

FMU Center of Excellence receives grants totaling \$1 million

FLORENCE, S.C. – Francis Marion University’s Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty (COE) has received two grants totaling more than \$1 million.

The first grant, from the S.C. Department of Education Science and Mathematics Unit, is \$558,000 (\$186,000 annually over three years). The second grant, an Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) grant from the S.C. Commission on Higher Education, is approximately \$500,000 (\$125,000 over four years). FMU will match the ITQ grant in the amount of approximately \$49,000 annually.

The purpose of the Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty is to increase the achievement of children of poverty by improving the quality of undergraduate teacher preparation, graduate teacher preparation, and the professional development of in-service teachers. The center has seven partner school districts: Florence 1, Florence 2, Darlington, Dillon 2, Marion 1, Marion 2, and Marion 7.

Each grant will fund a project that will draw together 24 teachers (three from each grade level, grades one through eight) from the partner schools to participate in 13 weekends of intensive immersion in curriculum development over a period of seven months. The purpose of the immersion sessions is to learn the conceptual framework for developing high-quality instructional units, which are standards-based and highly effective for teaching children of poverty. The sessions will be led by FMU consultant faculty under the guidance of Lorin Anderson, an educator and psychologist.

Upon completion, each curriculum unit will be field tested in the partner school districts and revised as a part of an ongoing process of development. Teachers will communicate with peers and consultant faculty to refine instructional units, keep journals to determine impact on teaching and learning, and do self-assessments to document changes in teacher practice and student achievement. Completed units will be put on CDs and disseminated in the Pee Dee region by the center and ultimately throughout the state of South Carolina through the S.C. Department of Education.

“The curriculum development projects funded by the Commission on Higher Education and the S.C. State Department of Education will afford participating teachers the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers across the Pee Dee and under the direction of Dr. Anderson, a nationally recognized researcher,” said Tammy Pawloski, director of the COE. “The resulting curriculum units, developed by these local teachers that have experienced success in working with children of poverty, are

certain to be products that will improve instruction in schools that serve large populations of low-income families.”

More information can be found at the COE’s website, www.fmucenterofexcellence.org.

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