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## Back to the Future: An IBMer's dream coming true through Transition to Teaching



**IBMer Vickie Szarek, now a student teacher at Garner Magnet School, was one of Transition to Teaching's first participants.**

Now in its second year, IBM's Transition to Teaching program's first "class" is quickly nearing graduation. The program — which assists employees with bachelor's degrees or credentials in math, science, engineering and related fields to become certified K-12 teachers — is IBM's innovative solution to the industry-wide shortage of skilled technical professionals.

"The idea was to help mid- to late-career employees who have had a history of volunteering in the K-12 environment, and a background or interest in math and science, to enter the teaching field," said Maura Banta, IBM Corporate Community Relations (CCR).

IBM will reimburse participants up to a total of \$15,000 for tuition/stipend while they student-teach, as well as provide online mentoring and other support services in conjunction with partner colleges, universities and school districts.

"With the current shortage of traditional teaching candidates, programs like Transition to Teaching are an excellent way to fill our classrooms with qualified teachers with math and science skills," says Grant Holley, Ph.D., Alternative Licensure Director, North Carolina State University.

### Graduating with a degree in Education — thirty years later

Twenty-seven years ago, Vickie Szarek thought about becoming a teacher. Then she married an IBMer and began a series of work-related moves. During this time she completed graduate work at NC State and a BS in Computer Information Systems at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. She eventually became an IBMer and has been with the company for eighteen years. Still, Szarek never lost her desire to teach, even taking teacher certification courses in Florida until she was transferred back to North Carolina.



**The NC Teach program is available through many local universities including NC State**

"I was beginning to think about retiring when I saw an article on Transition to Teaching," recalls Szarek. After being accepted into the program, Szarek applied to NC State for a slot in their [NC Teach program](#), an accelerated curriculum for teachers interested in lateral entry.

**University,  
UNC Chapel  
Hill and NC  
Central  
University.**

Support from Szarek's IBM manager was crucial to her success in the program. "While all of the classes were offered at night or on the weekends, at the beginning it was difficult to balance working at IBM with often needing to leave work early to make it to a five o'clock class and then come home from work and do fifty pages of reading."

But Szarek's dedication remained and now, after a year of juggling school and IBM, she has taken a leave of absence from IBM and is in the classroom full-time. "I am currently on a leave of absence from IBM and student teaching at Garner Magnet School — and I LOVE it!" she says.

### **A Critical Shortage of U.S. Teachers**

- 42 percent of K-12 teachers are more than 50 years old.
- In 1999, 59 percent of teachers instructing in mathematics didn't specialize in the subject.
- Internationally, the average is 29 percent.
- The U.S. will need to add 2.4 million new teachers by 2012.
- In 2005, China graduated 500,000 engineers;

Szarek began by observing science teacher Martha Ghali's classes, and quickly began teaching on her own. "My husband keeps telling me to wipe the smile off of my face," laughs Szarek. "I spend my days working on science labs and other activities to try to reinforce material — it is great!"

"She is earning the students' respect and teaching them content in great, innovative ways," says Ghali. "I have taken a few of her ideas and used them in my other classes, which is the best part of working as a team. We can share ideas and come up with new ways to help the students learn."



**Vickie Szarek (left) and Martha Ghali (right) work together to create educational — and memorable — science labs.**

### **The search**

On June 1 Szarek will return to IBM, where she will continue working while interviewing for teaching positions across the county. Once she finds the right school for her, she will resign her position at IBM and begin her new career as a teacher.

And for other late-career IBMers, Transition to Teaching might also be the perfect opportunity at the perfect time. "IBM has shown genuine courage in being

and North  
America,  
70,000.

the first of many — I hope — businesses taking an interest in how they can positively affect our public schools by providing and supporting highly qualified employees to consider a career change into teaching," says NC Teach's Grant Holley. "I would strongly

encourage IBMers with an interest in teaching to take advantage of this wonderful program."

For a video interview with Vickie Szarek on her Transition to Teaching experience, click [here](#)

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