

The Kansas Early Career Professional / Mentor Academy

Program Summary 2006-07

Thank you for participating in a unique support program for yearly career professional educators. Over the past several years, higher education and the public school system have been working collaboratively to provide southeast Kansas's beginning teachers and special education professionals with a seamless system of professional development in their first three years of experience. **You are know an important part of that endeavor.**

Known as the Kansas Early Career Professional / Mentor Academy, the program structure drew upon a multifaceted framework conceptualized and developed under a series of Educate America Goals 2000 grants. Over a six-year period, the size, geographical restrictions, and financial resources of past participating districts influenced the scope and construction of this conceptual framework and resulted in a program well suited for Kansas schools. Training centers over the years were located in six different areas in Kansas and involved multiple teacher training institutions, numerous school districts, and an educational resource center. The program was presented at seven national and four state conferences with five different articles being published about its merits. From the lessons learned over these years, the present Academy was fashioned by Pittsburg State University, the Southeast Kansas Special Education Interlocal #637, USD 250 and several other school districts.

Major Pieces of the Puzzle

The present Academy provides a systemized infrastructure that meets the 2002 Kansas State Department of Education's standards for induction and mentoring and allows for continuous teacher training from undergraduate preparation through the third year of teaching. The program is open to all first, second, and third year teachers and special education professionals and is focused on increasing student achievement, improving instruction and management, socializing professionals to the school culture, reducing isolation, retaining professionals with long term potential, and developing collegiality among professionals.

Structure: The year-long Academy structure provides for multiple avenues for interaction. First, the Teacher's Academy starts the year involving all participants. With both the beginning teacher and mentor attending, the opening session fosters get acquainted activities and exploration in the characteristics and common difficulties of the beginning teacher; the expected competencies, roles, styles of interaction of the mentor; and the "Orientation Checklist" which gets the early career professional ready for the demands of the school year. Second, throughout the school year, both the mentor and beginning teacher attend six after school sessions held every five weeks. Here, dinner is served between two sessions where, in the first, various district-related topics are covered and, in the second, program-training topics are presented. Field implementation is then expected between the mentor and early career teacher and is documented through collaborative plans and a time line of activities. Third, to end the school year, all participants are invited to attend the Kansas State Department of Education's Annual April Conference. By beginning and ending the school year together and meeting at set times throughout, program continuity as well as situational differences are accommodated.

Trainers: The Academy is directed and managed by three experienced trainers who work with the beginning professionals and mentors.

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Participants and Training Goals: Participation in the Academy is voluntary but expected for all untenured staff in the participating school districts. Because of their distinct job differences, the early career teacher and early career special education professionals are sometimes kept separate for training sessions.

Early Career Teachers: All teachers especially the first, second, and third year teacher in the participating school districts are eligible for the program. To meet the needs of the first through third year teachers, several goals were established to structure the activities and materials. Based on research and observed teacher needs, the following serve as the major goals for the early career teachers program:

1. Improved knowledge of classroom management skills;
2. Increased awareness of techniques for improved student motivation;
3. Awareness of personal issues involved in teaching;
4. Improved knowledge of parent conferencing skills;
5. Increased knowledge of effective instructional strategies;
6. Demonstrated ability to reflect on teaching practices; and
7. Awareness of building a professional portfolio and applying for national board certification.

Early Career Professionals: All untenured special education professionals in Interlocal 637 also participate in the program. To meet the aims of the Interlocal, several additional goals were established to structure the activities and materials.

(Early Career Professional Objectives)

1. Demonstrate understanding of the components of effective classroom instruction.
2. Demonstrate understanding of the components of effective classroom management.
3. Assess and interpret classroom needs and problems using checklists, assessment instruments, and personal conferences.
4. Interact and communicate effectively with students, parents, and colleagues.
5. Work collaboratively to develop integrated curriculum strategies.
6. Work with the mentor teacher in a cooperative and receptive manner.
7. Respect the confidentiality between the mentor and beginning teacher.

(SEK Interlocal #637 Staff Development Objectives)

1. Support an optimal learning environment in all educational settings.
2. Ensure building level special education programs and activities conform to federal, state, and district guidelines.
3. Communicate effectively with students, parents, para educators, related service providers, general education providers, and the district and special education administrative staff.
4. Collaborate effectively with public and private agencies, community organizations, and general education providers.
5. Exhibit good time management and flexibility in scheduling.

6. Support the philosophy and mission of the special education cooperative and the supporting districts.
7. React to change productively.

Mentors: The program relies heavily on trained mentors selected by the principal on the basis of proximity, discipline similarity and/or grade level, positive attitude, and instructional proficiency. Because of the importance of continuous daily support through mentor activity, an effort is made to train the participating mentors in specific interaction skills and research-based activities which could be effectively used with the beginning professional. To help focus the program, nine goals are established for mentor proficiency. For the training to be successful, it is believed that the mentor should be able to:

1. Conceptualize the general characteristics, needs, concerns, and expectations of the beginning teacher;
2. Understand the components of developmental beginning teacher induction programs;
3. Interact and communicate with the beginning teacher in a non-threatening, supportive manner;
4. Assess and interpret specific classroom needs and problems of the beginning teacher using checklists, assessment instruments, and personal conferences;
5. Analyze, focus, and support specific teacher classroom needs using peer coaching techniques and conferencing;
6. Use data collection instruments in observing class activities to focus classroom observations;
7. Incorporate the personal, professional, and personality needs of the beginning teacher into activities and interaction;
8. Implement developmental activities that offer the beginning teacher additional knowledge, skills, and attitudes for successful teaching performance;
9. Serve effectively as a developmental mentor who provides an orderly, personalized transition from pre-service preparation to the first three years of teaching.

Materials: Various materials have been developed and structured to meet KSDE standards and district staff development initiatives. To house this material, three separate manuals have been developed for the early career teachers, early career special education professionals, and mentors.

Early Career Teacher / Professionals: The *Early Career Teacher Training Manual* is used to house the major material for the early career teachers and the special education professionals. The manual's items have been developed from feedback provided by past participants. Additional materials are added as the program year progresses. Initially included in both the manuals are such items as:

Orientation Checklist - a 225 item checklist which asks the beginning teacher to identify school and student policies, everyday procedures, classroom expectations / reinforcement plans, and particular school cultural norms and climate characteristics.

Activity Time Line - a monthly listing of suggested activities with the mentor which is modified to fit the particular school placement; two distinctly different timelines are used representing differences between the special education and regular classroom teacher.

Getting Started - materials specifically addressing the first few days and weeks of school Forms and handouts which might be helpful throughout the year to assist with record keeping, organization, classroom management, and time consolidation are also provided.

Classroom Management - materials addressing student relationships, behavioral guidelines, consistency, reinforcement, motivational strategies, and common challenging situations such as verbal confrontations, foul language, and off-task behaviors.

Conferencing - materials covering effective communication, parent contact strategies, open house preparation, and specific conferencing arrangements, preparation and procedures.

Effective Instructional Strategies – materials presenting various instructional strategies appropriate for all students as well as those appropriate for students with different learning styles, intelligences or special needs.

Technology - a collection of material designed to help incorporate technology into the classroom and use the Internet as an instructional resource.

Serving as a central text is Harry and Rosemary Wong's *The First Days of School*. This text provides a myriad of instructional and management ideas especially written for first year teachers. It presents teaching as a highly skilled craft that can be learned, and it involves having high expectations for student success, managing the classroom, and designing lessons for student success. Additional texts were added as the years progressed. Second and third year teachers received *The Unauthorized Teacher's Survival Guide* by Bryan and Warner. This text provides additional strategies both for new and seasoned educators. Special educators were given intervention manuals that assisted in the preparation of Individual Education Plans.

Mentors: Mentors are also provided a written training manual. Again, each of these items have been developed from feedback provided by past participants and are related specifically to the developmental orientation of the program. As the year progresses, additional materials are added to fit the specific year of the mentoring assignment. The mentor material includes:

The Mentorship - a 44 page manuscript containing four chapters - Why Become A Mentor, Characteristics of the Beginning Teacher, Mentor Characteristics, and Mentor Communication Activity - which serves as the text of the training program.

The Mentorship Course Syllabus - a graduate course syllabus offering 3 hours of graduate credit from Pittsburg State for those participating in the training sessions.

Orientation Checklist - a 225 item checklist which asks the mentor to help the beginning teacher identify school and student policies, everyday procedures, classroom expectations/reinforcement plans, and particular school cultural norms and climate characteristics.

Activity Time Line - a monthly listing of suggested mentor activities to be used with the beginning teacher which is modified to fit the particular school placement.

Data Collection Instruments - a collection of eight different instruments mentors can use when observing the beginning teacher's classroom.

Conferencing and Coaching - an outline of procedures for mentors to follow in conferencing and coaching the beginning teacher.

Teaching and Learning Style Identification - a series of teaching/learning styles instruments and explanations are developed to help the mentor recognize and understand the cognitive, affective, and physiological traits of him/herself and the beginning teacher.

Personal and Professional Need Identification - a 49 question needs identification instrument (Teacher Needs Assessment Questionnaire) which can be used to identify specific personal and professional needs at various times throughout the year.

Using videotaping In the Classroom - a series of procedural suggestions and a ten-domain critique guide for using videotaping of classroom teaching episodes.

Course Activities - over a dozen different activities and assessments used in the mentor training sessions.

The materials are constructed and used to allow for continuity, attention to task, and the professional development of the experienced teacher.

Training Topics: Because of situational differences, training topics for the early career teacher and the special education professional are somewhat different.

Early Career Teachers: Throughout the year, six training sessions are held. After the initial orientation meeting, the sessions are three hours long and are structured to provide information on a monthly topic(s), plus give the early career teachers time to discuss their individual needs. Early seminars focus on issues most likely to surface at the very beginning of school such as managing time and the classroom, adjusting to a new role, balancing home and school demands, and becoming familiar with the school and community. Later seminars address issues such as conferencing, professional development, technology, and instructional techniques and resources. Outside resources are utilized when appropriate and personal contacts are provided when requested by individual teachers. Topic examples:

- School and Community Orientation
- Effective Teacher Conferencing
- Student Learning Styles
- Classroom Management
- Positive Discipline
- High Expectations for Every child
- IDEA and the Classroom Teacher
- The Internet for Effective Lesson Planning
- Effective Questioning
- Ending the School Year

Many times the first year teachers are separated from the second and third year teachers to discuss specific concerns appropriate to their developmental level. Whatever the topic, early career teachers are active participants in both seminar presentations and discussions. Each seminar is structured to allow teachers time to discuss situational concerns and address common personal concerns such as:

- adjusting to the realities of teaching;
- managing time;
- relieving self-doubts;
- finding value in teaching;
- balancing home and school demands.
- becoming familiar with the community;
- avoiding isolation;
- building new relationships; and
- adjusting to a new role;

The program takes the orientation that if the beginning teacher does not personally adjust to the new occupation, the chance of long-term professional development is diminished.

Early Career Professionals: Just like the early career teachers, the special education professionals also attend six training sessions. After all attend the opening session, the early career professionals are exposed to a different set of topics in breakout session. Structured to provide information on a monthly topic(s) specific to the Interlocal, plus give the early career professionals time to discuss their individual needs, the three hour evening provides sessions before and after dinner. Example topics covered include:

Interlocal Structure and Personnel
Compliance Issues
IEP's and Behavior Plans
Accommodations and Modifications
Parent Professional Conferences
Special Education Internet Sites
Time Management and Organization Skills
What It Is Like To BE Handicapped
National Board Certification
QPA and Accreditation
Attachment Disorders
Adapting Curriculum
IDEA and Legislation
Autism Update

Mentors: Though the mentors attended the same training sessions as their mentees, at times, there were separate training sessions that cover specific mentor topics. Example topics covered include:

Characteristics and Stages of Beginning Teachers
Characteristics of Growth-Oriented Mentors
Assessing Professional Needs
Assessing Teaching Styles
Using the Internet for Ideas
Brain Research and Interpersonal Skills
Coaching Another Professional
Rogerian Counseling
Classroom Observation Instruments
Video-taping to Help Another Teacher
National Board Certification Portfolio Writing

Program Evaluation: Both qualitative and quantitative data has been collected over the past years that has been used to evaluate and modify the program.

Of note, the *Teacher Needs Assessment Questionnaire* (TNAQ) is being used to show quantitative professional progression for early career teachers . The early career teachers, both individually and as a group, are being tracked as they hopefully move through the stages of survival, mastery, and impact. Using as a basis the Fuller and Brown stages - survival, mastery, and impact - the program researchers assigned each of the 49 *Teacher Needs Assessment Questionnaire* items to one of the three stages - Establishing Structures (Survival), Developing the Science of Teaching (Mastery), and Cultivating the Art of Teaching (Impact) - to establish a theoretical framework. This TNAQ instrument was developed over a period of ten years through eight distinct statistical studies with over 1000 teachers. Eight national presentations at various conferences have exposed the instrument to outside evaluation and several journal articles have publicized its use. Based on each individual teacher's perception, the program uses the above 49 items to collect data on the beginning teachers' development (three times a year), tracking their movement through the stages. Using the theoretical stage framework, the program strives to move each teacher from a survival mentality to making an impact on every child. Characteristics of each stage are listed below.

Establishing Structures

(Survival)

Acquiring supplies and establishing room layout
Knowing school policies, norms and culture

Building collegial staff relationships
Establishing classroom procedures and routines
Setting rules and reinforcing them to gain respect of students
Expanding subject matter knowledge
Lesson planning for high time on task
Coping with evaluation, other's opinion, and fear of failure
Knowing parents and opening lines of communication

Developing the Science of Teaching

(Mastery)

Using various models of teaching correctly
Acquisition of innovative techniques, activities, and ideas
Asking classroom questions effectively and providing review and practice
Providing timely assignment feedback and furnishing justification for grades
Clear direction giving, illustration, and transitions so classroom activities move smoothly
Identifying learning styles, characteristics, and needs of class
Providing sponge activities to keep students busy
Managing time pressures

Developing the Art of Teaching

(Impact)

Being novel, vivid, and varied in teaching strategies
Achieving equity in monitoring, questioning and feedback
Showing high expectations for every student and motivating all students to succeed
Striving to meet the individual academic, emotional and social needs of students
Developing consistency in enthusiasm, fairness and humorous disposition
Being a role model who shows empathy, warmth, and respect to each student

Each time the instrument is used, a computer program is used to tabulate the means and display individual and group results. Over the years, the researchers have found that as beginning teachers move through their first year of teaching, they seem to generate concerns in a developmental sequence, even though there are identifiable situational differences. If left unexplored, these concerns could ultimately become major dissatisfactions that could influence their personal and professional life and stagnate their development. With the help of a mentor teacher and a retired teacher, the beginning teacher's needs lessen and approach those of the mentor. Also over the years, the results of the instrument have been useful as a vehicle capable of evaluating the program's success by identifying developmental stages and illustrating group and individual movement from one stage to another.

Other Pieces of the Puzzle

A number of other components have shown themselves to be key elements in fashioning a practical yet potent program and help fit the puzzle together.

College Credit: Three hours of graduate credit is offered to all participants. For the early career enrollees, course syllabi were developed to accommodate the first, second, and third year teacher and special education participants. For the mentors, three hours of graduate credit are also offered with different syllabi reflecting the activities required for each of the three years of participation. Overall, the program is designed to provide college support till the early career professional obtains tenure and professional certification.

Food, Food, Food: To help set a relaxing, yet professional atmosphere, food and various beverages are provided at all monthly sessions. A year-end banquet is also hosted. For several years, the banquet was held in Wichita at the April KSDE Conference where the Kansas Commissioner of Education addressed the participants and presented them with certificates.

Internet Communication: All Academy participants are connected together through the Internet. Here, all members have access to each other on a daily basis and can assess all material through a secure site. Discussion questions have elicited diverse discussions and offer a place to get a wide array of responses to situational problems encountered by the early career professional. Throughout the year, the ability to communicate with each other proved to be an excellent vehicle to provide updated information or timely articles to the Academy participants.

Local District Costs: For the program to be successful, local district involvement is essential in several ways. A \$700 fee for the mentor/early career couple is assessed from the local district that covers the materials, books, trainer and speaker stipends, dinners, banquets, and motel rooms at the KSDE conference. The district administration in the participating districts is also responsible for:

1. Selecting qualified, on-site mentors matched by an appropriate combination of proximity, grade level, endorsement, attitude, and instructional proficiency.
2. Providing compensation for both the mentor and retired teacher.
3. Aligning the Academy topics with the professional development initiatives in the respective school district.
4. Providing a process for reassigning a mentor if the first assignment is not effective (Easy Out Option).
5. Respecting the confidentiality between the mentor and beginning teacher (Confidentiality Agreement).
6. Providing administrative support for the program through providing professional development with other staff members regarding their roles in supporting the beginning teacher.
7. Providing release time for beginning teacher and mentor classroom observations and attendance at the end-of-year conference.
8. Providing release time, substitutes, and registration fee for the beginning professional and mentor for the KSDE conference.
9. Providing transportation to the training sights.
10. Providing administrative attendance at the year-end banquet.
11. Evaluating the program

Confidentiality Agreement: To provide for confidentiality in the mentor/mentee relationship, the program uses a form that all participants must sign which states that no activity or interaction can be used for formal performance assessment in contract renewal or dismissal.

No Fault, Easy-Out Policy: To provide a system of changing assigned relationships, the program uses a form that all participants must sign which outlines the process to change the early career / mentor assignment.

Kansas Performance Assessment: To prepare for future licensure documentation, each early career teacher completed a Kansas Performance Assessment. Here, each second year early career teacher with the help of the mentor will develop a written performance assessment that included discussion on the class's contextual factors; instructional objectives related to national standards; instructional design with lesson plans; the assessment design with pre, formative, and

post assessments; and analysis and reflection on the gains shown by students. The document will be used to apply for KSDE licensure.

Collaborative Professional Development Plan: In addition to the monthly timeline of activities, a collaborative plan that fosters individualized mentor/mentee classroom interaction is required each semester. Each plan outlines the objectives, planned activities, intended timeline, and verification documentation used in the collaborative activity.

State Conference: One of the most rewarding pieces of the puzzle according to participants involves both the early career and mentor participants attending a year end state conference. Here, the mentor and mentee are roomed together for a three-day conference sponsored by the Kansas Department of Education. Each attend sessions of their choosing, hear and meet nationally know educators, and participate in evening discussion groups.

Graduation Banquet: An evening graduation banquet will be held to celebrate the completion of the year and to bestow Certificates of Completion. Past keynote speakers have been the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Andy Tompkins, and the Dean of the Pittsburg State's College of Education, Dr. Steve Scott.

The Completed Puzzle

Over the past several years the Kansas Early Career / Mentor Academy has evolved into a training model with:

1. A developmental philosophy which recognizes the beginning teacher as one who has a set of skills and needs, and as a result of the program develops, extends, modifies, or refines these skills; orients the beginning teacher to the school system; and addresses and meets the perceived personal and professional needs of the teacher;
2. A well defined set of rationales and goals;
3. Continuous yearlong support from the preschool orientation to third-year tenure through various organized support systems;
4. Various personnel to offer a vast array of materials, instruments, and activities to personalize each beginning teacher's year;
5. Mentors selected, trained, and focused using current knowledge available about the beginning teacher;
6. Frequent support interaction and targeted topics to help the beginning teacher in adjusting, expressing needs, and developing;
7. An improvement system for instructional and non-instructional areas on which the beginning teacher could focus when a personal need surfaces;
8. An improvement system for any identified weaknesses connected with the district evaluation system; and
9. Documentation of positive growth from the beginning teacher's own perception of skills and knowledge as well as other qualitative and quantitative data.

The program will no doubt continue to grow and fit the pieces of the puzzle together to fashion an ever-changing strategy that provides supportive, growth-oriented environments.