

TNE

THE INDUCTION ISSUE:

SPECIAL EDITION FOR SOON-TO-BE NEAG SCHOOL OF
EDUCATION GRADUATES ENTERING THE TEACHING WORKFORCE

The Teachers for a New Era Project At the University of Connecticut

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Spring, 2007 TNE Bulletin

Greetings from the TNE Induction Committee!

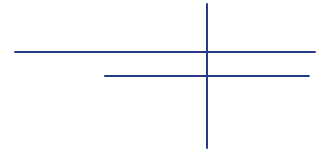
Over the past year, the TNE Induction Committee has developed a variety of initiatives to provide increased support for UConn graduates during their induction years in the teaching profession. A major highlight of our work this year was the establishment of an annual conference for beginning teachers. During the 2006 inaugural event in the Fall of 2006, graduates of the two Neag teacher preparation programs, the Integrated Bachelor's/Master's Program (IB/M) and Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates (TCPCG), were invited to UConn's Hartford campus along with beginning teachers employed in Neag's Professional Development Schools. The conference was a resounding success, bringing together over 50 first and second year teachers. The primary goal of the conference was to provide beginning teachers with an opportunity to explore relevant issues, such as classroom management and working effectively with parents, in an interactive forum. We are currently in the process of planning a second conference for Fall 2007.



A second major initiative was the creation of an online community of practice, linking recent UConn graduates with National Board Certified Teachers with *Tapped-In*. The site allows for threaded discussions and is populated with a variety of resources and links for beginning teachers. Another valuable resource for teachers can be found on the Teachers for a New Era website, where we have created a library of Podcasts featuring discussions with and presentations by an array of faculty, teachers and researchers in the field of education.

We are hard at work trying to find new and exciting ways to continue to support beginning teachers. Most notably, we are currently establishing a partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education's Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs), an organization with significant expertise and experience in providing induction support for new teachers. We look ahead to 2007-2008 with enthusiasm, both to continue successful collaborations and to build new and vibrant partnerships aimed at enhancing the experiences of both beginning teachers and their students in K-12 classrooms.

Sincerely,
Jason G. Irizarry, Ed.D.
The TNE Induction Committee



Julie White

Neag School of Education Graduate, Class of 1991
Gives us a glimpse into her first years as a teacher,
BEST certification, and the unique challenges of today's classroom

Teachers for a New Era (TNE): ‘What was your biggest “shock” in your first year of teaching? Was there anything you wish you had known when you began teaching that you can share with our graduating class?’

Julie White (JW): My student teacher recently shared a joke with me: *The teacher asked Johnny to identify two pronouns. Without hesitating, he replied, "Who? Me?"* His answer made me think of a response to your question. During that first year of teaching, my biggest "shock" came in having such a huge sense of responsibility. When it came time to plan units, I no longer had a cooperating teacher or professor to approve my work first. I wanted to ask, "Who? Me? I'm the one who will determine how this classroom operates?" If parents asked my advice about ways to help their children, I wasn't sure if I could help and again asked, "Who? You're asking me?" Students occasionally sought my assistance when making decisions about course planning, academics, or personal issues, and I wasn't sure about my ability to give good answers, so yet again I asked, "Who? You want me to help?" And of course, a teacher makes hundreds of decisions in a day, ranging from whether or not a rubric should be changed to deciding if a student really should sit near a certain peer or if that third request to go to a locker really is necessary. I was sometimes surprised by having to make so many decisions, and thought it should have been another adult, professor, or teacher who should have provided the responses. When I realized that I was the "adult in charge" in the room, I asked, "Me? You think I know the answer?" Since I was only 21 years old and the students in my 11th and 12th grade English classes were just a few years younger, I often wasn't sure why anyone would defer to me, and so again and again I asked, "Who? Me?"

In some ways, I guess you could say it didn't take long for me to assume the necessary responsibility of the classroom teacher. When twenty-five adolescents occupied our classroom and looked to me as the adult, I realized I had to *pretend* to feel confident in my decision making even when I wasn't. I had to make those quick decisions without always

having had the opportunity to defer to my administrators or other teachers. Yet I also learned that I could acknowledge mistakes in my decisions and that the students would not only tolerate it, but even respect me a little for it too. Even better, I also learned that although I had to "be the adult" and take on the full responsibility of the classroom, I was not working in isolation. My colleagues were very willing to answer my questions about student learning, classroom management, or lesson design. They still are! I have found that there are so many people in our profession who want to help that I am never alone. I think this is one of the keys to successful teaching too. In recognizing that we can *always* learn from our colleagues, whether they are in our schools or in other professional organizations, we can continue to teach more effectively so our students will learn more. The minute we think we've got it all worked out, that's when we're in trouble. And so if a new teacher occasionally feels a little overwhelmed by the enormity of the job and its many responsibilities, it might not be such a bad thing. This means that the teacher recognizes the importance of his or her role in the classroom and the weight of all those decisions. So when a new teacher asks himself or herself, "Who? Me?" I'd suggest the answer is, "Yes!" ...but don't be afraid to ask for help.

TNE: You were involved with the English/Language Arts component of the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program while spending a year as a teacher-in-residence at the Connecticut State Department of Education. Is there any insight you can share about the BEST Certification process?

JW: I understand the frustration many new teachers feel when faced with fulfilling the requirements of BEST, in particular the time and energy involved in finishing the portfolio. No doubt, it's a big task, one that takes countless hours in order to complete the necessary documentation and reflection that accompanies a successful performance on this certification requirement. However, the portfolio also offers new teachers opportunities to learn and improve their performance in the classroom. All of the instruments, benchmarks, and rubrics

used to assess portfolios are tightly aligned with the professional teaching standards for each discipline, and therefore, so are all of the tasks beginning teachers must complete. I think the portfolio can give new teachers a chance to be sure their practice is aligned with the standards for teaching and learning specific to their discipline. Another benefit to completing the portfolio is the requirement that new teachers document learning for several students of various achievement levels. Sure, it can seem cumbersome to collect samples of student work to submit for this assessment, and it can take time to analyze it for strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, it can also be an opportunity to examine a few students in depth and to understand what their strengths and needs are as learners. If new teachers make this a regular part of their practice, they'll be better able to individualize instruction for all students.

TNE: In 2005 you were honored with the Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award. How has that changed your career?

JW: I'm not sure if it's changed my career: I still find that teaching is a hard job indeed! When I first started in the classroom in 1991, I looked forward to the day when I'd find it easier to be a teacher. I'm still waiting... I guess I do have a few more tricks up my sleeve than when I first started, and I have a bit more confidence than I did in those first few years. In many ways, receiving the Milken award as well as the recent award from the Neag Alumni Association have been more humbling than anything. You know, I work with some very impressive colleagues! I've learned so much from them and continue to be challenged by the examples they set. If anything, receiving these honors has made me want to be as dedicated and effective as my peers in an effort to feel as though I can represent them with these awards attached to my name.

TNE: Since you graduated in 1991 from NSoE, what are some of the new challenges you see from students in today's classroom vs. when you began your career?

JW: I'm actually more idealistic and optimistic about our future than I was sixteen years ago when I first started teaching. Now that we know so much more about the brain and how children learn, I think teachers have done a better job in getting kids to think. I look at what my students can do and the ways they can wrestle with complex issues, and I'm dazzled! The concepts students understand in math, science, and social studies make my job as a language arts teacher easier. The students come to me having already engaged in critical thinking about difficult subjects. Not only that, but so many language arts teachers have prepared my students before they've entered my eighth grade classroom. Students are willing and able to organize their thinking into clear, concise pieces of writing. I love how students think as writers do, study history as historians do, and participate in labs and scientific processes as scientists do. These improvements, though, are not just the result

of our desires as educators to help students think better; these improvements come as the result of a real *need*. Students' access to information is so much greater and faster than when I was a student. (As an undergrad at UConn, I typed all of my papers on a typewriter. I had barely touched a computer let alone use the Internet!) Unless we equip students to access, analyze, and synthesize the information available to them -- and to be critical judges of those information sources -- then we will have failed them. The newest challenge, I think, is that we have to prepare our students to utilize information that we teachers may not have even seen yet. We have to prepare our students to think critically so they can respond to whatever it is that will next come their way. Yet this rapid and copious information overload makes our work that much more difficult. Children are used to a rapid-fire stimulation from various media sources. They can play online games within seconds of logging on; they can switch songs on their iPods by clicking a wheel; they are inundated with advertisements in restaurants, at the doctor's office, and sometimes even in school. I sometimes think about how even the television news has changed. When I was a kid, there'd be a talking head on the screen with perhaps one picture in the corner to illustrate the subject matter. Today, we not only get the news anchor, but simultaneously get a few tickers along the bottom: one to report the stocks, another the upcoming headlines, and perhaps yet another for sports scores. And let's not miss the swirling globe or station logo in one corner and maybe even an advertisement in another. I can't help but think this has trained our brains—our kids' brains—to expect more, to expect it fast, and to expect to be entertained in the process. So yes, there are greater challenges facing us as teachers. These challenges are twofold: First, we have to prepare our students to deal with the information overload in an intelligent and thoughtful way. Second, we as teachers have to work that much harder to keep students who are used to such rapidity and stimulation engaged in our classrooms! But instead of complaining about media's effects and the challenges we face, we can aim to find ways to work with these changes. Education, after all, is a means to prepare students for the world in which they live, and since ours is a fast-paced one; we have to find ways to help students understand it better and to make informed decisions.



“I love how students think as writers do, study history as historians do, and participate in labs and scientific process

Special thanks to Julie White for her contribution to the Spring, 2007 TNE Bulletin.

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Monday, May 21st, 2007
8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

University of Connecticut, Rome Ballroom

The second annual Closing the Achievement Gap Conference, sponsored by the Neag School of Education, highlights an issue of critical importance to educators, policymakers, and researchers.

Presentations by locally and nationally renowned speakers will share research results and discuss best practices for narrowing achievement gaps among students. School personnel from around the state and region are invited to take advantage of this excellent professional development opportunity.

All Details are available at:

<http://www.achievementgap.uconn.edu/index.htm>

In celebration of this exciting event, TNE at UConn is offering 20 full scholarships to the workshop.

Scholarships are available for:

- 10 Neag School of Education Graduates currently working in the education profession (Teachers or Administrators)
- 10 Current Neag School of Education Students

Act Soon!

These scholarships will be granted on a first-come first-serve basis.

Contact sarah.goldberg@uconn.edu if you are interested.

TNE PodCasts go International!

TNE PodCasts are now available on the iTunes store! Simply search the iTunes store for "TNE PodCasts" and subscribe. You will then receive our newest interviews for free! As always, PodCasts are also available at: www.tne.uconn.edu/PodCasts

Where in Connecticut do Neag School of Education Teacher Preparation Program Alumnae work?

Information attained from the Connecticut State Department of Education

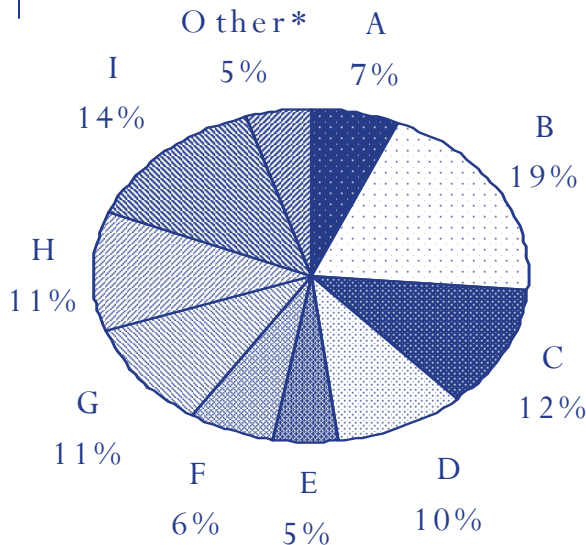
This data reflects the 2006/2007 School year employment information for graduates since 1997

Distribution by District Reference Group

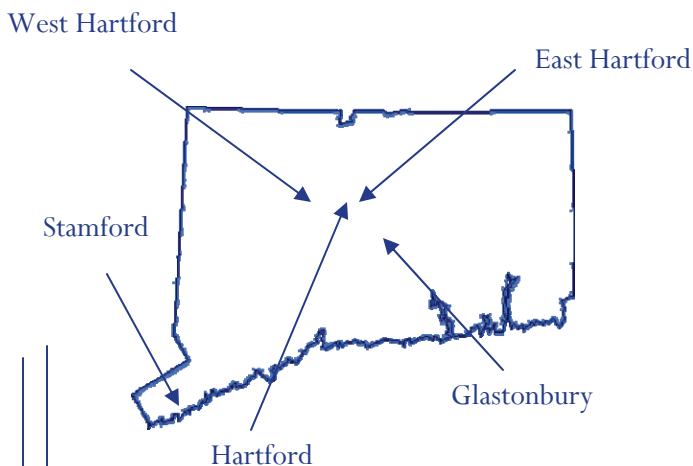
District Reference Group (DRG) is a Connecticut classification of districts whose students' families are similar in education, income, occupation, and need, and that have roughly similar enrollment.

DRG guidelines were determined by the Connecticut State Department of Education. DRG A represents the most affluent and low-need districts in the state, while DRG I represents the poorest and highest need districts, including Connecticut's five largest cities.

**Other refers to State Charter Schools, Schools serving students with special needs, and Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs)*



Current Top Connecticut School District Employers of NSOE Teacher Education Alumnae



When asked, "For what reasons are you still in the field of education?", NSOE Alumnae answered:

"I enjoy working with the students."	79.6%
"It is rewarding for me when my students learn."	75.9%
"I work in a supportive and challenging atmosphere."	58%
"I like the schedule."	38.3%
"I enjoy being in a diverse student population."	30.2%
"I like the building leaders."	30.2%
"Other."	19%

Note: Percentages listed represent the segment of respondents that agreed with each statement on the Winter, 2006 NSOE Graduate Survey.

support.

How can Teachers for a New Era aid you in your first years as a teacher?

Keep you calm: The TNE Induction Committee sponsored the first Conference for Beginning Teachers in the Fall of 2006. Over 50 first and second year teachers attended and participated in breakout sessions designed as forums to address a variety of topics that new teachers commonly identify as areas of need. Feedback from participants was very positive. The Induction Committee is currently in the process of planning a second conference for the Fall of 2007.

Keep you connected: The TappedIn support network is an online community built specifically for educators. The TNE Induction committee has created an open “lobby” with public resources for beginning teachers, as well as moderating a floor for Center for Teaching Quality National Board Certified mentors and beginning teachers to communicate. New teachers are encouraged to join; free registration is available at : <http://www.tne.uconn.edu/induction-activities.htm>.

Keep you current: TNE is on the forefront of the most up-to-date research in the field of education nationwide. Be sure to bookmark the TNE website at www.tne.uconn.edu and check it often for access to the newest developments in educational research and information. The newest feature of the TNE site features a library full of free, downloadable PodCasts. These PodCasts feature interviews and recorded presentations with professors and practicing teachers addressing topics ranging from ancient Mayan mathematics to international studies perspectives in K-12 classrooms. TNE at UConn plans to regularly add to the library; a wonderful resource for beginning and experienced teachers alike.

Ask not what TNE can do for you, ask what you can do for the students of Connecticut...

Because much of TNE’s research is dependent upon the willingness of participation, we depend on you to respond to our surveys to complete our research. Please remember this if you are asked to help with the TNE Project in the future. Your experiences and opinions are truly invaluable to us and TNE’s impact on education.



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