California Postsecondary Education Commission

Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) Program Status Report

March 2007

This report provides an update on current grant projects funded through the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program. These include grants targeted to academic literacy in secondary education and to the retention of science and matehmatics teachers. The Commission also received information on plans for the 2007 competition process, which will focus on teacher professional development in early elementary grades.

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The Commission advises the Governor and the Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the State's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

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Overview

The Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) Program currently has two major teacher professional development initiatives underway with a third initiative planned for this year. The year that just ended was a particularly busy one for the program, and saw the conclusion of the transition from the previous Eisenhower Professional Development Program to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)-funded Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) Program. The last of the Eisenhower grants, originally funded in 2001, have been completed. In addition, most of the first set of grants funded under ITQ have neared the end of their funding. As ITQ moves forward, it is establishing its unique identity as a tool for improving not only teacher practice, but also student achievement in California. This report summarizes the current status of the ITQ Program and the direction of the program for 2007.

Grants that Closed in 2006

The first set of multi-year grants funded under the NCLB's Improving Teacher Quality provisions—known as the ITQ-01 grants—also reached the end of their original term in 2006. A number of the projects were granted time extensions to use unexpended funds for additional project activities that increase their chances of being sustained with other resources, but all will finish their work by September.

The first ITQ grants were reasonably successful, although some faced significant challenges. In the final year of activity, 16 projects provided nearly 2,100 teachers and over 250 administrators with both short-term and sustained professional development activities. A few projects generated considerable community support, including fiscal support.

One particularly successful grant—the BAHIA Project in San Diego—helped teachers raise their expectations about inner city students from underachieving high schools. Students and teachers undertook intensive science education through a research expedition to Mexico. The students then became trainers of other teachers and younger students. Using generous outside contributions and leftover ITQ funds, the project is now creating scientific research expeditions close to the San Diego area for teachers and students—a model they hope to continue after the grant ends later this year.

This first group of ITQ grants helped Commission staff and the Assessment and Dissemination Team better understand the new requirements of NCLB for teacher professional development, and to strategize on ways to improve the overall program. As a result of lessons learned from these grants, the program has evolved to focus each grant competition on targeted efforts to support State and federal priorities for school reform. Staff have also incorporated a more rigorous evaluation research component responding to the need for scientifically-based accountability embodied in NCLB.

While most of the grants under the previous Eisenhower Program ceased operations in early 2006, one project continued until the end of 2006. The Francis P. Collea Teacher Achievement Award Program (TAAP) was suggested by and named for a distinguished California teacher/educator who had worked with the Eisenhower Program. Frank Collea wanted to put professional development decisions directly into the hands of the teachers who were to benefit. The master grant to the University of Southern California funded competitions for mini-grants to teacher teams who designed their own professional development. The last 12 teacher teams selected over the life of the grant conducted their training projects between late 2004 and late 2006, and reported their final outcomes in November.

Many different activities were pursued in these projects, which were located from the San Diego area to Northern California. At the John Morse Waldorf Method Charter School in Sacramento, teachers were trained in visual and performing arts to help students develop their team-building and creative skills. Teachers in Magnolia Elementary School near downtown Los Angeles increased their content knowledge in math and science, and then developed hands-on lessons linked to State content standards. Teachers at Butterfield Elementary in Lake Elsinore focused on how to improve learning through reading, writing and speaking combined with music, storytelling and video. All of the grants allowed teachers to increase their skills, share learning with their colleagues, and generate new and meaningful lessons for their students. The current TAAP grants are over, but this model will be considered for ITQ funding in the future.

First Year of ITQ-02 – Academic Literacy in Secondary Education

During the past year, the four-year grants funded in the second ITQ competition held their first training sessions in academic literacy that are designed for high school teachers. The eight projects provided an average of 61 hours of training during the year for more than 400 teachers and 50 administrators. Their targeted purpose is to increase the ability of teachers to utilize academic literacy strategies—reading, writing, and speaking—that would enable students to better understand and master subject matter content. The projects cover almost all of the core academic subjects. The major challenges to these projects so far have been recruiting issues and data collection for the evaluation research they are doing, but the projects are working hard to address those issues. Overall, they find that teachers consider the academic literacy strategies they are learning to be valuable.

Launching of ITQ-03 Grants – Mathematics and Science Teacher Retention

The third group of Improving Teacher Quality Grants consists of two large master grants to support multiple professional development projects throughout the State. The two grants—both for close to $5.25 million dollars over five years—were awarded to the California Mathematics Project (CMP) and the California Science Project (CSP). They are targeted at the retention of mathematics and science teachers, whose attrition rates are greater than most California teachers. This complements efforts in the University of California and the California State University to recruit and train more mathematics and science teachers by working to keep the ones already in the classroom.

Both of the master grantees held competitions late last year among the science and math project sites at universities throughout California. Early in 2007, each project funded a total of ten sites, listed in Display 1, which will provide intensive, sustained standards-based professional development over the next three to four years. Data gathered during those years will eventually be compiled and published in the fifth year of the projects. In addition, the California Mathematics Project intends to convene a teacher retention conference in that year to disseminate what it has learned from its work.

The mathematics project will hold one- to three-week institutes for teachers this summer and will then follow up with ongoing activities at schools during the academic year. For the California Science Project, summer institutes will start in June, will continue through August, and will be followed by sustained work to create professional communities of practice in the participating districts. Each of the sites will serve 27 to 30 teachers with three to four years of sustained professional development, and additional teachers will be able to participate in shorter-term opportunities. Each project is conducting in-depth research to determine how their work affects teacher practice, student achievement, and the retention of teachers who are vitally needed in California classrooms.

DISPLAY 1: Project Sites for Mathematics and Science Teacher Retention

Science Projects	Math Projects
CSU Chico	CSU Chico
UCLA	UCLA
UC Irvine	UC Irvine
CSU Fresno	CSU Fresno
CSU San Diego (Imperial Valley Center)	CSU San Diego (Imperial Valley Center)
CSU Humboldt	UC Santa Barbara
CSU Northridge	CSU Dominguez Hills
UC Riverside	CSU Sacramento
UC San Diego	CSU Bakersfield
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo	CSU San Bernardino

Plans for 2007 RFP – K-2 Education and the Achievement Gap

The 2007 Request for Proposals (RFP) will offer more opportunities for professional development that targets teachers of students in the primary grades, especially kindergarten through the second grade. This is timely for two reasons. One is the pending release of California Preschool Standards or Foundations that will attempt to provide guidance for what high quality pre-K programs provide and how they can support kindergarten readiness. The other is the relative lack of discretionary programs that provide professional development specifically aimed at teachers in these early grades. Much of the current funding in California for professional development is either targeted toward teachers' knowledge of newly-adopted curriculum or toward the reading and math strategies needed to meet State achievement goals.

While some of these programs do serve elementary teachers, there are few programs that focus on strategies to address the achievement gap where it begins—in the earliest grades. An ITQ initiative cannot address the issue comprehensively, but it can help to fill a gap and provide additional support for early education that will be spotlighted by the publication of the preschool standards.

The details of the Request for Proposals, including the amounts and number of grants to be awarded, are still being developed, but it is expected to include some or all of the following elements:

- A focus on sustained professional development for the participating teachers, including intensive institutes or workshops, and on-site support throughout the school year.
- Supporting multiple subject teachers to increase their content knowledge in some or all of the core academic subjects, and to better link that knowledge to the State content standards. Since available professional development activities tend to focus on reading and mathematics, it is anticipated that science, social studies, and visual and performing arts content may be highlighted in some of the projects.
- Evaluation research that not only looks at the impact on student achievement from year to year, but also seeks to follow students of participating teachers from kindergarten to the third grade to determine how the professional development affects achievement over time.
- Particular attention to gaps in educational achievement among racial/ethnic, language, socioeconomic and gender groupings. Each project will be expected to address the needs of diverse learners, utilizing research-based strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness over time.
- Each project will be expected to specifically address English language proficiency and utilize research-based strategies that are effective in assisting English Language Learners (ELL).
- Projects will be encouraged to assist teachers to effectively engage parents and increase parent involvement in improving student achievement.
- Projects will be encouraged to consider the importance of articulation between pre-K programs and kindergarten, to partner with pre-K programs, and to link pre-K and K-2 standards in their professional development activities.
- Projects will be encouraged to consider involving community colleges as additional partners in projects, especially in the linkages to established child development training programs and teacher pipeline programs.

Project staff will develop and refine the Request for Proposals throughout March and early April with anticipated release of the RFP by mid-April. This will be followed by technical assistance workshops at several locations in Northern, Central and Southern California. Proposals will be submitted by midsummer with evaluation to follow by reader panels and interviews. Grant awards are anticipated in October or November.

Other Program Activities:

Project directors in the ITQ-02 and ITQ-03 grant projects convened in Los Angeles in early February for the program directors' annual meeting. In addition to receiving updates on administrative requirements and a draft copy of a new ITQ Administrative Handbook, the group held separate meetings to discuss professional development and evaluation research activities. Because of the focused nature of the projects in each group, staff are working to build a sense of community among the project directors and to encourage them to share experiences and challenges; and we expect to develop more regular e-mail communication with them to support their success. The research directors for the projects also had a productive meeting and agreed to meet again in the fall to explore data collection and analysis issues

that emerged as their projects get underway. There is interest in convening a State-level meeting focused on research on teacher professional development, but no resources have been identified to support it.

At the federal level, ITQ Administrator Karen Humphrey will travel to Washington, D.C. in late March to meet with Title II-A administrators from State K-12 and higher education agencies. This annual meeting, convened by the U.S. Department of Education, is an opportunity to learn about current issues in teacher quality. The pending reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act and its implications for the future of the program, especially the discretionary grants for institutions of higher education, will likely be a topic of discussion.