

Excellence in Education
Educator Incentive Grant Application

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I. Project Goal & Summary

I am applying for the Excellence in Education grant to pursue Cognitive Coaching (CC) Training to enhance both my classroom instruction and leadership skills as our World Language district team leader. In my classroom, I teach nearly 180 students each day. As a team leader, I oversee and facilitate the growth of our middle school World Language programs at three separate buildings, and I support eight teachers throughout those buildings.

Research shows the CC training helps increase teacher autonomy by encouraging reflective practices and empowering educators to make informed decisions. This autonomy leads to improved teaching, which results in better student outcomes. Cognitive Coaching training supports both my classroom and the classrooms of my World Language colleagues at all 5 middle school and high school buildings. Furthermore, it promotes professional inquiry, allowing teachers to explore new ideas, refine their techniques, and engage in meaningful collaboration. The CC approach will not only improve my own individual practices, but also will directly support my effectiveness as a World Language team leader, enabling me to guide and inspire my colleagues at the building and district level.

II. Recent Professional Activities

Portage Public School World Language teachers have most recently attended CI in the Mitten, where we learned active engagement strategies for students while remaining in the target language (Spanish/French). We also attended the Michigan World Language Association conference this fall 2024. Last year, myself and the high school team leader attended the National ACTFL conference last fall in Chicago to learn from some of the top trainers in the language acquisition sphere. Additionally, teachers alongside our curriculum directors, have spent a considerable amount of time researching best practices in language acquisition. With all of this information and strategies in our toolboxes, it is my job as both a teacher and leader to help others teach and learn effectively with these strategies.

Personally, I recently pursued my Masters degree in K-12 Educational Leadership at Eastern Michigan University. During this time, I have certainly learned an array of new information and skills. However, I feel I still need further training to better understand how to facilitate conversations with both my students and colleagues, that encourages deep reflection and exploration of underlying thought processes and decision making.

By combining my previous training in World Language instruction and Educational Leadership with Cognitive Coaching training, I aim to elevate both my teaching and leadership. My World Language training has equipped me with essential methods and techniques to engage students in language learning, but CC training will take this to the next level by providing a deeper, reflective approach to teaching. CC's focus on cognitive growth and reflective practices will allow me to continuously improve my instructional strategies, ensuring that I am more responsive to student needs. It will also allow me to better support the growth and continuation of our World Language department in Portage. Cognitive Coaching will help me model collaborative, inquiry-driven leadership, empowering my team to reflect on their teaching practices, share ideas, and adopt innovative strategies. By incorporating both my World Language expertise and the principles of Cognitive Coaching, I can create a culture of continuous growth and improvement both within my classroom and our department.

This training supports our district strategic commitments; Student Success, People & Culture, Service Excellence, and Stewardship. This also supports our building's continuous improvement plans at Central Middle School which states that we will "Support each student using the continuum of universal instruction and support" and we will "Support the whole CMS community by improving our climate and culture with a focus on staff."

III. Explanation of Project Activities & Timeline

The Cognitive Coaching training takes place in a myriad of locations throughout Michigan, and beyond. I intend to participate in the training provided at Oakland Schools in Waterford, Michigan. The first four days are Part 1 of the Cognitive Coaching Foundations. Part 1 is scheduled for July 22-23 and August 12-13. Cognitive Coaching Foundations Part 2, also four days in length, will be scheduled for the fall. Exact dates will be released soon.

IV. Explanation of Anticipated Project Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this grant project will have both immediate and long-term effects on my teaching, leadership, and success of the World Language department in Portage. This Cognitive Coaching training will allow me to not only use better teaching strategies but also reflect on and improve them regularly. One specific outcome the district may see is a stronger, more collaborative World Language team. Through CC training, I will be able to guide my colleagues by using coaching strategies that encourage reflection and open feedback. This will create a supportive space where teachers feel confident to try new methods, discuss what's working, and learn from one another. As a result, this will help us all improve as teachers and work better together, which will lead to better student outcomes in our language classrooms.

V. Project Creativity

Despite budget tightening, Portage Public Schools has maintained their commitment to cohesive 7-12 Spanish & French programs in which all students can be successful. While many districts have eliminated or downsized their world language programs, Portage continues to thrive and gain support. Through the use of Cognitive Coaching, I hope to continue to empower our students through World Language instruction that encourages students to succeed in a global community. I also hope to empower and inspire my colleagues to make informed decisions with our instructional practices so that we may continue our strong World Language programming across our district, including all three middle schools and two high schools.

When I notice well respected leaders in our district using effective questions, I ask each of them what type of training or experiences have allowed them to build their capacity to do so. Time and time again they have all stated "Cognitive Coaching," which is how I initially learned of the existence of CC. However, when I ask my teacher colleagues from around our district, it seems none of our teachers have had this powerful training. I find this to be a very unique opportunity to be trained in Cognitive Coaching and be able to use it in my role as a teacher and team leader.

VI. Anticipated Project Costs

Please see the attached Proposed Budget and Reconciliation Form.