

THE BETTER BEGINNINGS AWARD

APPLICATION PACKET FOR 2007-2008

Recognizing and Rewarding
Teaching Excellence at the
Elementary Level

Deadline for Nominations:
June 2, 2008

The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department
Teacher Development Programs Unit
Education Building Addition, Room 1069
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234



BETTER BEGINNINGS AWARD

HELEN BACH MOSS MEMORIAL FUND

The New York State Board of Regents is pleased to announce the Better Beginnings Award in honor of Helen Bach Moss, a local educator who died in 1988. The award, which is sponsored by the Board of Regents, celebrates the life and career of Helen Bach Moss by recognizing elementary teachers who are gifted in finding and nurturing the strengths of each individual student. Mrs. Moss touched the lives of many people, and her career was distinguished by a genuine respect for and love of children. She was ever caring toward students and their parents and acted as a worthy role model in all of her endeavors. Her family and friends petitioned the Board of Regents to establish a memorial fund and provided an endowment to fund a cash stipend of \$1,000 to the winning elementary teacher. This award recognizes early childhood education as the most effective investment for long-term educational success.

In the spring of 2007, this award was presented to Linda Kelly Armour, a fifth grade teacher in the Duaneburg Central School District, who had just completed twenty-three years of teaching. Her principal, Dr. Kathleen O'Brien, describes her as a teacher who "really listens to her students and gets to know them" and who works to get her students "connected to other people and to the world beyond the school." Among Ms. Armour's special talents is her ability to make history come alive for her students and to broaden their perspective on how people live. One way she does this is by inviting a variety of people to come to her classroom and be interviewed by her students. Among these classroom guests have been a sheep-farmer, a man who makes his living by tapping maple trees, and an elderly man who had attended a one-room schoolhouse.

Ms. Armour's goals, however, go beyond increasing her students' knowledge of other times and cultures. She wants to teach her students that their own lives can be meaningful, and one way she does this is through projects to improve the community and to help people who are in trouble. Recently, for example, she received a grant to create a school garden, and her students not only designed the garden, but helped create it. She is also known in her community for the projects her classes have undertaken to make quilts for survivors of Hurricane Katrina (Quilts for Katrina) as well as to raise money for a local farmer whose barn had caught on fire (Cash for Cows) and to buy new fishing boats to replace those destroyed in the tsunami of 2005. The fund-raising for the fishing boats spread both beyond Ms. Armour's class and beyond the school, raising a total of over \$90,000. It enabled her students to see clearly both the importance of working together and that what they do can "make a difference."

The simple nomination process for the Better Beginnings Award involves the preparation of statements of support from students, parents, other educators, and the local community. Nominees should be teachers who are skilled at engaging young minds and developing nurturing relationships with elementary school students.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Purpose

The spirit of the award, which celebrates the life and career of Helen Bach Moss, is that *better beginnings* make for stronger completions. It strives to recognize elementary teachers who are gifted in finding and nurturing the strengths of each student and fostering trusting relationships among pupils, parents, teachers, and administrators.

Eligibility

To be eligible, the nominee must be currently teaching at the elementary level (N-6) and appropriately credentialed in New York State.

Nominating Procedure

The application for the award is **anecdotal in nature** and has two parts. **First is the completion of the attached “Basic Data Sheet,”** which must include the signatures of both the teacher being nominated and the president of the local board of education. **Second is the inclusion of at least one, and no more than two, statement(s) of nomination from each of the following five categories:**

- Pupils
- Parents
- Administrators
- Teachers
- Community members (someone active in the school community, such as a volunteer, business person, social services worker, etc.)

The Statements of Nomination from pupils may take the form of letters, drawings, or a combination of the two. Other Statements should take the form of letters, and each Statement should be **limited to two pages**. Materials that exceed these limits will not be considered. **Three copies** of all nominating materials must be submitted.

Selection Criteria

Nominations will be assessed using the following criteria. The recommendations must demonstrate:

- the individual's ability to find and nurture the strengths and individual talents of each student by documenting innovative techniques used and citing instances of accomplishment and achievement in the lives of students;
- the individual's exceptional character by referencing a specific circumstance which provides students with opportunities to experience success; and
- the individual's ability to foster mutually respectful relationships among pupils, parents, other teachers, and administrators.

Time Line

Applications will be accepted until the close of business on **June 2, 2008** in the Teacher Development Programs Unit, Room 1069 EBA, New York State Education Department, Albany, New York 12234. Applications will be reviewed by a Screening Committee comprised of State Education Department staff members. The Screening Committee will narrow the field to three finalists. During the next four weeks, the Program Officer will conduct telephone interviews with the three finalists and their respective principals, and a Selection Committee of representatives of the educational community will review the three finalists' portfolios, discuss the feedback from the telephone interviews, and select the recipient. This individual will be honored at an award ceremony held at the discretion of the local school community. Questions related to this process may be directed to the Teacher Development Programs Unit, at (518) 486-6042 or tdpr@mail.nysed.gov.

**BETTER BEGINNINGS AWARD
BASIC DATA SHEET**

Name: _____

Telephone Number: (Residence) () _____ E-mail Address (please print) _____

Telephone Number: (School) () _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Name of School District: _____

Name and Office Address of School Superintendent: _____

_____ Telephone: () _____

Name of School: _____

Name of School Principal: _____

School Address: _____

County _____ Senate District No. _____ Assembly District No. _____

Subject and Grade Level Taught: _____

Years in Present Position _____ Total Years of Teaching Experience _____

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE:

Dates	Institution	Location	Position
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

CERTIFICATION:

Area(s)	Date(s)
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

How did you and your supporters hear about the Better Beginnings Award?

I agree that any or all of the enclosed materials (except my home address and telephone number) may be shared with persons interested in promoting the Better Beginnings Award.

Signature of Candidate (Date)

Signature of School Board President (Date)

This application must be submitted in triplicate.

Please return application packets by June 2, 2008 to:

**Teacher Development Programs Unit
EBA, Room 1069
NYS Education Department, 89 Washington Avenue
Room 1069 EBA
Albany, NY 12234**