachers will be enrolled in two "cohort" groups. Forty-five teachers (fifteen at each grade level) will engage in professional development activities beginning in spring 2008; the remaining 45 teachers will join in the project one year later in spring 2009. All teachers will attend a two-day introduction training the first spring that they are enrolled in the project, and a five-day SMART Summer Institute the first summer. Teachers will then engage in additional professional learning community (PLC) group meetings throughout the school year, and a follow-up two day Summer Institute their second year of enrollment. At the professional development sessions, Chapman science and mathematics faculty will work with practicing Anaheim City School District teachers and future elementary teachers enrolled in Chapman's teacher education program on their understanding of science, math, and technology, while Chapman education faculty will work with participants on strategies for delivering science-based integrated instruction in the primary grades.</p>		
Outcomes Expected:	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased teacher capacity for high-quality science and math instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Increased teacher knowledge of science and math content <input type="checkbox"/> Increased infusion of technology into K-2 classrooms <input type="checkbox"/> Increased student achievement in science, reading, and math		
Teachers Served	90 practicing, 90 preservice	Students Served	2250 K-2
Project Website: www.project-smart.org			
Roxanne Greitz Miller IHE Contact	Email: rgmiller@chapman.edu	Kelley Barrett LEA Contact	Email: kbarrett@acsd.k12.ca.us
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