

Grantee Name: DeKalb County School System
Professional Learning Instruction

Project Name: Preparation of Alternatively Certified Math and Science Teachers

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Partner Districts/LEAs: DeKalb County School System (DCSS)

The DeKalb County School System (DCSS) and Georgia State University (GSU) are collaborating to recruit 90 paraprofessionals (30 paraprofessionals a year for three years) with associate degrees, and to train them to be highly qualified middle school mathematics and science teachers. DCSS is a high-need LEA with over 21,000 students from families below the poverty line. DCSS is the third largest school system in Georgia serving approximately 99,000 students. With 145 sites spread over 270 square miles, DCSS is one of the three largest school districts in Georgia. Over 63% of the students in DCSS receive free or reduced lunches, and 91 of the district's schools are Title I schools. Each year, for the past three years, DCSS has hired over 100 mathematics and science teachers. In addition, the Georgia Department of Education Report Card for 2006-2007 (2007-2008 data not available yet) showed that 27% of mathematics classes taught in DCSS high poverty schools did not have fully certified (highly qualified) teachers.

The partnership used a front-end survey of 1700 classified (non-certified) employees to gauge their interest in, and to identify barriers to participating in an alternative route program that would prepare individuals with teaching credentials in math and science. Over half of the over 400 respondents were interested in teaching science, and over one-third were interested in teaching mathematics. In order to graduate highly qualified mathematics and sciences teachers in two years, GSU and DCSS have combined to offer intensive online, evening, Saturday, and summer courses. Participants will complete coursework while they work at DCSS, and are committed to working in a high-need school for three years after completing the program.

Central to the project is DCSS Human Resources and Professional Learning Departments collaboration with GSU in order to expedite and fast track the certification, hiring and placement process of project participants. The process is streamlined by virtue of participants being a DCSS employee, with classroom or school environment experience, and having earned a significant number of credits toward graduation. The hiring process will also be aided by the fact that project participants already have employment files, and their application for employment can easily and speedily be updated as they progress through the project.

