

URBAN EDUCATION FELLOWS HIGH SCHOOL PILOT



With a successful track record in helping stem teacher turnover in urban schools, the Urban Education Fellows Program is expanding its outreach to the high school level.

Jennifer Morris set up educational classes during her four years as a museum curator, but she couldn't quite picture a life that revolved around the classroom.

Yet after the economy deteriorated in 2001 and museum funding had declined, Morris decided she needed to make a change in order to ensure she would have a more stable job.

The Urban Education Fellows Program, an alternative teaching certification program, not only helped Morris change careers, but also prepared her to change the lives of students in the central city. After spending the past five years as a teacher at Messmer Preparatory Catholic School, this fall, she assumed the role of dean of students at St. Rose and St. Leo.

"(Urban Fellows) are being trained to be effective teachers, but in addition, they are being trained to be effective leaders," said Jeff Monday, principal of Messmer Catholic Schools, which has had Morris and nine other fellows on staff over the years.

With the continued demand for such strong, qualified teachers and leaders in central city classrooms, the Urban Education Fellows Program is taking its impact to the

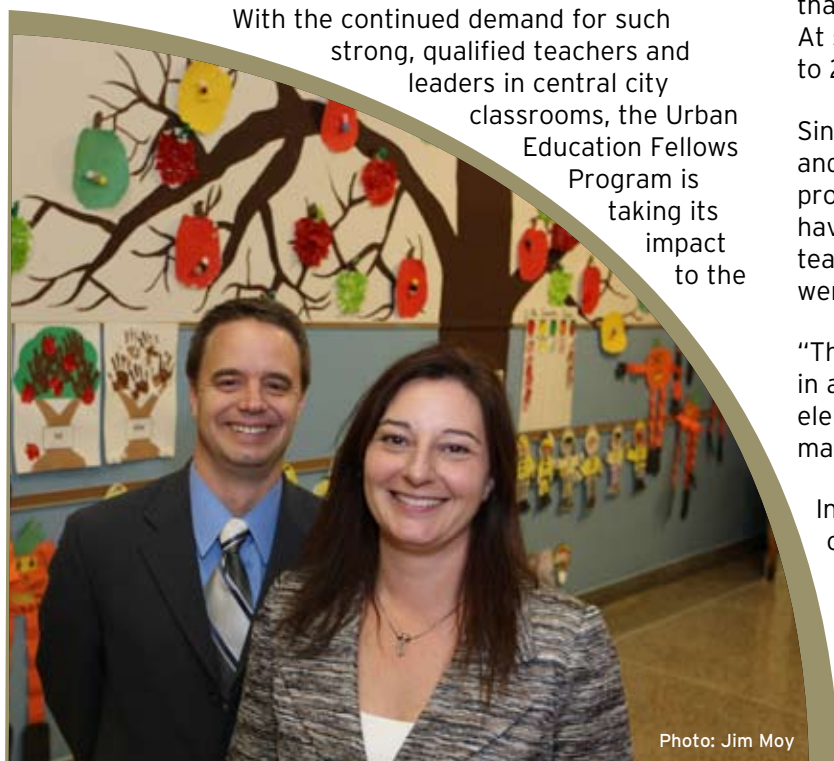


Photo: Jim Moy

Jeff Monday, principal of Messmer Catholic Schools, is looking forward to having a Urban Education fellow, like alumna Jennifer Morris, strengthen the faculty and students at Messmer High School. Messmer is one of four schools participating in the high school pilot.

FAST FACTS

Year started: 2009 (h.s. pilot)
2000 (UEFP)

No. of fellows: 8 (h.s. pilot)
34 (UEFP)

Partner schools: Messmer, Pius XI,
St. Joan Antida, Marquette University

next level. Recruitment starts in fall 2008 for a pilot program that will adapt the model for high school. Organizers hope to enroll eight fellows in the two-year program, which will begin in June 2009.

The pilot will prepare mid-career professionals with backgrounds in math and science to become math or science teachers at Messmer, Marquette University, Pius XI and St. Joan Antida. While teaching full time, fellows will earn their high school teaching license as well as a joint master's in education from Mount Mary and Alverno colleges. Funding from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the Burke Foundation, formerly the Trinity Foundation, is supporting the expansion.

The Urban Education Fellows Program was created in 2000 to address the teacher turnover and recruitment problems that trouble private, independent urban elementary schools. At some schools that initially partnered with the program, up to 25 percent of the teaching staff changed each year.

Since its debut, the program has helped alter that statistic and increasingly has been looked to as a resource for producing quality, urban teachers. Fifty six new teachers have come out of the program; 89 percent of them remain teaching in urban schools. Seventy percent of the fellows were hired by their original schools.

"They are very focused on preparing you to be a success in an urban classroom," said Morris, who earned her elementary school teaching certification as well as her master's in education through the program.

In 2008, the program expanded to include a new group of fellows each year instead of every two years. Over the years, the number of partner schools has increased from nine to nearly 30. Now, when school principals experience a vacancy, they turn to the program to help fill it.

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LEADERSHIP GRANT

More recently, the demand for qualified teachers has come from the high school level, particularly in the areas of math and science. More careers are requiring math and science backgrounds, but schools are having a hard time hiring qualified people to teach those skills to students, said Mary Diez, dean of graduate studies at Alverno.

Part of the reason for the difficulty, said program director Linda Delgadillo, is that there are so many different job opportunities available with math and science degrees beyond the classroom.

In response, program organizers adapted the elementary curriculum for area private high schools. Similar to the elementary level, the pilot will begin with a seven-week summer school. Fellows will teach in the morning and take classes in the afternoon. In the fall of 2009, they will be placed at one of the partner high schools.

Over the course of the program, they will take between 36 to 49 credits, depending on their background in math or science.

Messmer High School, one of the four schools that will host fellows in 2009, did not experience turnover last year with its staff, Monday said. But it has been searching for a teacher with an engineering background to strengthen its faculty.

"We can never have enough people in those areas to meet the growing interest and demand students have to expand their understanding of math and science," said Monday, who is also principal at Messmer High School.

One of the most important pieces that the high school fellows will bring to the classroom is their previous "real world" experiences, Diez and Delgadillo said.

"One of the things that has to happen for good learning, particularly at the high school level, is the connection to the real world context," Diez said about the value the fellows will bring. "That is a really critical piece."

A key difference between the two programs is the addition of an extra coach. In addition to an external coach, who has a background teaching one of the two subject areas, each

fellow also will be matched with a mentor inside their own high school.

Morris points to the coaching support as one of the program's greatest assets.

It is one component that organizers say will especially come in handy with fellows at the high school level. While the external coach helps participants adapt to the life as a teacher, internal mentors help them adapt to the culture of their high school.

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"The bottom line with our program is not that we just want to get people into our program licensed and earning their master's," Delgadillo said. "We want to make sure we are giving enough support to our folks so that they'll stay." ■



FOR MORE INFO

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