

LFHS Foundation Teacher Excellence Grant

The Lake Forest High School (“LFHS”) Foundation is proud to embark on a three-year pilot project with District 115 Administration and Faculty. This project will provide financial incentives to teachers who wish to improve their professional practice through advanced scholarship in their specialty area or through the intensive self-reflection of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification process. Backing this decision is a growing body of research showing that these two paths for teacher advancement - or “Programs” as they are called under the Teacher Excellence Grant – can significantly impact the quality of teaching and student learning.

The idea for the Teacher Excellence Grant originated with the LFHS Foundation Grants Committee when the Foundation began receiving funding inquiries and requests from faculty to support their advanced coursework. Upon further research, it was discovered that District 115 does not currently provide comprehensive tuition reimbursement or NBPTS benefits to its faculty, something that is relatively common among other high-performing schools in the area. Because these issues are determined contractually, and the District 115 faculty/teacher contract is not due for renegotiation for another three years, the idea for this grant - as an opportunity to provide financial incentives for teachers to pursue these rigorous and meaningful advancement opportunities today and not three years from now – began to take root.

The Teacher Excellence Grant is divided into two Programs: a Master Teacher Program and a Faculty Scholars Program. The Master Teacher Program will award grants to teachers who are seeking the NBPTS Master Teacher Certification. This certification has become the single most-recognized credential for accomplished classroom teaching in the United States. Teachers who undertake this program are seeking to improve their classroom practice through rigorous self-reflection, goal setting, intensive study, and expert evaluation. The NBPTS has likened this certification to that received by other professionals such as board-certified doctors and accountants. In addition, these Master Teachers often become mentors for newer teachers raising the overall quality of teaching in a school.

According to the NBPTS Directory, Lake Forest School District 67 currently has 23 teachers who have received their Master Teacher Certification compared with 1 for Lake Forest District 115. Dr. Amy Birtman, an English teacher at LFHS, is currently pursuing her Master Teacher Certification with some financial support from a fall 2007 LFHS Foundation grant. By helping to defray the cost of registration, it is the goal of this grant program to provide financial incentives to more LFHS teachers interested in becoming Master Teachers. The current cost of registration is \$2,565.

The Faculty Scholars Program, in turn, will provide grants in the form of tuition assistance to those teachers interested in becoming more expert in their academic disciplines. By providing financial assistance, these grants will help to address some of the cost and logistical obstacles to pursuing this type of advanced coursework. Research

again has shown that teachers with deeper content knowledge of their specialty area (e.g. Science, Math, Art, English, etc.) have a greater impact on student learning than those with less content knowledge.

Please contact Michael Cyrus, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources (K-12) and Administrator of this Grant, for more details about either of these Programs. He can be reached at 847-604-7403/mcyrus@lfelem.lfc.edu.