WHAT IS THE KENAN FELLOWS PROGRAM?

The State of North Carolina has a two-fold challenge related to the instruction of science, math, and technology in its public schools: a statewide shortage of qualified teachers and a need for relevant, meaningful curriculum. In order to address these challenges, the Kenan Fellows Program for Curriculum and Leadership Development seeks to enhance teacher professionalism and leadership by encouraging outstanding North Carolina teachers to develop innovative curricular resources in collaboration with the private sector, public schools, and institutions of higher learning.

Exceptional classroom teachers selected as Kenan Fellows engage in a two-year fellowship in partnership with scientists and university faculty. This two-year fellowship includes two intense six-week summer sessions during which fellows participate in professional development and work with their mentor to develop innovative curricula based on current statewide classroom needs. Professional development targets leadership and teaching areas such as advocacy, grant writing and inquiry-guided instruction. During the summer and throughout the school year fellows work with mentors on their curriculum projects, and upon completion the curricula are disseminated to teachers via project websites, presentations, and publications. Kenan Fellows also participate with state education leaders in “fireside chats” which provide a forum for dialogue on key issues of relevance to education within North Carolina.

Kenan Fellowships have been awarded to 67 teachers from seven NC counties. While the program initially attracted a majority of its teachers from the Triangle area, the program has expanded to include teachers from Guilford, Lee and Iredell counties.

IS THE KENAN FELLOWS PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHING ITS GOALS?

Kenan Fellows are veteran teachers and their ability to teach—given their vast years of experience—often leads to significant gains in student achievement as opposed to their more novice peers. It is imperative that these Fellows remain in the classroom and are also equipped with the skills to energize teaching and promote retention among their colleagues. Evaluation data collected to date suggest that the Kenan Fellows program is already beginning to realize many of its objectives:

- Currently 93% of all Kenan Fellows remain in the classroom; two of the five who have left the classroom remain in the educational field in some capacity (e.g., curriculum writing for NCDPI).*
- Currently nearly half (49%) of all Kenan Fellows have achieved National Board Certification, the highest credential possible, in their field of teaching. These teachers serve as role models in their school and may encourage other teachers to enhance their professional qualifications, which correlates to improved student achievement. *
- A substantial majority (71%) of all Fellows have made presentations on their work at state and national conferences, thereby modeling leadership skills for other teachers and disseminating their work to large teacher audiences. *
- More than half (57%) of Fellows have applied for, and received grants that support their projects; many in fact have received funding for more than one grant.*

Many Fellows describe increased self-confidence since joining the program, and that it positively impacts their willingness to lead. As one Fellow commented, “The Kenan Fellows program has given me the confidence to voice my opinion and concerns regarding educational policy in the community and to better help shape policy at my own school.”

* These data were independently collected and prepared by Donley Educational Evaluation Consulting, Inc.; April, 2007.
ADVANCING THE ART OF TEACHING THROUGH INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

- Kenan Fellows report significant improvement in their teaching skills, including their use of inquiry-guided instruction, classroom technology, content knowledge and presentation skills.

- Fellows exhibited significant improvement in their professional efficacy, including in their instructional strategies and leadership skills.

- Fellows’ websites have attracted more than 300,000 “hits” by more than 128,000 visitors from within North Carolina, the U.S., and internationally.

- Fellows have provided very highly rated presentations of their curricula at conferences attended by teachers from more than 50 North Carolina counties, as well as to teachers nationally and internationally.

One Kenan Fellow spoke to the impact of their participation on their professional efficacy:

“I have stepped ‘outside the box’ and become more creative with my teaching. I am better able to help students with learning problems. I have a better relationship with my students because science class is fun and interesting.”

Kenan Fellows not only improve their own teaching through program participation, but also motivate colleagues to improve as well. For example, many reported that they provide staff training sessions on National Science Standards for their colleagues, and serve as the “classroom technology expert” resource for other science and math teachers.

RELATIONSHIP / PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

A key-programming component of the Kenan Fellows program is to encourage and support Fellows’ development of partnership-building skills. These partnerships are essential to the success of the Kenan Fellows Program and are designed to fulfill the mandate put forth by the State Board of Education, which prioritizes community and business support for education. Fellows believe these partnerships have broadened their interests and concerns and are essential to their success as educators. As one Fellow explained:

“I used to feel very isolated in my little classroom. Now I have a very powerful support structure of influential forces in education across the state. I now have the tools and the confidence to make meaningful contacts with professionals and businesses to help improve the quality of education the students in my school receive.”

CONCLUSIONS

Results from evaluation of the Kenan Fellows Program to date suggest that it is clearly fulfilling its goals and should provide a much-needed benefit to the state of North Carolina in the area of science and mathematics education. Outstanding educators are given an opportunity to further hone their teaching and leadership skills, thus potentially making them more likely to remain in the classroom. In addition, the curriculum development and dissemination process will ultimately help to improve science and mathematics instruction statewide.

Program evaluation plans have recently been expanded to include documentation of program impact on student achievement on state tests, as well as on student learning as a result of curricula developed by Fellows. In addition, peer reviews of Fellow-developed websites will provide valuable data on the quality of the curricula developed.