

THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
SPECIAL EDUCATION RECRUITMENT & RETENTION GRANT
EXPANSION GRANT PROJECT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Title: Project STARSET (Striving To Attract and Retain Special Education Teachers)
Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer M. Coronado, Texas A&M International University

For over twenty years, the shortage of teachers in high needs areas has been a concern of school districts across the country. It has been projected that an additional two million teachers will be needed over the next ten years (Southworth, 2000), and the largest increase in demand will be for special education teachers (Pipho, 1998). It is imperative that institutions of higher education incorporate recruitment strategies into their programs to attract individuals to enter into the field of special education.

This project provided a 4-day summer camp for high school students and instructional aides. The summer camp highlighted the benefits and rewards of becoming a special education teacher by involving the participants in hands-on, learner-centered classes taught by special education teachers from the local school districts. The participants also had the opportunity to interact with a class of special education students who came to campus to visit the planetarium and the gym. The participants viewed relevant videos, received a copy of an introduction to special education textbook, and built a community of learner with whom they could stay in contact with and work with throughout their studies.

A recent study in Texas showed that attrition costs school systems at least \$8,000 for each teacher who leaves within the first few years of teaching, and it is estimated that the high attrition of beginning teachers cost the state of Texas more than \$200 million per year (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000). The attrition rate of special education teachers is compounding the shortage and erodes the current teaching force (TEA, 1999). Within the first five years, 30 to 50 percent of teachers leave their positions (ACE, 1999; SBEC, 1998). However, special education teachers are more likely to leave teaching than any other teacher group (Ingersoll, 2001), and special education teachers are ten times more likely to transfer to the general education setting (Boe, et al., 1997). In response to this need, various mentoring initiatives have been established and undertaken by different institutions (Sullivan, 1992; Huling, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000; Auton, Berry, Mullen, & Cochran, 2002).

The Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS) was developed by Region XIII Education Service Center with the endorsement of the State Board of Education in an effort to help beginning teachers stay in the profession longer (Region XIII Education Service Center, 2002). Recognizing that the success of novice teachers depends on systemic support, TxBESS was established to provide training for mentors of novice teachers as well as campus administrators. Data after 1999-2000 indicated that 80.4% of the beginning teachers who received TxBESS support remained in their district, whereas 63.7% of those who received other types of support continued working in their school district. Only 61.4% of the beginning teachers who did not receive any type of support

remained in their school district (Charles A. Dana Center, 2001). Research on the experiences of beginning teachers has confirmed that the likelihood of long-term success is substantially impaired for many by the absence of expert guidance, support, and opportunities to reflect on their efforts (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999).

This project provided Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS) mentor training to mentors of newly certified special education teachers. The trainings were held on Saturdays and participants received a certificate of completion. Upon completion of the trainings, participants could serve as a mentor for a beginning special education teacher at their campus.

As a result of this grant, the principal investigator presented a paper entitled "Effective Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Latino Special Education Teachers" at the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) Summer Conference in Philadelphia on August 1, 2006.

References

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