



CPEC

Improving Teacher Quality Program: 2009 Grants and Current Activity

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by Natalie Sidarous

CPEC's Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program (ITQ) awards \$8 million annually to support university-based teacher professional development projects. The program is funded by the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. CPEC awards these grant funds through a competitive process involving evaluations by expert readers.

Current Projects

CPEC is reviewing grant proposals for two groups of projects. Funding for these projects is expected to start in October 2009.

Addressing the Achievement Gap in Middle Schools

This RFP targets California's persistent racial/ethnic achievement gap. It requests proposers to work with at least one department and integrate at least one additional department in the targeted school or schools. The projects must develop teacher leaders who can help sustain the improvements after the ITQ funds are gone. In July, panels of independent readers convened to review and rank the 31 proposals received. The 11 finalists were invited to attend interviews in August in Sacramento and Los Angeles. The interview panel was composed of ITQ program staff and several readers with different areas of expertise. Finalists were then asked follow-up questions by email. The panel then recommended the projects they believed should be funded.

The new ITQ administrator, Marcia Trott, reviewed the recommendations and submitted the proposed grantees to the CPEC executive director for approval. Information on the final selections will be provided at the September 2009 Commission meeting and posted on the CPEC website by October. Plans to announce these awards in local communities will be shared with the Commission.

Teacher-Based Reform

Teacher-Based Reform (T-BAR) is a pilot program that funds master grants for teachers to design their own professional development programs. T-BAR divides the state into four regions: Los Angeles County, South (Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Imperial Counties), Coastal (from Del Norte to Ventura County, including about a dozen adjacent counties), and Inland (remaining 33 counties).

A committee reviewed the five T-BAR proposals received. In August, CPEC announced funding for two teams, one at UCLA serving Los Angeles County and a collaboration between UC Davis and Humboldt State University serving the Coastal T-BAR region.

The process of running a grant competition will expand the collaboration to include numerous school districts within their region. The first meeting with T-BAR master grant staff and ITQ program staff is planned for late August. This is an opportunity to ensure that the goals and the spirit of T-BAR are met and that the master grantees can get their RFPs off the ground in a timely and successful manner.

The T-BAR grants are based on a model that has not been used for some time by ITQ. The RFP attracted five proposals — fewer than hoped — and only two were deemed fundable. Proposers

from the Inland region failed to meet either project standards or specific programmatic requirements. No proposal was submitted from the Southern region. Program staff decided to proceed with the successful proposals as demonstration projects. ITQ staff intend to learn more about how this type of project should be shaped. A new RFP will be released as soon as possible for the Inland and South regions, so that teachers throughout California have the opportunity to participate.

Other Activities

Most ITQ projects hold intensive summer workshops designed to provide content information and teaching strategies. Staff have continued to visit the current projects despite the absence of an ITQ administrator. Program coordinator Natalie Sidarous, CPEC staff researcher Jessika Jones, and contractor Jason MacCannell have visited most directly-funded projects and many subgrants in the 2006 Math and Science Teacher Retention Projects that held training sessions this summer. Every directly-funded project was required to complete a mid-year report that is more detailed than required in the past. This desk monitoring protocol is in response to the federal monitoring report in April 2008 that requires CPEC staff to visit all projects, or at least use formal desk monitoring reports separate from each project's annual reports.

ITQ Program Administration

The position of ITQ Program Administrator was vacant from March when Karen Humphrey was appointed Executive Director of CPEC. In August, Marcia Trott was appointed ITQ Program Administrator. She then attended the State Higher Education Executive Officers Professional Development Collaborative meeting for Title II-A grant administrators in Denver. She has also attended grant competition interviews and made several site visits with other program staff.

Ms. Trott has degrees in liberal arts from Antelope Valley College, political science from UC Santa Barbara, and a master's degree in public administration from CSU Northridge. She was a private postsecondary senior education specialist at the Bureau of Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education and the California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education.

Research Conference

Since 2005, all grantees have been required to conduct scientifically based research to evaluate the outcomes of their projects. The first group required to carry out this research will report on their findings and experiences in September at UC Irvine. The results will be presented at Commission meetings and available on the CPEC website to benefit the ITQ community and the whole teacher professional development field.

Site visits

During our visits, we observed a lot of excellent professional development activities. Teachers were excited about improving their knowledge of subject matter and identifying strategies to help their students learn that content.

A project at CSU Long Beach working in Montebello Unified School District had a goal of enrolling 42 teachers. Teachers have been so eager to participate that enrollment was nearly double that. In this economic climate, it is remarkable that the project has been able to accomplish this without additional funding from ITQ.

At a math academy in Red Bluff run by CSU Chico, teachers were excited, and did not want the institute to end. The children were arguing over who would do the math problems first. Teachers said repeatedly, "This is the way to change teachers!"

One student heading into third grade this year said she hoped she would get to come back to "math class" again next summer.

— Natalie Sidarous, ITQ program coordinator
