

## One-on-one

# Teachers teaching teachers

## Education

### *Grant gives educators opportunities to learn from each other*

BY BRENDEN WEST

Assistant Editor

CLINTON — With eyes constantly on future progress, sometimes Kristi Cooley likes to look back into the past.

Five years ago, Cooley taught third grade in the Clinton School District. Education is a field, she said, that's constantly evolving. Even as a qualified teacher, there were times when Cooley felt she could use a little mentoring; like many in the district, she sought ways to reach all students of varying levels.

"There's so much going on in classrooms and so much to do," she said. "I didn't have that person to go to to say, 'Hey, I'm stuck on this idea'... It would have been great to have someone to go to to be a resource and a support." Now, Cooley fills that void for others.

Four years ago she was promoted to the title of "instructional coach," a position she self-describes as "the teacher's teacher." During her discussion with the *Clinton Herald*, Cooley fielded several questions from teachers at Jefferson Elementary School bustling in and out of the halls. She stepped into classrooms to get down to the students' level, and pulled teachers aside to discuss what they observe.

In a lot of ways, those learning teachers mirror the students they teach.

"When I can get a teacher who is kind of reluctant to try something new, and they feel the success, that's great — it's a great feeling," Cooley said. "To have teachers say 'Oh, this works.' That really has been great to see. As

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**Saul Xique-Marcos (left), a Jefferson Elementary kindergartener, receives one-on-one education from Clinton School District instructional coach Kristi Cooley.**

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**Clinton School District instructional coach Kristi Cooley (middle) meets with Jefferson Elementary School kindergarteners Jed Johns (left) and Rogelio Ixba-May during a math lesson on Friday.**

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## **TEACH**

### **Teachers teaching teachers**

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teachers we call it the 'aha' moment for students. I get to see that with teachers. " Districts like Clinton's constantly embrace technology when handed new tools and new approaches to student learning. So it's sensible that Clinton schools employ people devoted to getting other educators up to speed.

"It's about teachers working with teachers to get better at instruction," said John Jorgenson, the district's director of learning and collaboration. Among other duties, he's responsible for coordinating the district's "professional learning community" (PLC) program - a brand of education that involves bringing educators together in face-to-face idea exchanges. "Today's buzzword is collaboration, and it's totally about teachers working together to help students learn." PLCs help align district curriculum and give

teachers collaborative methods to reach all students of varying levels.

That's where coaches such as Cooley come in. Jorgenson said Clinton schools adopted the "coaching" approach ahead of other Iowa schools.

Cooley is among four with her title in the district.

There's a ripple effect, Jorgenson said. Cooley gives teachers a mentor to lean on; teachers learn and apply innovative learning modules to their students.

The end result has been rising test scores, Jorgenson said. Clinton schools have achieved highs in reading, math, attendance and the graduation rate since PLCs and instructional coaches were embedded in the curriculum.

"There's this conversation about student results," Jorgenson said. "(Coaches) are game- changers." In January, Superintendent Deb Olson announced that Clinton schools received a \$1 million Teacher Leadership Compensation grant from the state of Iowa. CSD is turning the dollars into a way to supplement instructional coaching.

The district is already starting to apply the grant.

During Monday's school board meeting, the board unanimously approved 23 stipends to teachers who were hired under the program. Ten of the hires (all within the district) will be full-time coaches, like Cooley (who was also approved on Monday).

Jorgenson said the grant creates 125 total leadership positions, most of them part time.

"We're really expanding upon a proven success strategy," Jorgenson said.

"It goes back to the whole concept of collaboration.

We are all in this together." Cooley said educators districtwide are excited about the prospects. The grant allows Clinton schools to gather more resources. And with more coaches, she'll be able to hone in on specific needs and ideas from her fellow educators.

The Teacher Leadership Compensation Program represents an "exciting" time for Clinton, Cooley said. The grant has educators looking ahead, and, like Jorgenson, Cooley foresees benefits for all involved in the district.

That covers students, teachers and the Clinton community.

"The overall goal is for us to improve the student achievement," Cooley said. "It will be great to have the other coaches along with me so we can work towards that end goal." *Assistant Editor Brenden West can be contacted at [brendenwest@clintonherald.com](mailto:brendenwest@clintonherald.com)*



**It's not uncommon for teachers to bounce ideas off Clinton's instructional coaches. Here, elementary teacher Shawna Kent (left) asks for advice from coach Kristi Cooley in a brief hallway exchange at Jefferson Elementary School.**

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