**Carroll University**

Project Title: *Teacher Residency PLC: Preparing Elementary Dual Certification Candidates*

This mini-grant supports the development, study and expansion of a Teacher Education Residency Model that prepares dually certified teachers in Elementary Education and Special Education. Carroll University has established a Residency Program with four school districts in Waukesha County. The residency model places candidates who are seeking dual certification in schools for a full academic year. The first semester includes daily clinical experiences combined with coursework completion both on-site in the school district and on Carroll’s campus prior to the student teaching semester. During the student teaching semester, residents build on their foundational knowledge of teaching, learners, and the school community as they assume instructional and leadership roles in regular and special education placements.

This project prioritizes developing teaching practices that move beyond labels by engaging pre-service and practicing teachers in analysis, critical reflection and application of the breadth of research on effective learning for all students. Though PK-12 collaboration and a focus on defining and implementing best practice for all students, the residency model is designed to integrate students and learning, Special Education and General Education, and theory and practice.

The grant supports the residency project and its expansion through funding a professional learning community (PLC) to analyze and study the effectiveness of the residency model. The PLC includes teachers and administrators, Carroll University faculty and teacher residents.

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**College of Menominee Nation**

Project Title: *We Make a Path by Walking Together*

The title of our project, “We Make a Path by Walking Together,” provides a visual reference to the work the College of Menominee Nation has begun as a part of our Wisconsin Department State Personnel Development IHE Mini Grant. The path CMN originally planned has expanded, and as paths normally do, has taken us in directions not originally proposed. The Project Director and Early Childhood Specialist family took the time and the opportunity to attend a training provided by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to build awareness and knowledge regarding the use of IRIS and other evidence-based materials. The knowledge learned at the IRIS training has been infused into CMN Teacher Education coursework to better educate our pre-service teachers and their future instructional practices in serving children with special needs. In addition, CMN has worked to build relationships with the Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative (WSPEI) and its facilitator, Menominee Indian Head Start and its teachers, and Shawano School District’s Hillcrest Primary School and its guidance counselors. The goal of these relationships is to build strong collaborations with the intent to improve the instruction for Native American children and their families. Through designing, delivering, completing and documenting data from surveys and meetings we have identified specific areas of need at both Hillcrest Primary School and Menominee Indian Head Start. This work will allow CMN to provide culturally responsive support and materials and trainings that will meet the specific identified needs of both groups.

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**Edgewood College**

Project Title: *Professional Learning Communities and Edgewood College: Pre-service to Inservice within*

*the LEA (local education agency)*

Professional learning communities may be defined as "ongoing groups who meet regularly for the purposes of increasing their own learning and that of their students." Although learning communities vary in form and context, they share some fundamental core beliefs and values. Based on the idea that educators can learn from each other, learning communities create and maintain an environment that fosters collaboration, honest talk, and a commitment to the growth and development of individual members and to the group as a whole. Our initial rationale for the funding of this proposal stated that we would create these communities and support them as they grow our future teachers and our current educational staffs. They work from the assumption that stakeholders are not mere technicians who implement the ideas of others, but are intellectuals who are creating knowledge and doing associated work. This means that learning communities reflect upon theory as well as practice; they encourage and support members to examine their practice, to try out new ideas, and to reflect together on what works and why; and they provide opportunities for the collective construction and sharing of new knowledge.

In this proposal, all stakeholders who voice an interest in the concept of change and/or improvement will be included. Equally important to the concept of a learning community is the connection it forges between professional and student learning. As educators identify and solve problems of practice together, they build the capacity and ability to move forward the equity agenda of their schools and districts and enhance the learning and achievement of all students. It is hypothesized that this proposal will bolster the case that learning communities in schools are a critical element in professional development and student achievement. This proposal is moving forward to make a major contribution to a growing and powerful research base about professional learning communities, how they can transform classroom practice, and ultimately enhance student learning. This particular proposal is significant because it focuses upon the needs that parents and caregivers have that relate to youth with disabilities. Further, it focuses upon developing a PLC that is driven by the needs and interests of those stakeholders, and which is supported by the schools’ staff. The School of Education has reached out to include content area faculty and faculty outside of the special education area to improve syllabi that introduce PLC and to include PLC in discussion forums. The outreach to the candidate has been included in two Graduate Teacher Education courses. The outreach to the community is in place in three local education agencies.

The rationale for implementation of this project leads to the improved outcomes for youth with disabilities. First we rationalize that the creation, continued support of and cultivation of our learning communities will triangulate the success of our outcome. We will continue to do this by faculty and candidates, including the candidates outside of special education. Secondly, our rationale points toward the LEA school itself, which will be moving toward the same goals through the PLC venue. Finally, we rationalize that the LEA and the youth served will benefit because whatever initiative is selected, it will be supported by resources, face time, and the facilitation of an effective PLC. Preliminary data on the aforementioned successes is held at the schools. Two schools and one agency have been invited to participate and all three are currently very actively engaged. The hypothesis is that the numbers of participants will grow into Years 3 and beyond.

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**Edgewood College**

Project Title: *Empowering Parents and Caregivers through the Implementation of a Professional Learning Community*

Professional learning communities may be defined as "ongoing groups who meet regularly for the purposes of increasing their own learning and that of their students." Although learning communities vary in form and context, they share some fundamental core beliefs and values. Based on the idea that educators can learn from each other, learning communities create and maintain an environment that fosters collaboration, honest talk, and a commitment to the growth and development of individual members and to the group as a whole. Our initial rationale for the funding of this proposal stated that we would create these communities and support them as they grow our future teachers and our current educational staffs. They work from the assumption that stakeholders are not mere technicians who implement the ideas of others, but are intellectuals who are creating knowledge and doing associated work. This means that learning communities reflect upon theory as well as practice; they encourage and support members to examine their practice, to try out new ideas, and to reflect together on what works and why; and they provide opportunities for the collective construction and sharing of new knowledge.

In this proposal, all stakeholders who voice an interest in the concept of change and/or improvement will be included. Equally important to the concept of a learning community is the connection it forges between professional and student learning. As educators identify and solve problems of practice together, they build the capacity and ability to move forward the equity agenda of their schools and districts and enhance the learning and achievement of all students. It is hypothesized that this proposal will bolster the case that learning communities in schools are a critical element in professional development and student achievement. This proposal is moving forward to make a major contribution to a growing and powerful research base about professional learning communities, how they can transform classroom practice, and ultimately enhance student learning. This particular proposal is significant because it focuses upon the needs that parents and caregivers have that relate to youth with disabilities. Further, it focuses upon developing a PLC that is driven by the needs and interests of those stakeholders, and which is supported by the schools’ staff. The implementation of the parent/caregiver PLC is led by Teacher Education candidates from the IHE.

The rationale for implementation of this project leads to the improved outcomes for youth with disabilities. First we rationalize that the creation, continued support of and cultivation of our learning communities will triangulate the success of our outcome. We will continue to do this by empowering parents and caregivers and including the candidates. Secondly, our rationale points toward the school itself, which will be moving toward the same goals through the PLC venue. Finally, we rationalize that the LEA and the youth served will benefit because whatever initiative is selected, it will be supported by resources, face time, and the facilitation of an effective PLC. Preliminary data on the aforementioned successes is held at the schools. Two schools have been invited to participate and two are currently very actively engaged. The hypothesis is that the numbers of participants will grow into Years 2 and beyond.

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**Marian University**

Project Title: *Sustained, Targeted, and Accessible Support Communities for RTI Professional Learning*

Marian University’s School of Education is committed to supporting and maintaining quality relationships with K-12 public and private schools. As part of this commitment, some faculty members are currently participating in a state grant that promotes healthy partnerships with K-12 schools through the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) intended to enrich participants’ knowledge of Response to Intervention work. This PLC has a specific focus in better understanding multi-tiered systems of support including the implementation or work of progress monitoring, co-teaching, reading comprehension and paraprofessional support. Our venues of learning will include both face-to-face and online professional interactions.

As a community of K-16 learners, members will share individual and organizational understandings of their work as practitioners in educational systems through opportunities to interact both synchronously and asynchronously in online formats. Online work will include a Google Plus social media community which serves to promote connectedness between educators where time and place are not limiting factors to interaction. An online website of professional learning modules will also be maintained as a collection site for videos, modules and links to quality resources. Members will participate in dialogue and thoughtful reflection in active face-to-face meetings in this community of learners with the intent of building stronger relationships and a broader, deeper understanding of evidence-based practice that impacts student learning.

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**Silver Lake College of the Holy Family (SLC)**

Project Title: *Using Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as an Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) to Promote Accessible and Differentiated Learning for All Students: Theory to Practice*

SLC’s mini-grant project is a 3-year Action Plan (2013-2016) which has one overarching goal with objectives outlined for each year of the 3-year grant proposal. The goal is to implement a Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework as a vehicle to create a culture of collaboration and partnership among general and special education IHE faculty and school district personnel which focuses on developing and implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) to promote accessible and differentiated instruction to increase educator effectiveness and ultimately improve student learning outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. In Year 1 (2013-2014), the Silver Lake College SPDG PLC engaged in collective inquiry (study and dialogue) related to current research and best practices for pre-service field experiences including clinical and student teacher placements. In Year 2 (2014-2015) SLC’s mini-grant had two main foci. First, the mini-grant objectives focused on clarifying what pre-service teachers need to learn to become high quality effective educators, and what evidence-based practices from the field will ensure that pre-service candidates will transition from educator preparation programs to the classroom as an effective general and special educator. Second, the SLC SPDG team worked with the New Lisbon Elementary School principal and faculty to establish a PLC partnership to explore research-based literacy interventions to improve student outcomes and develop formative assessments which will identify students who need assistance and inform instructional decisions. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected to ensure fidelity of implementation when using the strategies and interventions, and to validate their effectiveness in creating positive learning trajectories for all students. Year 3 will continue to develop and refine the outcomes based on what we learn from the Year 2 data.

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**University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, School of Education**

Project Title: *Interrupting Our Gaps in Achievement: Facilitating a Community of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement to Develop Proactive Services for ALL Learners*

The purpose of this project is to develop a Professional Learning Community (PLC), or more specifically, a “Community of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement” (Hord, 1997, p. 63), among professional program faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Through professional conversations and problem-solving, the group engages in goal setting conversations related to improving K12 student outcomes based on the tenets of integrated comprehensive services through informing both teacher and leadership preparation programs. While PLC members engage in ongoing conversation, research, and dialogue during the grant period, a key component of the project is centered on interviews and data collection related to district level administrator practice that supports – or inhibits – student achievement. The research, conducted by Dr. Elise Frattura and Dr. Leigh E. Wallace, seeks to explore the evolution of district administrator roles from the very traditional, specialized roles of Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Director of Special Education and Student Services to a more proactive, integrated role of Director (or Assistant Superintendent) of Teaching and Learning. When district office administrators begin to merge roles and services to the schools they symbolically, and practically, model that all staff must provide an array of services to meet student needs. The goals of this grant embody this philosophy and hope to transform the silos that currently exist they relate to the educational services provided to all students at the building level as well as within district office. It is anticipated that data collected will be completed during the summer and analysis will begin.

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**University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF)**

Project Title: *Inclusive Educational Practices through Professional Learning Communities*

The purposes of the current project are to: (1) assist Altoona Middle School (MS) in refining their professional learning community (PLC), develop a PLC within the College of Education and Professional Studies (CEPS) at University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF), and model the PLC for our CEPS students; (2) assist Altoona MS in improving co-teaching practice and improve our CEPS students’ understanding of various co-teaching models through observation and data collection; and (3) assist math staff/student development at Altoona MS and promote professional development in math education faculty and students at UWRF.

First, the current project has been implemented through refining the existing PLC among special and regular education teachers, administrators, and specialists at Altoona MS and developing our own PLC within the CEPS at UWRF. This project focuses on assisting Altoona MS with evidence-based, critical components (e.g., changing structures and communication through PLCs at school, data collection based on student learning, connecting PLC efforts into classroom practice, etc.) in improving their existing PLC. Simultaneously, we initiated our own PLC within UWRF to mirror the PLC in Altoona MS. Interested CEPS faculty members, as well as the current project team, meet monthly and will determine a focus based on our CEPS student learning data to develop our own PLC. The goals of implementing the CEPS PLC are: 1) to practice and model the process for our CEPS students at UWRF in order to improve our students’ future teaching, 2) to use our PLC experience to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits and tensions and bring new insights to the Altoona team, and 3) to improve our own pedagogy.

Second, the current project also aims to extend our last three years of efforts on collaborative teaching practice by emphasizing various co-teaching models. The current interdisciplinary team has developed and modeled collaborative teaching practice for our pre-service teachers. We will share our expertise and experience in collaborative teaching practices with Altoona MS by focusing on established co-teaching models (Cook & Friend, 2000). Beyond modeling, discussing, and supervising co-teaching practice within the UWRF campus and our established partner schools in Wisconsin and Minnesota, we will also invite interested CEPS students to collect the data on various co-teaching models in classroom settings at Altoona MS for this project. Data collection in the form of observation, interview, and collection of student work will benefit our inservice students through increased understanding of co-teaching practice in authentic classroom settings for their current field-based experience and their future teaching and will provide data for future research projects.

Third, this project will also target math staff development at Altoona MS and our inservice students at UWRF. Inservice training and discussions using the curricular materials from the Rational Number Project will be held between Altoona MS teachers and our CEPS math education faculty and students at UWRF. The goal of this project is to enhance teacher understanding of fraction learning, which ultimately aims to increase special education student learning and achievement in math.

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**University of Wisconsin-Stout**

Project Title: *Using PLC to Increase Effectiveness and the Academic Achievement for All Students*

The PLC framework will continue to guide departments in the school of education in a collaborative effort to prepare their teacher candidates by increasing understanding of the significance of practices related to research, data analysis, and evidence-based decision making. Furthermore, while soliciting a partnership for this grant, the PLC framework and guiding principles will be used in a partnership between the Stout faculty and a primary school to investigate, develop, and plan in-service opportunities to meet the needs of the district. The UW-Stout proposed PLC has mutually accepted a partnership with Unity Middle School, Balsam Lake, WI.

Four of our team members met during Winterm to prepare for a professional learning opportunity to be presented to our partnering school’s PLC on March 25, 2015. The workshop addressed the following topics: evidence-based reading strategies, efficient usage of student data to make instructional decisions, social and cultural contexts for teaching all children to read, Common Core State Standards (reading-literature, informational texts and foundational skills, writing, speaking, and listening), background of poverty characteristics, the school’s role in educating students of poverty, and social class issues that affect education. The Professional Learning Communities framework and knowledge were discussed at one of the professional education courses and at the student teacher seminar. For the purpose of collecting data, two surveys were/will be administered; one in fall of 2014 and another during spring 2015. Descriptive and inferential statistics will be conducted towards the end of the spring semester of 2015.

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**University of Wisconsin-Whitewater**

Project Title: Investigating, Teaching, and Implementing Evidence-Based Practices to support Children's Learning in Inclusive Classrooms

The focus of this project is the building of a partnership between an interdisciplinary team of four faculty members at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, all of whom teach pre-service educators and/or related-services personnel, and a team of early childhood educators, special educators, related service personnel and administrators in the Oregon School District. A primary goal of the partnership is to implement and evaluate a collaborative consultation approach to functional intervention planning for preschool children with special needs in inclusive settings. Building this professional learning community (PLC) among faculty members and field-based practitioners will benefit our future teachers and related services personnel because we all share in the responsibility of their training. Our students will join the PLC and will evaluate and study the relevant research on educational practices as part of their coursework and will implement the practices in their field-based placements.

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