

**“Meeting the Challenge: Preparing Effective Special Education Teachers to
Work with Students with High-Incidence Disabilities in Urban Districts.”**

Summary: Fitchburg State College (FSC) and four large urban school districts in Massachusetts—Lowell, Worcester, and the twin cities of Fitchburg and Leominster—have developed a collaborative special education teacher licensure program designed to alleviate the critical shortages of highly qualified teachers in special education by providing teacher training, support services, financial aid, and retention services for unlicensed teachers in the partner districts. This field-based program targets professionals currently teaching students with high-incidence disabilities. It provides enhanced skill development designed to facilitate immediate classroom application that results in improvements in the academic performance of students with high-incidence disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

To address this shortage of highly qualified teachers in special education *Meeting the Challenge* has established the following goals: **1) provide a research-based, clinical experience graduate program that will lead to initial licensure for teachers with emergency licensure (Massachusetts Department of Education waiver) in Special Education; 2) provide teacher licensure preparation for paraprofessionals currently in special education classrooms who have degrees in other fields; 3) provide licensure endorsement for English language learning to meet the Massachusetts Department of Education standards for highly qualified status of initial licensure and professional development for special education teachers who serve sheltered English immersion students in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening; 4) implement training for mentors of beginning teachers to ensure they have the skills necessary to meet the unique needs of special educators; and 5) offer intensive mentoring and professional development programs for special education teachers who are in their first three years of teaching to address and alleviate the high incidence of attrition experienced by these districts.**

Introduction: Fitchburg State College, a four-year public college, has come to be recognized as one of the finest institutions of its kind in New England. Fitchburg State College was established in 1894 as the State Normal School and was a pioneer in Special Education, developing its baccalaureate degree in 1953. In 1965, its name was officially changed to Fitchburg State College, which today offers forty-nine undergraduate degree programs in eighteen academic departments, twenty Masters Degree programs, five Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study programs, and seven Graduate Certificate programs. Enrollment is approximately 3,100 full-time and 4,000 part-time students that include 1,100 matriculated graduate students. Fitchburg State and its sister state institutions educate more than 70% of Central Massachusetts' teachers. Approximately 20% of baccalaureate degrees awarded each year are in education and 66% of masters' degrees awarded at FSC are in education. The Education Department at Fitchburg State College offers the oldest special education teacher preparation program in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with an enrollment of 120 undergraduate students and approximately 200 graduate students.

Through collaborative agreements, the pre-service education students at FSC are placed in the program's partner districts for their pre-practicum and student teaching experiences. Fitchburg State's educator licensure programs are nationally recognized by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Fitchburg State College is one of only eight nationally accredited programs in Massachusetts. Within our programs is a shared Conceptual Framework, as well as widespread incorporation of the core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards for what accomplished teachers in all areas should know and be able to do.

The special education curriculum was developed and continues to function with an

underlying belief in the potential of individuals with special needs and their right to full participation in the mainstream of life in schools and in their communities. Since the beginning of this program, the emphasis in course work and field experiences has been on linking content with the ability to apply strategies and resources in working with individuals with disabilities in the least restrictive environment

The four partner districts collectively serve 50,930 students in north central Massachusetts, 5% of the state's public school population. They are urban school districts that have long-standing relationships with Fitchburg State College (FSC). The twin cities of Fitchburg and Leominster are situated approximately 45 miles west of Boston and 25 miles north of Worcester, the second largest city in the state. Fitchburg has a population of 39,102 and Leominster 41,303. As estimated by the Spanish-American Center of Leominster, the current Hispanic population in the Fitchburg/Leominster area is approximately 30,000. This number is triple the number officially reported in the 2000 census. The Southeast Asian population was the fastest growing population in the eighties in this area, as it grew 907% between 1980-1990, and experienced a 94% increase in this decade. Both Fitchburg and Leominster Public Schools have been target schools with the federally funded FSC Upward Bound (TRIO) program for the past nineteen years. Worcester is a city of 172,648 that has changed dramatically over the past decades. The poverty rate is 72% above the state average. The immigrant population of Latinos, Southeast Asians, Albanians, Africans, Europeans, South American and Central Americans has grown exponentially. In Worcester, 88.7% of school age children in the city attend public school. Of those, 46.9 are children of color, they speak 84 languages and dialects and 36% do not speak English as a first language. Lowell, with a population of 105,167, has the second largest community of Southeast Asians (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian) in the country, with most Southeast Asian students coming from immigrant families.

Over the years the college and the four partner districts have collaborated on many grant funded projects that include programs focused on: pre-service teacher preparation, Summer Content Institutes, Education Curriculum Frameworks and two very successful Paraprofessional Career Ladder programs– Creating Certification Opportunities for Strengthening Transitional Bilingual Education Paraprofessionals (CO-STEP) with Middlesex Community College and Lowell Public Schools & Career Development in Special Education (a partnership with Fitchburg State College, Quinsigamond community College and Worcester Public Schools.

(a) Need for project: (i) gaps or weaknesses... have been identified and will be addressed...

National: Fitchburg State College and its partners, having reviewed the national research on the shortage of teachers in Special Education, have found that the public school districts in this proposal demonstrate even greater need than is nationally reported.

Education is the foundation of a democratic, knowledge-based society. As John Dewey has aptly stated, “education is not preparation for life, education is life itself.” The current crisis in the teaching profession, as it faces a historic teacher turnover, threatens the essence of the American public education system. An estimated 2 million teachers in the nation will retire by the year 2008 (NEA, 2002). This turnover is acutely felt in special education. Research indicates that the demand for qualified teachers in special education far outweighs the supply (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001). This situation is most critical in high-need urban areas (NEA, 2002) where non-credentialed teachers working with students with disabilities frequently are employed (McQuillan, 2002). As urban school districts struggle to achieve higher academic standards for students with disabilities and the relationship between teacher credentials and student achievement is substantiated (Darling-Hammond, 1999), the dilemma for urban public schools may in fact be the “most important civil rights challenge of our day” (Chase, 1998). It is estimated that more than one fourth of special educators have either no license or a license that is

substandard in the area that they are employed as teachers (Rosenberg and Sindelar 2003). National research on the licensure status for educators indicates that the lack of proper credentials is twice that for special educators versus general educators (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt et al., 1998). The need for highly qualified teachers in special education is also exacerbated by the fact that special education teachers leave the profession at a higher rate. This attrition rate is an issue critical to the quality of education provided students with disabilities. A recent report issued by the CEC (2000) indicates that, "By the year 2005, the United States will need over 200,000 new special educators. Four out of every ten special educators entering the field leave special education before their fifth year of teaching" (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Kilgore, 2002).

The assurance of a competent, caring and "highly qualified" teacher for every child in every classroom is a daunting challenge that teacher preparation programs and public school systems are required to undertake under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. Investment in teacher knowledge and skills is viewed as the most viable means of increasing student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The creation of rigorous standards is regarded as one sign of progress towards the achievement of the "highly qualified" mandate (Darling-Hammond, 2000). **Focusing on teacher preparation programs that prepare "highly qualified" teachers from the current pool of teachers serving under educational license waivers, and who have already demonstrated a commitment to students with disabilities, is one of the methods put forth in this proposal to address this pervasive concern.**

Additionally, teacher retention in high-need urban school districts is an area of particular concern. Researchers have shown that up to 30% of new teachers leave by the end of their third year and for those in urban areas this percentage can be as high as 50% (Darling-Hammond, 2000). For special educators this percentage can be as much as 8% higher. **Intensive mentoring support and professional development training will be provided to address the needs of**

beginning special education teachers and their mentors.

A review of the literature by Nougaret, Scruggs and Mastropieri (2004) indicated that traditional teacher licensure programs have a positive impact on teacher competence. However, research specifically addressing special educator teacher licensure programs has been limited (Nougart et al, 2004). Research indicates that many negative consequences result when untrained staff are assigned to work with students with high-incidence disabilities. (Carroll, 2001; Haycock, 1999). Districts report problems in motivating students, communicating with families, and achieving learning outcomes when students are served by untrained staff. Current writings continue to support the findings that those special educators who are prepared in traditional teacher education programs demonstrate a higher level of competence in the classroom (Nougart et al 2005). In light of the “high stakes” requirements for progression through the pk-12 system on local, state and national levels, the need to address this situation is clearly indicated. **This proposal provides a specific program of study and clinical experiences which is a pathway to licensure and highly qualified special education teacher initial licensure status.**

A recent policy information report published by ETS (2005) indicated that approximately one third of the nation’s students leave the public school system without achieving a diploma. Furthermore, the United States ranks 10th in the world for student attrition. Factors which contribute to this high rate of student attrition include: socio-economic status, high mobility and the number of parents in the home. All of these issues are ever present in large urban school districts. When one compares this rate of attrition of one third for the general population with figures for minority students enrolled in special education, figures indicate that the special education percentage is 68% higher for these students (Annual Report to Congress, 1997). The need to further recruit and retain teachers from underrepresented groups has the potential to impact students from minority groups in high-need urban districts **The provision of the**

licensure endorsement for English Language Learners in concert with initial licensure in moderate (high-incidence) disabilities address the needs of minority students who are disproportionately represented in the aforementioned attrition rates .

Statewide: The issues in Special Education confronting school systems nationally are mirrored in the school systems of the **Commonwealth of Massachusetts**. The low numbers of children with high-incidence disabilities passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) dramatically demonstrates the need for highly qualified staff well trained in special education strategies for teaching core subjects of reading, math, and science, as well as cultural and linguistic understanding. Many of these teachers are hired with little or no educational preparation related to strategies for special needs, language acquisition, cultural sensitivity, child growth and development, or classroom behavior management.

Regional/Local: The Massachusetts Department of Education reports that 16.1% (157,122) students have disabilities, the majority of which are high-incidence disabilities. The most recent MCAS results indicate that the students in four partner districts, on average, are scoring even more poorly than other students in the state. A disproportionately high number of 10th grade students with high-incidence disabilities in three partner districts have failed the MCAS—both Language Arts and Mathematics—and must continue to retake the tests until they pass them in order to receive a high school diploma. The following table details the large percentage of students with high-incidence disabilities that are still scoring in the “warning” or “failure category.” (Full table is located in Appendix F) **Note:** Scores for students who fall into both the “Disabilities” and “Limited English Proficient” (LEP) categories are counted in the “Disabilities” category. **The high number of LEP students failing the MCAS underscores the great challenges faced by students who have both learning disabilities and limited English proficiency.**

2004 MCAS Results – Percentage of students in the Warning or Failure category

Grade Level 10– English Language Arts					
Student Status	State	Fitchburg	Leominster	Lowell	Worcester
Regular	4%	9%	3%	12%	12%
Students with Disabilities	34%	32%	51%	66%	54%
Limited English Proficiency	52%	32%	50%	36%	60%
Grade Level 10– Mathematics					
Student Status	State	Fitchburg	Leominster	Lowell	Worcester
Regular	9%	19%	8%	20%	25%
Students with Disabilities	41%	31%	66%	79%	66%
Limited English Proficiency	39%	40%	24%	44%	57%

(Massachusetts Department of Education MCAS Results Report 2004)

In Massachusetts there is a critical shortage of teachers specially trained to work with students who have high-incidence disabilities. The Massachusetts Department of Education has identified special education as among the top three teaching areas where the need for qualified teachers is the highest. These staffing concerns are reflected in the partner school districts that serve 8,504 students with disabilities and currently have 77 teachers on waivers. The districts anticipate an urgent need for teachers in the next few years as those retiring will leave a gap unfilled by the current number of licensed teachers in special education. Partners collectively have 740 special education (SPED) teachers, who comprise 16.75% percent of their teaching staff. In addition, due to teacher attrition and an anticipated increase in student numbers, these schools collectively project a shortage in critical need areas of twenty teachers in Fitchburg to as many as seventy teachers in Worcester within the next five years to appropriately service students. Although many of these teachers are licensed in other subject areas, **most of the teachers who work with students with high-incidence disabilities have little or no**

formal training and education in this field.

All four partner school districts experience both special education staff attrition and the need to add new positions to accommodate the growing number of students with special education needs. For example, Worcester Public Schools (WPS) went from 3779 students with special needs in December 2000 to 4800 in 2004, an increase of 12% per year. In addition to its growing rate, WPS is experiencing an attrition of 5-10 teachers per year and anticipates that they will need to fill 40 vacancies within the next year. Combining the increase in the number of students with special needs and the high attrition rate these numbers, extended over the next four years, would result in 70 vacancies to fill. Lowell has seen an increase of 300 students with special needs over the past year, currently has 26 unlicensed teachers, and is anticipating an increased need for special education teachers as retirements peak over the next five years (Susan Duggan, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, Lowell Public Schools). Although Fitchburg and Leominster Public Schools have the highest number of licensed special education teachers, it is anticipated that over the next five years most of their special education teachers will retire and the need for new licensed teachers will be dramatic at 15-20 each. Both of these schools are also seeing a similar annual increase in the number of students with special education needs that they serve in their districts. (Kathy Raftery, Director of Student Services, FPS and Susan Hitchcock, Assistant Superintendent, Leominster Public Schools, April 2005). Consistent with the shortage of teachers and urban districts' need to meet staffing requirements, many districts are forced to hire teachers who lack the required special education licensure for their positions.

District	Students with High-Incidence Disabilities	# of teachers lacking Special Education licensure	# of Special Education Teachers
Fitchburg	1024	3	86
Leominster	965	3	74

Lowell	1928	26	160
Worcester	4587	45	420
Total	8504	77	740

The above table illustrates the number of teachers in the partner school districts who do not hold special education licensure and are teaching under a Massachusetts Department of Education waiver. This situation contrasts with affluent districts where long waiting lists of “highly qualified” teachers is frequently the norm (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The research quantifies the relationship between teacher credentials and student achievement. Not only are the partner schools in urban high-need areas, two of the school districts—Lowell and Worcester—have over 20% of the children in the school population living in poverty. All four districts have a high percentage of students who are low-income—Fitchburg (54.2%), Leominster (31.1%), Lowell (65.1%), and Worcester (61.5%) compared to the state average of 27.7%.

This project will also meet the need for staff trained to work with **culturally and linguistically diverse populations**, a regional and statewide need. Many of the students in the partner districts come from immigrant families who find themselves culturally and linguistically isolated from the mainstream population, with school systems that are not equipped to meet the bicultural needs of their children. In Lowell, 57% of the student population represents ethnic minorities. For Worcester and Fitchburg, the percentages are not far behind at 53.5% and 50.3%.

In addition to preparing unlicensed teachers and recruiting paraprofessionals to meet state requirements for licensure, this project will provide the necessary **support to retain beginning special education teachers in the field**. Historically, younger inexperienced special education teachers have a tendency to leave the field more often than their older and more experienced colleagues (Copsse, 2003). In this contemporary educational climate, special educators express

feelings of lack of support, and preparedness, and are often beleaguered, and disempowered (CEC, 2004). They are frequently placed in classroom settings where they are essentially “set up to fail” due to situations that make them feel ineffective (CEC, 2004). Utilizing the *Critical Friends Group* model, seminars will be offered (for graduate credit and professional development points) to program scholars and beginning licensed special education teachers to provide them with support in meeting the demands of their career.

There is a lack of accessible and affordable training and education programs in the central Massachusetts area leading to teacher licensure in Special Education. Of the secondary education institutions in the region, **only Fitchburg State College (FSC) offers a graduate degree in Special Education.** The cost of an education leading to teacher licensure at private institutions is prohibitive. Travel to the University of Massachusetts programs at Amherst or Boston is out of reach for most participants, as it substantially increases the time and money it would take to receive training. FSC, as a result, serves fully one-third of the state’s population interested in affordable and accessible special education coursework and programs leading to teacher licensure on a graduate level. This partnership program with extended campuses in Lowell and Worcester will **greatly increase access to Fitchburg State College’s program of study for the collaborating urban public schools.**

(a)(ii) The project will prepare personnel for fields in which shortages have been demonstrated...

This project addresses the critical training need for licensed, highly qualified special education teachers by preparing 25 scholars to become licensed special education teachers by 2008 and an additional 25 by 2010 for a total of 50 additional licensed special education teachers in these four districts. An urgent need exists to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers who lack licensure and to address the impending shortage of licensed qualified special education teachers in all four partner school districts (ESEA, 2002). This program offers proven successful

career ladder models for professional personnel training and demonstrates the capacity for the partners to produce “highly qualified” teachers.

The *Meeting the Challenge* program is designed for two cohorts of 25 scholars to complete the first 33 hours of the FSC graduate program in Special Education. For two years each cohort will participate in a course of study comprised of key courses addressing the curricula of the Massachusetts Frameworks including English /Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies that will have an impact on student learning and potential improvement of MCAS scores by providing scholars with the conceptual framework, necessary application skills, and strategies for delivering content. Grant funding will provide scholarships to cover the cost of tuition and fees for 33 credit hours over the two year period.

Additionally, as the scholars/teachers in this group are employed and working with students in a classroom, their practicum will be a year long. This program will provide support from college faculty who will conduct six classroom observational visits, which is twice the number required for licensure programs. This increased high-quality supervision in the classroom provides the opportunity to have extended contact with the college faculty intended to enhance skill development in a way that is different from most traditional Master’s in Education and other college programs.

(b) Quality of project services:

The training...is of sufficient quality, intensity, and duration to lead to improvements...

After completion of 33 credit hours these scholars will receive an *initial* license in Special Education and a licensure Endorsement in English Language Learning. In addition, they will be only two courses shy of the requirements for the master of education degree. Each course throughout this program will provide those teaching in the classroom, as well as the paraprofessionals, with additional skills and knowledge necessary to improve their students’

achievement. At the end of year two, it is expected that 25 scholars will receive *initial* licensure and at the end of year four, an additional 25 will have completed these requirements making for a total of 50 teachers being able to teach in Massachusetts without the need for the Department of Education issuance of emergency licensure.

These cohorts will include many of the paraprofessionals currently working with special education students who have bachelor degrees. Both Worcester and Lowell have a great number of paraprofessionals working with students with special needs. A recent survey (with a return rate of 80%) of WPS paraprofessionals shows that 48 of those have a bachelor's degree, 9 have a master's and 15 are certified to teach in Massachusetts, but do not have special education licensure.

Through *Improving Teacher Quality* grant funds available on a competitive basis from the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, Fitchburg State received a small grant (<\$50,000) for a pilot project to initiate a cohort of teachers serving under waivers from the state department of education. This model which provides a route to licensure and a master of education degree, has a success rate of 100% of scholars enrolled in the cohort achieving this licensure and degree status (to be awarded 5/21/05). An additional cohort of 16 scholars has been formed and is making steady progress toward initial licensure. This current grant proposal builds upon this model. Feedback from project principals, faculty, participants, and administrators attest to its success. Requests from our partner districts to extend and expand an accelerated form of this model demonstrates the continued and impending need that the schools have for highly qualified educators of children with high-incidence disabilities.

Since scholars enrolling in this program are teachers and paraprofessionals currently working with students with high-incidence disabilities, this project will provide financial and

employment incentives to remain in the system where they have been teaching and are already familiar with the student population. With the preparation, professional development and mentoring support provided by this program, it is anticipated that all scholars will be more committed to the program and their school districts than those hired from outside the region.

As most of the scholars will be from low- and low-middle income families, one of the most significant incentives is the financial assistance provided by the grant to cover tuition, books, and fees. This grant will make it possible for more scholars to obtain the education that will enable them to provide stronger services to students with high-incidence disabilities. A second incentive is the possibility for salary increases and/or job advancement for paraprofessionals obtaining a license. Completing licensure will qualify them for teaching positions that represent significant salary increases. The third incentive will be the services that scholars will receive throughout the program. Case management, tutoring, and academic advising will provide them with the confidence, skills and resources required to meet the demands of advance degree studies while continuing to work. (Taylor, M. and Chawla, D. 2000)

To accommodate scholars' schedules as well as the various locations of their schools and homes, classes are held after school during the school year and during the summer at three geographical locations. **This flexible scheduling will make it possible for teachers to take classes during a time when courses are not typically offered.** All the courses will be offered within close proximity to the respective districts so that scholars will not have to commute long distances to complete their degrees. Fitchburg State College is central to both districts in the twin cities of Leominster and Fitchburg. Classes will be conducted in the Elm Park Community School in Worcester and Merrimack Educational Center (MEC) in Chelmsford—10 minutes from Lowell. Schools in both Leominster and Fitchburg are all within a 20-minute commute to Fitchburg State.

This project will also provide the necessary support to retain beginning special education teachers in the four districts. Historically, younger inexperienced special education teachers have a tendency to leave the field more often than their older and more experienced colleagues (Copsse, 2003). They are frequently placed in classroom settings where they are essentially “set up to fail” due to situations that make them feel ineffective (CEC, 2004). Utilizing the *Critical Friends* model (Cushman, 1996) five mentor teachers per year will attend training to be coaches of the *Critical Friends*’ model. A *Critical Friends Group (CFG)* brings together six to ten teachers within a school over at least two years, to help each other evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction and make adjustments as needed. Student learning is at the heart of the *CFG* discussions. *CFG* members work to clearly state goals for students so that others can observe the members and provide feedback on their ability of meet defined goals. Members collect evidence on student performance that informs instructional decisions. *CFG* members bring to the table student work, teacher lessons and units, case studies of students, classroom dilemmas, and other pressing issues. Using structures called “protocols”; *CFG* members help each other improve their practice by analyzing these artifacts and issues.

In addition to serving the scholars involved in this program, an additional 50 teachers who have been teaching children with high-incidence disabilities for less than four years will participate in the *Critical Friends Group*. Mentors from each district will undergo training in the *CFG* model, which includes extensive group processing skills and use of *CFG* protocols. Mentors will conduct monthly seminars to assist newly licensed special education teachers to in examine their teaching practices and developing strategies to address areas of concern/need improvement. Seminars will be offered over a ten month period (September-June) for four hours each for a total of 40 hours. Participants will have the option of receiving three graduate credits (at a reduced fee of \$225) that can be applied to the master’s degree or Professional

Development Points (that will advance licensed teachers toward professional licensure).

The following topics have been identified as presenting the greatest challenges to beginning special educators: classroom management; working with colleagues; time management strategies; understanding the evaluation process; acclimating to the public school environment; adapting/modifying instructions; and understanding standards based instruction (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Kilgore, 2002). It is expected that these topics will be the focus of many of the *Critical Friends* meetings.

The training provided for **mentor teachers** in this program will improve their skills in addressing the specific issues facing teachers of children with high-incidence disabilities. The partner districts have mentoring programs in place. However, all have expressed a need to provide continued professional development programs for the mentors that specifically address concerns that face the special education teachers and the inclusive classroom. Mentor teachers will receive Professional Development Points (PDPs) for their participation in this program. Five mentor teachers per year will be trained to be as *CFG* coaches and will serve as mentors in this program thus providing schools districts with a larger number of mentors trained to more fully support the new teacher in concerns that relate to teaching children with high-incidence disabilities. Classroom observations by master teachers (required by districts under state law) will provide individual opportunities for feedback, reflection and discussion.

Districts have projected that along with attrition of special education teachers, a large number of mentor teachers will retire by the year 2007. Worcester alone could lose close to 100 trained mentors. The *Critical Friends* program will train five new mentors the first year and will train an additional five in year three, thereby providing districts with support base for the expected influx of new teachers.

The partner districts share common issues, concerns and challenges in providing services to students with high-incidence disabilities. A speaker series will bring leaders in the field to share knowledge on current topics relative to providing services to students with disabilities in urban setting (e.g. determining the difference between second language learner and disabilities, working with students and families who are homeless, identifying and addressing issues relative to low income status.

The Special Education program at Fitchburg State College, the lead partner in this application, has prepared special educators effectively over the last 55 years and has met the high standards set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The program is one of eight higher education institutions in Massachusetts to have achieved this designation. This designation demonstrates the Special Education Department at Fitchburg State College's ability to prepare teachers with intense knowledge of content areas and a thorough understanding of learning, pedagogy, curriculum, needs of English language learners, assessment, and the utilization of technology. However, all of these initiatives are of little importance if school districts (in particular urban districts) are forced to continue to hire teachers who are not "highly qualified" to fulfill their staffing needs as those with special education licenses retire or move on to other fields due to lack of preparation or support. Proactive strategies such as those outlined in this proposal are one means of addressing the issue of teacher credentials and the effect that these credentials have on student achievement. *Meeting the Challenge* will build a solid foundation for the knowledge and skills necessary to effect intended learning outcomes for Pk-12 students with high-incidence disabilities.

Research...is incorporated into training requirements and reflected in required coursework...

Fitchburg State College's plan of study is based upon the standards and principles enumerated by the specialty professional association (SPA) for special education—The Council

for Exceptional Children (CEC). These standards and principles reflect the knowledge and skill of “literally thousands of special educators” (CEC, 2003). These standards according to CEC are “rigorously validated, research informed and pedagogically grounded and performance-based for results oriented accountability”. These standards are contemporary in nature and reflect the research-based standards that are critical to effective practice in the field of special education. Worthy of note is the fact Fitchburg State is one of 34 institutions of higher education presently involved in the pilot accreditation program for NCATE. An analysis of these standards and the Fitchburg State College teacher preparation courses which reflect these standards is as follows:

CEC Standard Analysis – Moderate (High-Incidence) Disabilities Initial License

CEC Standard	Summary of Standard	Course that addresses Standard
Foundations	Evidence of an understanding of the field based as an evolving and changing discipline.	SPED 9002 Research
Development and Characteristics of Learners	Special educators know and demonstrate respect for their students and their individual similarities and differences.	SPED 7004 Working with Individuals with Disabilities
Individual learning Differences	Special educators understand the effects that an exceptional condition can have on an individual’s learning in school and throughout life.	SPED 8914 and 8924 Assessment Strand
Instructional Strategies	Special educators possess a repertoire of evidence-based	SPED 7020 Modifying and Adapting

	instructional strategies to individualize instruction for individuals with exceptional learning needs.	SPED 7025 Pedagogy in Reading SPED 8914 and 8924 Curriculum Strand SPED 9130 Reading Adv
Learning Environments and Social Interactions	Special educators actively create learning environments that foster cultural understanding , safety, emotional well being , positive social interactions/engagement	SPED 8180 Positive Behavioral Supports
Language	Special educators understand typical and atypical language development and the ways this can interact with an individuals experience and language use	SPED 8300 Language Development Differences and Disorders
Instructional Planning	Special educators are adept at individualized decision making and instruction.	SPED 7020, 7025, 8914 8924, 9130
Assessment	Special educators use the results of multiple types of assessment information for a variety of educational decisions.	SPED 8914 and 8924 Assessment Strand
Professional and Ethical Practice	Special educators are guided by the profession’s ethical and	SPED 7004

	professional practice standards.	
Collaboration	Special educators routinely and effectively collaborate with families, other educators, related services providers and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways	SPED 9200 Consultation and Collaboration Strategies

CEC Professional standards as illustrated in the above chart are based upon the research that informs the field of special education with regards to the best practices approach in the education of students with high-incidence disabilities. CEC is the specialty professional agency (SPA) that informs the practice of NCATE accredited institutions (of which Fitchburg State is one). The field-based research that assists in the development of the Knowledge and Skills Standards detail the competencies that entry-level special educators must master in order to demonstrate efficacy in the education of students with disabilities (CEC, 2003)

Accreditation of teacher preparation programs is considered to be an essential element of standards based reform (Brownell et al., 2005). Highly qualified teachers, according to Howey (1996), are prepared in programs that incorporate: 1) a rational program focus as reflected in the Education Unit’s Conceptual Framework (see Appendix I) which addresses a unified preparation approach for all teacher candidates in the Education Department and is considered to be a stronger element of “constructivism” (Brownell et al.,2005); 2) content and pedagogy that is research based; and 3) field-based experiences that provide teacher candidates opportunity to practice what they are learning in their coursework as viewed as essential (Brownell, 2005). Fitchburg State College Special Education program exemplifies these research-based components viewed as essential and meets the standard for NCATE accreditation as well as the

licensure requirements issued by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Provides effective services to children with disabilities through integrated training and practice

Unlicensed teachers and paraprofessionals with degrees in other fields, who are working as special educators in the identified school districts are the targeted group for whom the graduate program is designed. Before entering the program, scholars must successfully pass the Communication and Literacy component of the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL). They must receive a positive recommendation from at least three individuals who have observed them teaching and are qualified to judge their academic competence. They must also successfully complete the Graduate Record exam or the Miller's Analogy Test with a score at the 50th percentile or higher.

Under the supervision of Project Director Dr. Denise O'Connell, the Graduate Program Chair for Special Education, the Project Coordinator will oversee the recruitment process that will be carried out in collaboration with the various school systems and the assistance of the Advisory Board. Advising sessions and informational workshops will be directed at those currently teaching special education on waivers and paraprofessional working in the schools systems that have bachelor's degrees and are interested in becoming certified special educators. We have found this method of recruitment and information dissemination highly successful.

Once identified as an appropriate candidate for acceptance, scholars complete the application process which includes: 1) Submission of application with application payment fee; 2) Passing scores on the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) Communication and Literacy subtests; 3) Official undergraduate transcripts; 4) Three letters of recommendation; 4) Miller Analogy Test results – graduate program; and 5) Approval of the Graduate Committee – graduate program. Scholars will sign a statement of commitment and agreement to the terms of the contract in accepting the financial aid package.

Special Education Department INITIAL Licensure Plan of Study

Terms	Credits	Description
Spring 2006	3	<p>SPED 7004 Working with Individuals with Disabilities</p> <p>An introductory course to laws and litigation regarding education of students with disabilities. Various disability areas are addressed with implications for teaching.</p>
Spring 2006	3	<p>SPED 8180 Positive Behavioral Supports for Students with Disabilities</p> <p>Various theories and approaches to addressing behavioral issues in the classroom are addressed. Students conduct a functional behavioral assessment for an identified student, as well as an ecological assessment of a classroom environment.</p>
Summer 2006	3	<p>SPED 8300 Language Development, Differences and Disorders</p> <p>Typical and atypical language development is addressed. Various speech and language problems that students with disabilities demonstrate are covered. Assessment of speech and language problems reviewed.</p>
Fall 1 2006	6	<p>SPED 8914 Assessment, Curriculum, Strategies in Language Arts</p> <p>This class builds upon previous coursework in the instruction of reading. Assessment, curriculum and strategies in the teaching of reading/language arts are integrated in this team-taught course. The teaching of reading and writing to English Language learners is also addressed.</p>

Spring 2 2007	6	SPED 8924 Assessment, Curriculum and Strategies for Math, Science Assessment, curriculum and strategies in the teaching of reading/language arts are integrated in this team-taught course. The assessment of cognitive abilities is also addressed.
Summer 2007	3	SPED 9130 Reading/Language Problems: Advanced This course focuses on reading disabilities and effective assessment and intervention strategies for working with students who have significant reading disabilities. It also addresses curriculum, lesson panning & instructional strategies for students who are second language learners.
Fall 2 – Spring 2(2007- 2008)	3	EDUC 7000 Second Language Learning Instruction and Assessment of Speaking and Listening in English This course focuses on key factors affecting second language learning, implications of cultural difference for classroom organization, and content of the Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes. The assessment of reading, speaking, and communicative competence in English is addressed.
Fall 2 – Spring 2	6	SPED 8962 Clinical Experience

This model reflects the inclusive philosophy of the FSC Education Department that children are more similar than different, that effective teaching strategies benefit all students, and that some students may need different approaches to be successful in school. The effective special educator must be able to understand students’ disabilities and their impact

on learning, assess and develop effective instructional strategies to meet individual needs in all curriculum areas and work effectively with parents and colleagues in meeting students’ goals. (Brownell, 1993, Lindsey, 1995, McLaughlin, 1988, Peterson, 1998, & Sapon-Shevin, 1988).

The program prepares personnel to address the specialized needs of children with disabilities from diverse cultural and language backgrounds; In the City of Lowell, 57% of the student population represents ethnic minorities. For Worcester and Fitchburg, the percentages are not far below at 53.5% and 50.3% respectively. **These districts have a disproportionately high percentage of students whose first language is not English or have limited English Proficiency as indicated by the table on page 27.** The FSC Education Department has collaborated with Director of Language Acquisition of Leominster Public Schools, Sergio Paez, to develop courses to address four categories of skills and knowledge stipulated by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education: second language learning and teaching, sheltering content instruction, assessing speaking and listening, and teaching reading and writing to English language learners. These competencies have been infused into the courses required by the FSC Education Department and incorporated into the plan of study above.

The program, through beneficial partnership, promotes continuous improvement in preparation programs...and...includes field-based training...in high-poverty communities or urban areas.

Scholars in this program are teachers and paraprofessionals who are working in the partner schools. For their field-based practicum, they will be working in their current classroom setting. The largest number of scholars will come from the Lowell and Worcester districts where over 20% of the children in the school population are living in poverty. **All four districts have large number of students who are classified as low-income as noted in the table below.**

District Population	Fitchburg	Leominster	Lowell	Worcester	State
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Number of pupils	5,600	6,189	14,603	24,538	975,911
Selected Populations	Fitchburg	Leominster	Lowell	Worcester	State
Low-Income	54.3%	31.1%	65.1%	61.1%	27.7%
First Language not English	33.8 %	17%	41.2%	36%	14%
Limited English Proficiency	22.2%	9%	23.1%	13.9%	5.1%
Special Education	18.3%	15.6%	13.2%	18.7%	16.1%
Race/Ethnicity	Fitchburg	Leominster	Lowell	Worcester	State
African American	6.6%	5.2%	6%	12.6%	8.9%
Asian	8.7%	4%	29.3%	8.4%	4.8%
Hispanic	34.6%	19.7%	21.5%	31.8%	11.8%
Native American	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.7%	0.3%
White	49.7%	70.8%	43%	46.5%	74.2%

(Massachusetts Department of Education 2004-2005)

The success of the programs that serve as models for this project has been the strength of advising; academic success services; disabilities support services; and financial aid incentives. The Graduate Program Chair and Project Coordinator will be able to effectively advise these non-traditional learners, thus increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the course work. All of this allows scholars to gain the knowledge and skills to better assist their students and to advance in their careers as licensed teachers. This group of scholars' academic and financial advising needs will be supported by Fitchburg State College. The cohort model provides the opportunity for the scholars to establish a learning community and receive the necessary peer support required to complete the rigors of a graduate degree program.

The Academic Success Centers are a group of programs and services that work collaboratively to support and assist students in achieving academic success at Fitchburg State College. The Tutor Center provides peer and professional tutoring. The FSC Writing Center is open Sunday-Friday with day and evening hours for additional assistance as needed and **is available on-line to students.** Disability Services provides individually tailored support

services, programs, and academic accommodations for students with disabilities. A number of services are available, including an assertive technology lab, tutors, peer mentors, tape recorders, testing accommodations, note takers, readers, interpreters, support groups, coaching, and consultation with the faculty. The adaptive computer lab houses a voice activated computer system, Braille printer, scanner with print recognition, screen enlargement programs, a closed circuit television, speech synthesizers, and screen reading programs.

Program provides knowledge to effectively assist children in achieving State learning standards:

The Plan of Study is comprised of key courses addressing the curricula of the Massachusetts Frameworks including English /Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies that will have an impact on student learning and potential improvement of Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores by providing scholars with the conceptual framework, application skills, and strategies for delivering content.

The training or professional development will alleviate the personnel shortages:

This project will increase the total number of teacher candidates graduating from the Master of Education degree and licensure program over the next four years by 34%, dramatically increasing the number of highly qualified teachers for the targeted school districts. This project will provide the necessary support to retain beginning special education teachers in the four districts by providing mentoring and additional on going support through the *Critical Friends Group (CFG)* for all 50 program scholars. In addition to serving the scholars involved in this program, an additional 50 newly licensed teachers of children with high-incidence disabilities will participate. This model will provide a **sustainable program** that will continue in the districts after the completion of this grant funded program.

Program Completion by Year	1	2	3	4	Total
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Paraprofessionals - Spec. Ed. & Initial Licensure		10		10	20
Post-Baccalaureate - Spec. Ed. & Initial Licensure		15		15	30
Total Completion rates per year		25		25	50
Program Participation by Year		1 & 2	3 & 4	Total	
<i>Critical Friends</i> - Trained mentors		10	10	20	
<i>Critical Friends</i> - Program scholars		25	25	50	
<i>Critical Friends</i> - Beginning teachers		25	25	50	

The program involves the collaboration of... partners for maximizing effectiveness of ...services.

Recognizing the great need for this project in their districts, members of the planning committee are stakeholders in this project and will continue their involvement as members of the Advisory Board (See Appendix C). To ensure ongoing effective collaboration, communication and program enhancement this Board will meet a minimum of once a semester with the members of the project management team. Meetings will focus on reviewing project activities and assessments and providing suggestions for enhancing program components. Board members will receive monthly update reports. In addition, schools will support this project by assisting with recruiting, identifying and encouraging special education staff to be mentors, and providing incentives for completion of programs based on number of credits or completion of specific programs. The letters of commitment reflect the districts' need, willingness to support their teachers' participation, and commitment to serve on the Advisory Board.

In summary, this program design offers the following highlights:

- A regional effort to address special education staffing needs in large urban districts that is timely and responsive
- Financial and academic support services to matriculated scholars seeking licensure
- Advancement of “highly qualified” scholars to positively impact student achievement

- A successful record of preparing teachers for careers in special education which spans a 55 year period
- Support for beginning teachers to increase the likelihood of retaining them in the profession
- Graduate placement rates for employment is 100%

(c) Quality of project personnel

(i) The extent to which college encourages applications from underrepresented groups...

The Project Coordinator is the parent of a child with a disability and the project Advisory Board includes five individuals with disabilities and one parent of a child with a disability. The Advisory Board will assist in the development of additional strategies to ensure that the program successfully recruits scholars, mentors, and staff from underrepresented populations. Every effort is always made to ensure that participants from underrepresented groups are afforded equal access and treatment throughout the project, with significant outreach efforts aimed at those from underrepresented groups. We will recruit directly through the FSC office of Disabilities Services for alumni to fill the position of administrative assistant.

All partners are committed to developing a teaching staff that is reflective of the demographics of the students that they teach. This project is committed to serving students in our schools by continuing a demonstrated effort to recruit future teachers from underrepresented populations. **To support this commitment to increase the number of teachers from ethnic and racial minorities and people with disabilities in the classroom, 20% of the scholars in this program will be recruited from underrepresented population. The project staff and Advisory Board will employ the following strategies:** 1) Notifications of program and scholarships will be distributed to organizations supporting individuals with disabilities, such as the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and AHEAD (Association on Higher Education and Disability); 2) Advisory Board members will actively provide recruitment outreach through their networks by utilizing meetings, information sessions, web-sites, and newsletters; 3) Information sessions will be conducted for participants in the current career ladder programs,

from which qualified and motivated individuals can be identified; 4) With the assistance of Fitchburg State College's Disabilities Services Office and the Office of Minority Affairs, as well as Expanding Horizons, Upward Bound and other TRIO programs information will be distributed to their student and alumni networks to encourage applications from individuals with disabilities for any open project positions.

Both the CO-STEP Project in Lowell and the Worcester Public Schools (WPS) have extensive experience in recruiting underrepresented populations. Additionally, FSC has programs that recruit and assist traditionally underrepresented and disadvantaged populations. These programs include the state funded ACCESS program, and The U.S. Department of Education's TRIO Student Support Services, and Upward Bound. Worcester Public Schools will utilize its diversity recruitment plan, successful in increasing employment of underrepresented population by 22% over the past three years.

Each of the partners districts are committed to equal opportunity for all employees. All college projects and programs fully adhere to Fitchburg State College's Affirmative Action Policy: *"Fitchburg State College is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and encourages applications from women, minorities, and persons with disabilities to apply."* Recruitment for students, faculty and staff includes accessing the network of disability and career centers at colleges throughout the state. Whenever possible, qualified staff and administrators are selected because they share personal experiences similar to the students they serve, whether they are individuals with disabilities, people of color, first generation or non-traditional college students. All grant projects at Fitchburg State College have been affirmative in their hiring of individuals with disabilities and from underrepresented population and current staffing reflects this. For example, past OSERS funded projects such as the Leadership Center have been leaders in enhancing career opportunities for students with disabilities.

(ii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel.

Fitchburg State College Special Education Graduate Program Chair Dr. Denise O'Connell will serve as Project Director and be responsible for overall project oversight. Dr. O'Connell holds bachelors and master's degrees in special education and a doctoral degree in special education administration. She has also completed additional studies on diversity and advanced assessment issues. Her doctoral work focused on training parents in the evaluation of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. She has 25 years of experience that span the PK-12 spectrum in a large urban school district (Worcester Public Schools—a project partner district) as well as experiences as a school psychologist and as Assistant to the Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services. The focus of her 18 years of direct teaching in the urban district centered around providing services to students evidencing high-incidence disabilities specifically in the area of learning disabilities. In addition, she is a professor in the graduate program at Fitchburg State where she supervises graduate candidates completing special education practica and internships and teaches a variety of courses in the Clinical Master's program. She brings a wide range of diverse expertise to the project and will provide effective programmatic and management oversight for the project. Dr. O'Connell currently oversees the FSC Career Ladder Program with Worcester Public Schools.

The Project Coordinator, Ms. Ann Hogan, who is the parent of a child with a disability and who currently serves as a 50% coordinator of the CO-STEP program, will report directly to Dr. O'Connell on all programmatic issues. Ms. Hogan has a master's degree in Special Education and has been the program coordinator with the highly successful CO-STEP career ladder program between Lowell Public Schools and FSC for the past five years. Ms. Hogan's work on the CO-STEP grant will be reduced in 2006 (its final year) to .40 FTE so that she will be able to work on this project .60 FTE. As Project Coordinator Ms. Hogan will: meet with faculty

and administration of FSC, and partners to develop an action plan that aligns with the management plan to ensure project goals and objectives will be met; recruit qualified graduate faculty to teach in the program; recruit scholars for the *Meeting the Challenge* program; provide regularly scheduled office hours to provide academic support and counseling for scholars; schedule courses, arrange for class location; monitor implementation of courses to ensure curriculum is delivered in accordance with departmental guidelines and requirements; and arrange for the delivery of workshops to assist scholars in preparing for MTEL.

The Project Coordinator will make bi-monthly reports to the project management team. These reports will document specific progress being made towards the actualization of delineated goals and objectives. The management team is comprised of Dr. O'Connell, Dr. Shirley Wagner (Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs), Dr. Elaine Francis (Dean of Education) and Dr. Laurie DeRosa (Education Department Chair) and will meet twice a semester for program review and to respond to reports and evaluation information. All project budget and financial matters will be managed by the Program Coordinator through the FSC Grant Center. The Program Coordinator will meet directly with Dr. Wagner, who supervises all grants, on budget and financial issues. She will work under the supervision and in close collaboration with the Project Director (Dr. O'Connell), who will oversee the graduate programs.

All course and professional activities will be taught by combined faculty of Fitchburg State College and participating districts. The utilization of instructors from participating districts will assist FSC to **institutionalize these efforts as well as providing on site support to the scholars**. Most of the college's faculty members reside near or in the three urban areas participating in this project. (Appendix J for Organizational Chart)

(d) Quality of the management plan

(i) The management plan will achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, with clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing tasks;

MANAGEMENT PLAN

OVERALL PROJECT GOAL:

TO IMPROVE THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH HIGH- INCIDENCE DISABILITIES THROUGH THE TRAINING, PREPARATION, AND RETENTION OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED PERSONNEL.

Strategy – Respond to the current and impending critical shortages in urban settings of highly qualified teachers in special education by providing teacher training, support services, financial aid, and retention services for unlicensed teachers in Fitchburg, Leominster, Lowell and Worcester School Districts.

Goal 1. Provide a research-based, clinical experience graduate program that will lead to initial licensure for teachers with emergency licensure (Massachusetts Department of Education waiver)

Goal 2. Provide teacher licensure preparation for paraprofessionals currently in special education classrooms who have degrees in other fields

Goal 1 & 2: Objective 1. Recruit and prepare first cohort of scholars eligible for participation in graduate special education program leading to licensure as special education teachers.

Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. Prepare first cohort of 25 scholars	January 2006	Project Coordinator	30 applicants	Log of advising meetings
2. Schedule potential scholar transcript review and academic counseling		Project Director		

and application sessions.				
2. Evaluate pool (admissions committee); notify scholars of their acceptance.	Fall, 2006	Grad. Program Chair FSC Admissions Offices	25 scholars accepted into program	Enter accepted scholars into data base; compile a scholar record
Goal 1 & 2: Objective 2. Prepare scholars to meet Initial licensure requirements of the state of Massachusetts and related Elementary and Secondary Act (No Child Left Behind) mandates.				
Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. Implement teacher preparation plan of study for Cohorts	1. January 2006 Cohort 1 January 2008	Project Coordinator, Special Education Department Chair and	Schedule of courses and faculty teaching assignments developed	Meeting minutes and informal program monitoring
2. Offer MTEL test preparation workshops	Cohort 2 2. 2007 & 2009	Graduate Program Chair	4 Curriculum meetings per year scheduled	
Goal 1 & 2: Objective 3. Monitor and evaluate scholars' progress in their achievement of standards required by NCATE, the Massachusetts Department of Education and Fitchburg State College.				
Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. Monitor scholar academic progress	On a semester	FSC Teacher Licensure	25 scholars accepted	Biannual review of

and Grade Point Average (GPA) to ensure that the scholars maintain required GPA for continued participation in the program	basis	Office and Project Coordinator	and enrolled in program and progressing successfully	scholars records in accordance with FERPA requirements
2. Review teacher test scores to ascertain that the requirements of a passing score (100% on MTEL Content component) are achieved for all scholars.	Prior to application for initial licensure	FSC Teacher Licensure Office and Project Coordinator	100% pass rate for all scholars enrolled in the program	Review test data released by the MA DOE
3. Evaluate scholar progress in practica settings utilizing the forms and standards approved by NCATE and the Mass. D.O.E. 4 times per year	Years 2 & 4	FSC Teacher licensure Office and Project Coordinator FSC Special Education department faculty	25 scholars per two year cycle accepted, enrolled in program, and progressing successfully	Summary of scores related to NCATE and MA DOE standards on Practica Rubrics
Goal 3. Provide Licensure endorsement for English Language learning to meet Massachusetts Department of Education standard for Highly Qualified status of initial licensure and professional development for special education teachers who serve sheltered English immersion students in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and Listening				

Goal 1, 2 & 3: Objective 4. Prepare scholars in the <i>Meeting the Challenge</i> program through the implementation of the following activities by providing advising, mentoring and support to scholars in urban settings who are preparing to be teachers.				
Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. Provide advising, mentoring and support to scholars in urban settings who are preparing to be teachers.	On going and on an as needed basis	Project Coordinator, Education Dept. & Project Director	25 scholars per two year cycle	Consumer satisfaction surveys
2. Review scholar transcripts and provide academic course advising for scholars enrolled in teacher prep. program leading to Massachusetts's licensure in Special Education.	Spring semesters	Project Coordinator Education Department Chair and Project Director	Each scholar attends two advising sessions per year (one individual and one small group) 30 sessions per site per year	Case management documentation and consumer satisfaction surveys
3. Provide academic counseling and support for scholars enrolled in a teacher preparation program leading to Massachusetts's licensure in Special Education.	On going and as needed	Project Coordinator Education Department Chair and Project Director	Same as above	Scholar focus group feedback

<p>4. Provide instruction to scholars for credit or professional development points in licensure endorsement requirements for sheltered English Immersion students.</p>	<p>On going</p>	<p>(FSC) Professional Development Center and Graduate Department</p>	<p>Each scholars completes course work required for English language endorsement</p>	<p>Consumer satisfaction surveys</p>
<p>5. Maintain regular office hours to provide information on workshops to prepare scholars for the Massachusetts Educators Test for Licensure (MTEL), financial aid, and academic support services (reading, writing and math) in each setting.</p>	<p>Two hours (4-6pm) two days a week and as needed</p>	<p>Project Coordinator FSC Teacher Licensure Office</p>	<p>Same as above</p>	<p>Maintenance of log of office hours</p>
<p>6. Meet regularly with scholars to discuss progress in the program and identify any academic needs.</p>	<p>Two hours (4-6pm) two days a week & by apt.</p>	<p>Project Coordinator Education Dept. Chair Project Director</p>	<p>Same as above</p>	<p>Log of scholar contacts</p>
<p>Goals 1, 2 & 3: Objective 5: Scholars complete requirements necessary for initial licensure and ELL endorsement</p>				

Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. Work in concert with Education Licensure Office to determine that each of the scholars has met the requirements for licensure.	On going	FSC Teacher Licensure Office and Project Coordinator FSC Special Education department faculty	25 scholars per 2 year cycle	Maintenance of data base Biannual review of scholars' records and plan of study
2. Scholars submit necessary documents for licensure to the MA DOE	Spring, 2008 Spring, 2009	Project Coordinator	100% of applications submitted are processed and scholars are licensed	Survey scholars to ensure licenses have been received
Goal 4. Implement training for mentors to ensure they have the skills necessary to meet the unique needs of special educators.				
Goal 5. Offer intensive mentoring and professional development programs for special education teachers who are in their first three years of teaching to address and alleviate high incidence of retention.				
Goal 4& 5: Objective 1. Increase the retention rate by 80% of special educators who are in their first three years of teaching by providing ongoing support to meet their identified needs through the institution of (<i>Critical Friends</i>) program.				

Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. FSC in collaboration with partner districts identify highly qualified teachers who are committed to the mentoring process Districts identify 25 novice teachers	Spring 2006 through 2008	Mentor teachers with Special Education licensure and professional status in their district	Mentors are partnered with novice teachers and participating scholars to form <i>Critical Friends Group</i>	Mentor contract
2. Begin monthly <i>Critical Friends</i> Group meetings with focus on special education and sheltered English immersion for new teachers	Years 2006 through 2010	(FSC) Education Department	Conduct 12 meetings per year	New teacher needs assessment Program scholar needs assessment
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the <i>Critical Friends</i> program	Ongoing	Grant evaluation team Management team	Data that will inform future program modifications & revisions	Consumer satisfaction surveys, Session evaluation forms & focus groups

Goals 1, 2, 3 & 4: Objective 1. Evaluate the academic progress of k-12 students enrolled in scholars' classrooms.				
Activities	Timeline	Personnel	Milestones/Outcomes	Evaluation Method
1. Evaluate the academic progress of targeted PK - 12 students through an examination of student records consistent with FERPA requirements. (see evaluation methods of this section to the right)	Biannually	Evaluator and Project Coordinator	Evaluate the effectiveness of scholar's instruction. Utilize information to inform instructional and advisor practice	1. Criterion referenced assessment of students utilized in a pre/post test manner 2.MCAS student data reviewing district trends 3.Student progress reports (consistent with IEP requirements) 4. Student "annual review documents" 5. Student attendance data 6. Student Discipline reports

(ii) Procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation are adequate

The Education Department regularly distributes surveys to its graduates and employers assess satisfaction with the program. Participant feedback garnered through consumer satisfaction surveys is central to the concept of improved student learning. Scholars' feedback will inform practice for teacher educators and serve to improve the teaching/learning process. These forms indicate the level of confidence that the scholar has in their ability and their progress, allowing for intervention and additional support as needed. The college has partnered in these school districts multiple times and will capitalize on these collaborative efforts to make adjustments in the program as indicated. The models for past partnerships will be utilized in student teacher placement, assessing and meeting professional development needs.

Faculty and staff satisfaction surveys and interviews with public school mentors and administrative staff will capture recommendations for improvement as well as examples of changes that have been implemented as a result of the program. The Project Director, Project Coordinator, and the management team will review program documents such as; lists of enrollments, training presentations, hours of operation, grades of the scholars, and requests for assistance. These data will be used to assess program fidelity to the management plan and to make modifications as needed. The management team and the Advisory Board will review Project Coordinator reports and utilize this information to make any recommendation for corrective action.

To increase parental involvement and feedback opportunities the advisory board will, in collaboration with the schools districts, develop a systematic approach to increasing the number of parents of children with disabilities on the Principal's Advisory Council and creating a feedback loop that will inform this program and will be sustained after the project ends.

(iii) The time commitments of key project personnel are appropriate and adequate ...

Personnel Loading Chart – Time in Days per Year by Personnel

Activity	Director	Coordinator	Faculty
Project Management	30	80	0
Scholar Recruitment/Interviews	15	20	5
Scholar Advisement, Support Services	15	25	10
Field-based experiences	10		40
Evaluation	15	10	5
Advisory/Scholar Meetings	10	10	5
TOTAL	95	150	100

(i) Support, including facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources are adequate...

Classes in Worcester will be held at the Elm Park Community School that is accessible by public transportation and central to the district's schools. The Project Coordinator will serve as liaison, advisor, and case manager for all Worcester site activities and will have office space provided in the Education Association of Worcester to ensure easy access by scholars and provide confidential access to scholar records to facilitate easy communication among staff, faculty, and scholars. This site has served as an FSC extended campus for over three years.

Classes for Lowell Public Schools will take place at Merrimack Education Center located just ten minutes from downtown Lowell in Chelmsford where the extended campus site has been in place for years, and classrooms are equipped for adult learning. All institutions are committed to universal accessibility and meet all ADA requirements.

The Fitchburg State College classes will be held in the teacher preparation center with access to computer labs, library facilities, and special office hours for staff testing and curricula

materials. **All scholars (including those at remote locations)** have access to Fitchburg State library services that include instruction classes, interlibrary loans, CD-ROM computer-based literature searching, online service, 97 hours of operation, and an automated circulation system. The library contains 223,500 volumes, including a children's literature collection, a reference collection, and the McKay Campus School Library. There are 469,000 microfilms, 1,400 print periodical subscriptions, and access to 6,387 full text online periodicals. The college provides a "virtual" student center on its website with links to a variety of online student services.

(ii) The extent to which the budget is adequate to support the proposed project:

The project budget has been carefully constructed to ensure that resources are adequate to successfully support the goals and objectives of this project. A review of the narrative budget justification for each of the four years of funding, **which is located in the forms section of this proposal**, will reveal that the budget includes appropriate and necessary funding to implement the objectives of the project. This includes \$27,000 for the first year with a 3% increase (per bargaining union contract) annually for the salary of a Program Coordinator to work on the project three days a week. This is a twelve-month part-time benefited position. Grant funds are requested to provide salary for three days a week for the first three years. Fitchburg State College will begin the process of making this a permanent position by assuming one day per week of salary and fringe costs for the last year of the grant period. After the final year of grant funding this position will be a part-time college funded position. A program assistant is included in the budget at \$16,200 for the first year for two days per week with 3% increase (per bargaining unit contract) annually. The program assistant will provide project support to the Program Coordinator by: maintaining/monitoring budgets, preparation of requisitions, budget adjustments, contracts, and budget reports; maintaining database of project participants, faculty

and staff; assist with communications; maintain web-site; and assist with post award compliance, reporting and evaluation. **All partner organizations are contributing significantly to the project by providing personnel and facilities to ensure project success.** Experience with the model projects (CO-STEP and The WPS/FSC Licensure Project) have enabled us to effectively anticipate real project costs and allocate resources accordingly. The required 60% funding for tuition and fees documented in the budget will serve to support the proposed activities. Professional development activities for new teachers have been specifically designed to increase the retention rates and success of newly licensed special education teachers and will serve the teachers currently in the four districts as well as those that will be trained in this project. The organizational structure, plan of operation, and timeline will ensure sustained success of this project. The case management and advising process has been developed to ensure that scholars will complete their program of study and be highly qualified and skilled to provide services that will increase the achievement and learning of children with disabilities.

(iii)(iv)... the costs are reasonable for the anticipated results and benefits;

This program is designed to accelerate the process of licensure and will concentrate on summer courses as well as those offered during the school year. Scholars are expected to participate in the full program outlined in the plan of study for the two year period. The grant will provide the full tuition and fees (\$705 per 3 credit course) for each scholar for 33 credits. Tuition costs at FSC are the lowest in the state. **The total program cost for 50 preliminarily licensed special education teachers, mentoring and professional development activities for an additional 50 beginning teachers is \$7,973 per each of the 100 participants.**

The professional development and mentoring activities for 50 novice teachers will increase their success in their teaching careers and improve the retention rate of the four school districts.

Given the number of students with high-incidence disabilities that will benefit from this project in each of the school districts and the number of families impacted, the costs associated with this program are reasonable. Building on the success of the program's models, the anticipated results will have a strong impact on shrinking the shortage of special education teachers in high-need urban schools.

(v) The potential for continued support of the project after Federal funding ends...

This project will provide districts with 50 additional teachers licensed work with children with high-incidence disabilities, but need for personnel in this field is projected to remain high. By creating this regionalized teacher preparation and professional development program within the context of the strong partnerships with the public school districts involved, planning for sustainability will begin immediately upon first formal meeting of the advisory board. By year four of this project, the efforts of the project's coordinator will have resulted in the establishment of a program with systems in place, faculty committed, and partnerships galvanized. During the project, Dr. O'Connell, Ms. Hogan, and the management team will oversee the process of institutionalizing the program into FSC's Special Education Program in the Education Department. This process will commence during the course of this project as FSC begins covering the cost of the project coordinator for one day for year four of the grant, as reflected in the grant budget. The part-time program coordinator will oversee the program's continuation. In addition, the financial aid office will work with project staff to insure that future scholars not covered by this grant program obtain any financial aid for which they are eligible.

(f) Quality of project evaluation

(i)... the methods of evaluation are thorough, feasible, and appropriate ...

Evaluation strategies outlined in the management plan (page 32-39) utilize a variety of

methods. They include use of record logs for session attendance, advising meetings, office hours, scholar contacts and mentor contacts to measure the activity outcomes that support the accomplishment of Goal 1& 2 Objectives 1, 2, 3, & 4 Goal 4 & 5 Objective 1. Office hour logs and scholar contact logs are maintained on standard forms developed by the college.

Review of database records measure scholar's academic progress through transcripts, GPA, practica scores, MTEL scores as well as results of advising sessions. The database is maintained by the administrative assistant. Record reviews are conducted by the Department Chair and Project Coordinator. All reviews and scholar evaluative materials are reviewed in a manner that is consistent with the educational rights and privacy requirements set forth in the FERPA regulations.

Criterion referenced and curriculum based measures for objectives 8 are developed under the direction of the evaluation consultant. Data is reviewed noting specific trends. All student data is reviewed in a manner consistent with FERPA regulations.

Additionally, the intermediate outcome of Goal 4 & 5 Objective 1 will also include data gathered on the five critical levels of information identified by T. R. Gus key in Evaluating Professional Development: participants' reactions, participants' learning, organizational support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes. Information will be gathered in order to gain scholars' reactions through direct feedback such as satisfaction surveys, questionnaires, and personal interviews. Data to evaluate scholar's learning will be obtained from Massachusetts Tests of Educator Licensure (MTEL) content tests, pre- and -post tests on content of courses, portfolios linked to NCATE standards, direct classroom observation, and analysis of videotapes of classroom practice. Data to evaluate student learning will be gathered through classroom observation (See Appendix H for sample rubric), student

interviews and assessment of student work, and teacher-made tests. Fitchburg State College utilizes the Teacher Work Sample approach to determine teacher licensure candidates' impact on student learning and their ability to respond to student performance data (McKinney, 1998).

Additionally, measuring the long-term impact of this program as well as the interventions of objective 6 will help determine the level of success of this program as it relates to teacher success, career satisfaction and retention. The Education Department regularly assesses graduates' satisfaction with the program and the degree to which it has helped them to be prepared for their work.

(ii)...the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures...

This proposed program is consistent with the requirements outlined in the definition of the highly qualified teacher defined in the recent *No Child Left Behind* legislation. The plan of study is designed in accordance with the requirements of NCATE and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Massachusetts State teacher licensure standards. The Special Education Department at Fitchburg State College has the knowledge, skill, expertise and experience to prepare teachers to provide students with disabilities a high-quality education. The accountability measures outlined in the management plan endeavor to guarantee student success.

Evaluation Overview

The effectiveness of this program will be evaluated through assessment of the program goals and objectives. The program will employ a rigorous evaluation facilitated by an external evaluation team guided by Dr. Thomas Kochanek who is experienced in the evaluation of similar projects. The program evaluation will provide both bi-annual summative reports on program accomplishments as well as on-going data on the project's progress. Formative data will be reported monthly to the management team. Evaluation data will consist of a wide variety of

process and outcomes information gathered from participating teachers, their students, participating schools, program staff, and faculty. The degree to which we are *measurably* successful in meeting intermediate goals will serve as an indicator of the success in achieving the ultimate goal.

The program's intermediate goals relate to *teachers* and teacher preparation while the ultimate goal is one expressed in terms of student outcomes. The program activities – professional development, mentor training and teacher preparation – relate directly to teachers. Therefore, that which can be directly attributed to program work will relate to measuring impact on teacher/scholars. If we successfully conduct our planned teacher preparation and professional development activities, *then* we will achieve our overarching goal of improving student learning.

Individual academic performance of scholars will be biannually reviewed through the process of transcript evaluation utilizing the grade point average (GPA) as an indicator of academic success and the requirements of the graduate program. Scholars' performance will be assessed on a course-by-course basis. Scholar's performance will be evaluated during the practicum experience utilizing the form attached (Appendix G). Practicum related rubrics are linked to the state and national standards including those established by the Council for Exceptional Children. For example, lesson plan rubrics are broken down to reflect the language of the national teaching standards and scholars are scored on each component as exemplary, acceptable, or unacceptable. Scholars are able to determine patterns on their areas of strength and areas needed to improve, and they focus their efforts, with supervisors help, in these areas. The department aggregates data from all scholars in the final lesson plan completed in their practicum semester. These data indicate how scholars as a whole performed on each aspect of the standards. Thus, both the scholar and the program receive feedback on the degree to which they

have met their goals. These data are used for scholar and program improvement. Data from the cohort groups in this project will be compared to other traditional groups at Fitchburg State, specifically the on campus program not supported through this project and the undergraduate program in Special Education. Data will be reviewed to determine if the hallmarks of this project—enhanced mentoring, and support, and scholars who are already employed in the field— increase satisfaction, preparedness and retention in the field. This outcomes assessment model developed by FSC has been so successful that the college has provided technical assistance for developing outcomes based models to colleges in Mississippi, New Jersey, Maryland, and Nevada.

Qualitative data will include faculty assessment of scholars' learning as represented in each scholar's work samples. In addition, we will hold a minimum of two focus group meetings a year with the program participants to obtain their feedback regarding the courses and support services. We will seek job performance indicators from teachers' principals on the impact of sponsored course work and scholars' teaching skills in accordance with the contractual requirements set forth by the local education associations. Progress toward individual professional development plans will be gathered through a self-assessment of progress toward goals. Since our project occurs in Massachusetts MCAS data will be used to document "improved student achievement." Student performance data will be incorporated and analyzed objectively by our external evaluator.

Project evaluation will utilize both the services and advice of Dr. Thomas Kochanek who was consulted during the planning process. He will work with the project personnel throughout the entire project. Although assessment devices have been developed and are currently utilized on an annual basis to evaluate program effectiveness and consumer satisfaction, Dr. Kochanek

will bring expertise in the design, implementation and interpretation of data derived from curriculum based and criterion referenced measures and surveys to the project. His expertise will assist the project team in the design of a comparative evaluation design that will measure the effectiveness of this model as it differs from traditional licensure programs at Fitchburg State College. Short term outcomes as stated will look at grades (GPA), competency inventories, classroom observation comparisons as well as survey of scholar satisfaction (perception of quality and recommended changes if any) and how many years it takes to pass the two components of MTEL. Long term outcomes would look to see if the impact of this program results in lasting change and will measure—job satisfaction, perceptions of job preparation, stability of employment, and job performance. In addition, Dr. Kochanek will assist in the analysis of district trends with respect to state mandated testing (MCAS) and coordinate evaluative responses with respect to this initiative.

As noted above, the external evaluator will be included in program management meetings and will report current data, preliminary findings, and other observations during such meetings. At the mid-point of each project year, the evaluator will issue a brief formal report that outlines the work, progress, and any emerging issues that could impact program success. Performance feedback from all sources will be made available to the project management team, as well as those involved with carrying out specific activities and courses. Scholars will receive continuous feedback from faculty, the Project Coordinator and case managers or advisors who will meet with each scholar individually a minimum of twice a semester.

At the end of each project year the evaluator and Project Coordinator will produce a formal evaluation report designed to fulfill U.S. Department of Education reporting requirements. This report will be submitted to Dr. O'Connell, the management team, the U.S. Department of

Education, the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Dean of Graduate and Continuing Education, the Public School Professional Development Services, and Directors of Special Education, the local school committees (if requested) and the Advisory Board. Measures are in place to insure input from all constituencies.

The partner schools' student progress will be evaluated by the Fitchburg State College faculty and the school districts utilizing standardized test data as well as student progress and report cards noting trends for student achievement in targeted classrooms. Mentors will meet regularly in evaluation. Please refer to the management plan for specifics relative to the timelines. The partnership will be evaluated with feedback, meetings and adjustments to ensure sustainability. We will consistently work together to pursue additional funding sources, incorporate promising practices as they appear in the literature and utilize evaluative feedback in a constructive manner and institutionalize this project.

Work or repay requirement for participants:

Provisions to ensure that individuals who receive financial assistance under the proposed project will meet the service obligation requirements, or repay all or part of that assistance, in accordance with section 673 (h)(1) of IDEA and the regulation in 34 CFR part 304 are as follows. Scholars will be informed of the requirement at the beginning of the recruitment process. The work/payback requirements will appear in all the literature relating to the program. They will, once enrolled in the program, receive written explanation detailing requirement that for every year that they receive assistance they must remain employed the equivalent of fulltime in a special education setting for two years or repay all or part of the cost of assistance. This document of agreement, signed in front of witnesses, will indicate their understanding of and agreement with the compliance requirements.