

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Education Reform Delivers a Bonus to New Teachers

If you are a new teacher who graduated at the top of your undergraduate class and if you have school loans to repay, the state might be able to assist you in repaying those loans. If you meet the above requirements and are teaching in a low-income school, your chances for assistance are even greater. The help comes from the Education Reform Act.

When the legislature passed the act, the aspect that received the most attention was the increase in state funding to needy school districts. But we all recognized that it takes more than money to improve education. We also looked for ways to renew and improve instruction. We changed the requirements for teacher certification. We even added a five-year recertification requirement for teaching staff. We then went one step further.

We also recognized the upcoming challenge facing our schools, an impending shortage of teachers. To address that shortage and to attract the best possible applicants for teaching positions, we instituted a program to create a group of scholar-teachers by attracting top graduates to Massachusetts public schools.

Studies of our educational system had shown that the Massachusetts teaching corps has the second highest average age in the nation. An aging teaching staff means that our schools will soon be faced with retirements, and this will happen just at the time when enrollments are increasing. That means we will soon have a need for many new public school teachers.

The state is assisting in securing the best possible applicants by creating the "Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program." The program helps qualifying teachers repay school loans with stipends as high as \$150 per month over a four year period. State reimbursements depend on the loan amount and repayment plan, and they require a teacher to be employed by a state public school district for the four-year period.

Applicants must be new teachers, beginning after July 1, 1994, and they must have graduated in the top quarter of their undergraduate class. Because funding is limited, a special priority is granted to teachers who are employed in low-income school districts where 10 percent of students or more qualify for federal free and reduced lunches.

My office has a supply of applications, which I will be happy to send out. Just call me at 567-1661. The Executive Office of Education can also send the forms. Applications are due by January 1, 1996. The state budget appropriated \$150,000 for this first year of the program. I voted for this program; I endorse the program; and I want the teachers I represent to benefit from its funding.