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# central jersey

## New Jersey teachers collaborate creatively

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This past school year, teachers from the Plainfield Public School District and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District teamed up with Kean University to promote in-the-classroom leadership.

Tenured teachers from these districts participated in the inaugural year of the three-year program "Building Teacher Leadership Capacity to Support Beginning Teachers." The cross-district collaboration with Kean University was funded by a \$200,000 grant from the N.J. Department of Education. The grant was also divided between other partnerships across New Jersey, also pairing universities and neighboring public schools.

Kean University's School of Education described the collaboration as natural.

"Inasmuch as Kean University is the largest producer of teachers in the state of New Jersey, it made sense that we would take advantage of the State's NGO (Notice of Grant Opportunity) related to teacher leadership," explained Dr. Anthony Pittman, the acting dean of the School of Education at Kean University. "The College of Education's mission is to provide high quality professional development to districts. We view this as a way of giving back to our communities, especially since our graduates are likely to be employed in many of the school districts across the great state of New Jersey."

Chosen teachers from Plainfield and Scotch Plains-Fanwood spent Wednesdays in the classroom, but this time they did so while sitting at a desk. They participated in a 10-week, three-credit graduate course at Kean University that detailed the implementation of Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs. These communities are where grade level and specialized teachers worked on different methods to address academic needs and boost student performance. Co-teaching and inclusion, cognitive behavioral strategies, and phonemic awareness were among the discussion workshops featured.

"I imagine it to be similar to a Think Tank where all ideas are welcomed and then the best ideas are used by all to move forward," said MonaRae Stokes, a teacher at Clinton Elementary School in Plainfield. "It is a fluid exchange of best ideas and approaches cou-

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COURTESY OF GLORIA MONTEALEGRE

In the photo (from left) Dr. Gail G. Verdi, Kean University Lead Faculty, Marie Toto, Kean Project Coordinator, Dr. Anthony A. Pittman, Acting Dean of Kean University's College of Education and Project Director of the grant, BJ Brown, Director Professional Development/Teacher Effectiveness, Plainfield Public School District, and Margaret Hayes, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools Scotch

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pled with ongoing data review to decide the effectiveness of these approaches. It is a movement away from single action or solo teaching."

In addition, the participants attended 10 sessions in Cognitive Behavioral Teaching, or CBT. These sessions addressed concerns on how to handle the social and emotional health of both teachers and students. It focused on identifying automatic thoughts that may impact the way a teacher interacts with co-workers or other students.

"In speaking with teachers participating in the grant they overwhelming agree that learning these strategies are informing their mentoring practices this current year and must be shared with veteran and new teachers," said Superintendent of Plainfield Public Schools Anna Belin-Pyles.

Stokes explained that CBT and PLC

have to work together to have the greatest impact. However, for her PLC work was "where the magic happens." She saw inspiring commitment and a strong group effort toward improving student performance. A highlight of the program was the group's work to address the challenge of education by using inter-district student performance data.

The ultimate goal of the program was to give teachers the tools to mentor new teachers in the transition, and up retention rate.

On July 7, the districts and Kean University celebrated a successful first year of the Building Teacher Leadership Capacity grant. During the year-end presentation, the teachers shared their reflections and discussed their successes in working with their students in grades K-12.

"We always look for opportunities to enhance the opportunities of our teachers, and we are glad we could afford the opportunity for teachers to become leaders and mentors," said Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Superintendent Margaret Hayes, Ed.D.