

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Hartford, Connecticut

Series 2008-2009
Circular Letter: C-1

TO: Superintendents of Schools
Principals of Schools

FROM: Mark K. McQuillan
Commissioner of Education

DATE: July 31, 2008

SUBJECT: Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program Update

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with an update of recent legislation affecting the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program and the implications of this legislation on the induction of new teachers in Connecticut.

Key Provisions of Public Act 08-107

In May 2008, the legislature passed Public Act 08-107, which calls for the replacement of the current BEST Program with a new beginning teacher program, effective July 1, 2009. As a result, the program will be going through a transition period commencing with the 2008-09 school year. During this next school year, teachers will continue to submit portfolios but will not be required to submit videos as part of the portfolio. As always, all portfolios submitted in 2009 will be evaluated and feedback will be provided to each beginning teacher. Concurrently, a legislatively established task force will be making recommendations for the replacement of the current BEST Program with a mentor assistance program beginning in the 2009-2010 school year.

The Charge of the Task Force

I will be chairing the Task Force, which will meet from August through November to review the current BEST Program and make recommendations for a new, improved induction program for beginning teachers.

The Task Force will include legislators representing the Education Committee and the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. The legislature will also appoint members representing the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), Connecticut Federation of School Administrators (CDSA), Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) and the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association (CPTA). In addition,

teacher members of the Task Force will include representatives from the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Connecticut Chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT-CT), the Connecticut Technical High School System, a beginning teacher, and a mentor. Higher education faculty will also be appointed from the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges and the Connecticut State University System.

The Task Force shall present a plan to the Education and Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committees no later than January 1, 2009, including recommended legislative changes and funding recommendations.

The legislature has charged the Task Force to develop a plan which includes:

- Requirements for beginning teachers' successful completion of the program;
- Sequential mentoring modules based on state standards;
- Mentor eligibility, assignments and training requirements;
- A data collection and evaluation system for monitoring the program at the state and local levels;
- Transition provisions for those teachers who did not previously successfully complete the BEST portfolio assessment; and
- Funding recommendations for school districts to implement this program.

New Directions for the BEST Program: Issues and Challenges

First implemented in 1989, the BEST Program evolved from a one-year program of mentoring and classroom-based observations through the Connecticut Competency Instrument to a two-year program of school and state-based support and the completion of a content-specific portfolio in year two, with a third year available if necessary. Given the many changes and new challenges faced by schools and districts across the state to improve student achievement and reduce the achievement gap, it is appropriate at this time to re-visit the BEST Program and develop new program structures that will ensure that a new generation of teachers will be able to meet the increasing challenges of educating Connecticut's students.

The central mission of the "new" BEST Program will remain the same as the current BEST Program – that is, to ensure that every Connecticut student is taught by a highly qualified and competent teacher. However, shared responsibility for induction between the state and the local school districts should be implemented.

There is a need to better align the BEST Program with local district evaluation and professional development policies and practices and to more effectively engage principals in the induction process. Accountability needs to remain an integral part of the new program – to ensure consistency in standards for quality mentoring support, as well as, for the demonstration of teaching competency expected of teachers during the induction phase of their careers. The greatest challenge to be overcome will be ensuring adequate funding for a new, improved induction program in a time of competing and increasing pressures on state and local resources. As noted earlier, the Task Force's charge includes

making funding recommendations for the implementation of this new program, and the legislature will be challenged to secure the resources necessary to do so.

The State Department of Education will support the work of the Task Force and other educational constituencies to create a more equitable, sustainable and improved induction program for new teachers.

Any questions regarding this issue may be directed to Nancy Pugliese at (860)713-6708 or via email at nancy.pugliese@ct.gov.

MKM:np