

CLINTON SCHOOLS

District utilizing teacher leadership program

Grant creates new role for its teachers

BY AMY KENT

Assistant Editor

CLINTON — Educating students is the Clinton School District's top priority and it needs top tier teachers to accomplish that.

Thanks to a state funding program, the district is now armed with a tool that will help train teachers to reach that top tier — the Teacher Leadership program.

The Teacher Leadership program is Clinton's version of the state's Teacher Leadership and Compensation System, a supplemental funding effort that stemmed from the 2013 education reform package.

The 2015-16 school year is the first year Clinton schools will benefit from the program, and administrators, teacher leaders and the teachers themselves, are enthusiastic for the potential it brings.

"The state is really working hard to improve student achievement and they're putting their money where their mouth is at. This is about a \$1 million grant," John Jorgensen, director of learning and collaboration, said. "It took us about two years with a team of teachers,

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administrators, parents and even community input to get this grant, so we were successful in writing it and there's 127 positions with this grant. So, a third of our teaching staff will have leadership positions." To educate the Clinton School Board, principals from all six district schools last week gave a presentation about all the benefits the new program offers the district.

What the administrators wanted to get across during the presentation was the number one goal is enhancing student achievement.

"What we hope to achieve is higher student achievement, and we're going to do this through the shared leadership," Teresa Zahs, Jefferson Elementary School principal, said. "We don't want to rely on any one person, we want to multiply all of our key players so that no matter who the leader is, our student achievement continues to go up." School board members offered a few questions during the presentation, through their moments of encouragement and enthusiasm. Many of the questions centered around how teachers have reacted to the program and the new roles it offers.

Because the program is designed for teachers to learn new and improved techniques from their peers, each grade level is assigned a teacher leadership coordinator, who then oversees a variety of instructional coaches, professional learning community leaders, mentoring curriculum coordinators, mentors and navigators.

It's supposed to act as a multi-tiered system, allowing for better communication and hopefully, a stronger education system Kristi Cooley, Bluff Elementary School principal said.

"None of this could happen without support, and we've spent August already working on that," Cooley said. "We will continue to support that throughout the year with weekly and monthly schedule meetings with teacher leaders. We also have training scheduled for the principals, the teacher leaders and the coaches as well so that we can continue to support that growth for all of us." One question board member Missey Sullivan-Pope had for the new teacher roles is the effect it will have on their former roles as full-time instructors.

"Whenever we implement something like this I hear from the community that we take our great teachers out of the classroom,"

Sullivan-Pope said. "I believe that they're all great, but that's something that I hear a lot." According to Superintendent Deb Olson, the teacher leadership coordinators will teach 100 percent of the time and instructional coaches will teach 20 percent of the time. She said it was important to maintain the contact those teachers had with students.

As for Jorgensen, if taking one of the district's best teachers out of the classroom to potentially create five more teachers of the same caliber, it's completely worth it.

"I would hope that some of our highest teachers are now working with other teachers because we want clones of those teachers," Jorgensen said. "I make no apologies for that at all. We want 100 percent of our teachers to become that proficient, and that's the only way we're going to get there is if they're working with highly qualified teachers who will coach them to become that." *Assistant Editor Amy Kent may be contacted at amykent@clintonherald.com.*