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# Budget Briefs

*from the Legislative Reference Bureau*

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Budget Brief 05-1

August 2005

## MENTORING GRANTS FOR INITIAL EDUCATORS

The biennial state budget act, 2005 Wisconsin Act 25, passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Jim Doyle on July 25, 2005, created a new noncompetitive grant program that provides employers of licensed educators with up to \$375 per new educator per year, to help subsidize the costs of mentoring newly hired teachers, administrators, and pupil services staff, starting in 2006-07.

### BACKGROUND

A primary goal of the mentoring programs is to help novice teachers, administrators, and pupil services staff transition from initial educators to professional educators. As outlined in the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) administrative rules, teachers progress through three stages of educator licensing: initial, professional, and master.

**Initial Educator License.** As of August 31, 2004, to obtain an initial educator license, an applicant must successfully complete an approved professional education program. The applicant may receive an initial educator license from DPI only once in a particular category, such as teaching, administration, or pupil services. Wisconsin law requires an applicant to demonstrate competency in conflict resolution before being issued an initial teaching license, but the state superintendent can waive this requirement, as long as the applicant demonstrates the required skills within 12 months after the license is issued. Initial educator licenses are issued for five years and are generally nonrenewable.

**Professional Development Plan (PDP).** For a classroom teacher to advance from an initial educator license to a professional educator license, the teacher must design and complete a PDP addressing at least two Wisconsin

Teacher Standards identified as in need of improvement. These standards deal with issues such as lesson plans, classroom management, and measuring student progress. The plan must be approved by an initial educator review team, consisting of a teacher of the same subject (not the mentor), an administrator, and a higher education representative. At the request of the teacher, between three to five years after the initial educator license is issued, at least two of the three members of the review team must verify the successful completion of the PDP. To help initial educators successfully complete their PDPs, school districts are required to provide ongoing orientation, support seminars, and a qualified mentor for each initial educator.

### CURRENT MENTORING GRANTS

Mentors are teachers who hold at least a professional educator license and who are trained to provide support during a new teacher's first five years of service. Mentors may provide feedback to the initial educator but are not considered a part of the formal employment evaluation process. 1997 Wisconsin Act 237 created the current grant program for peer review and mentoring. Under the program, the state provides one-year competitive grants to support initial educators and mentors through activities aligned with the Wisconsin Educator Standards. Applicants consist of either a consortium of two or more school districts, cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs), or a combination of school districts and CESAs. The agency or consortium that applies for the grant is required to provide at least 20 percent matching funds or matching in-kind services, is limited to \$25,000 per fiscal year, and must take

into account significant input from its teachers. Annual awards totaling \$500,000 were granted to 35 applicants in 2003-04 and to 27 applicants in 2004-05. Grants have funded mentor training, seminars and conferences for mentor/mentees, orientation for new teachers, compensation for mentors, consultants, substitute teachers, release time for mentor/mentees, and various other activities related to mentoring initial educators. The grant's annual appropriation of \$500,000 has been extended through 2006-07.

### NEW GRANT FUNDING

**Governor's Task Force.** In its June 2004 final report, the Governor's Task Force on Educational Excellence recommended the creation of a new categorical aid program to help provide mentors to new teachers. The report's authors cited research that suggested mentoring has a significant impact on new teacher retention rates. The task force concluded that retaining high quality teachers should be a shared state and local goal, and therefore the costs should be shared between state government and local school districts. The task force recommended that \$2.5-\$3 million per year be provided toward the costs of developing and sustaining mentoring programs.

**Department of Public Instruction.** Referencing the task force's final report in a budget communication memo, State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster requested \$2,625,000 annually from general purpose revenue to go toward a grant program to provide mentors for all new teachers, administrators, and pupil services staff in 2005-06 and 2006-07. This amount would have resulted in \$750 per initial educator for all of the estimated 3,500 new Wisconsin educators employed annually.

**2005 Assembly Bill 100 – Executive Budget Bill.** Utilizing the DPI estimate that school districts will hire 3,500 initial educators per year, the original executive budget proposed

by the governor would have increased general purpose revenue funding for mentoring grants by \$2,625,000 (\$1,312,500 per fiscal year), in order to provide school districts with up to \$375 per initial educator, half of what Superintendent Burmaster had requested.

**2005 Assembly Substitute Amendment 1 to AB-100.** In its modifications to the budget bill, the Joint Committee on Finance eliminated the governor's proposed \$2,625,000 spending from general purpose revenue, and instead increased initial and renewal teacher licenses from \$100 to \$150 per application. From this increase in fees, \$1,350,000 of program revenue was to go toward initial educator mentoring grants in 2006-07.

**2005 Wisconsin Act 25.** Governor Doyle vetoed the portions of the budget bill that would have increased teacher and administrator license fees, as well as any mention of program revenue being the source of funding for the grants. The result is an increase in general purpose revenue spending of \$1,350,000 to provide mentoring grants for initial educators, beginning in 2006-07. The grant will supply employers of initial educators with a sum equal to what they are spending for mentoring an initial educator, up to \$375. If funds are not sufficient in any given fiscal year, DPI will prorate the payments to eligible employers.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more detail on *Teacher Licensing* see Section 118.19, Wisconsin Statutes, and DPI Administrative Code 34; on *Mentoring Grants* see Section 115.405, Wisconsin Statutes, and DPI Administrative Code 38. To view Wisconsin Statutes or Administrative Code online visit: <http://folio.legis.state.wi.us>

For further information, contact DPI's Teacher Education, Professional Development and Licensing Team at (608) 266-1027, toll free (800) 266-1027, or visit: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsis/tel/index.html>