



Contact: Gretchen Wolfram
317/916-7304
317/255-2640 (home)

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Lilly Endowment awards \$44.3 million to Marion County public schools

Seven Marion County school districts will share \$44.3 million in grant funds approved by Lilly Endowment Inc. in its Marion County Public School Initiative. The proposals, which will affect 110,000 students in the county, cover ambitious projects that school officials believe will have “transformative” effects on their districts.

Their plans include conducting preschool programs to enhance school readiness, providing intensive staff development for teachers and administrators, improving literacy dramatically, integrating technology into the curriculum, contracting with Edison Schools to administer two new schools, beefing up assessment and data collection, focusing on student-centered approaches to learning, and personalizing education plans for each student.

“These proposals were the result of intensive discussion and planning in these school districts,” said Sara B. Cobb, Endowment vice president for education. “We were pleased to see that these discussions and public meetings drew participants from a broad range of perspectives – from teachers to parents, students to civic leaders, businesses to religious and neighborhood organizations. The level of caring about our community’s public schools was indeed inspiring.

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“I think it is important to point out that these groups struggled with important issues, forthrightly acknowledged their districts’ unique challenges and learned there are no quick fixes – that there is no silver bullet that will magically cause test scores to skyrocket or all students to achieve at their maximum capability,” she said. “They realize that this is hard work requiring perseverance on a daily basis.

“Nevertheless, the Endowment was most impressed with the optimism and determination expressed in these proposals. It is obvious that the success of their students is uppermost in their minds and how to achieve that success is their number one concern,” she said.

All 11 school districts in Marion County received planning grants of \$50,000, and all submitted proposals for implementation grants. For this round, districts could request funding based on their enrollment (\$400 per student).

The following Marion County school districts have been approved to receive implementation grants:

◆ **Indianapolis Public Schools, \$16,443,200**

Comprehensive program to improve student and teacher performance

Challenges: high dropout and poverty rates, failure to meet state standards in reading and math, children unprepared to begin school.

Features:

Staff development tailored for urban educators.

Summer programs for preschool children and pupils in grades 1-3.

Preschool program to address language and vocabulary development with transportation, breakfast and lunch to be provided.

Literacy enhancement program for early-elementary students who are not reading at grade level.

Programs to ease transition from elementary to middle school.

Establishment of timely and precise instruments for measuring student progress.

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◆ **Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township, \$5,913,200**

Lawrence Township Network for the Digital Age

Challenges: declines in reading achievement; changing nature of work; rapid growth (90 percent since 1983) has fueled inconsistency across the district, i.e. its schools with low poverty rates outperform the state average by a substantial margin, while only one of its three high-poverty elementary schools even performs at the state average.

Features:

A warranty for parents, guaranteeing that their children will read at grade level by the end of the third grade.

Additional reading strategies at all grade levels and enhanced instruction in digital skills.

An online learning environment called the “LT Network: Learning and Teaching for the Digital Age” that will deliver professional development to upgrade teachers’ knowledge of and instruction in digital-age practices.

◆ **Metropolitan School District of Perry Township, \$4,602,330**

Program to improve academic performance and increase parent involvement

Challenges: increasing student dropout rate, declines in standardized test results, an obvious gap in student achievement between college-preparatory students and others, insufficient parental involvement.

Features:

Implementation of a national model of school reform in two new elementary schools. The township will contract with the Edison Schools whose reform model emphasizes individual student achievement. Perry Township will be the first school district in Indiana to establish such a relationship with Edison Schools.

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District-wide targeting on reading improvement.

Programs to increase parent involvement in the schools.

◆ **Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, \$3,809,800**

Project CLEAR (Community Legacy of Educational Achievement and Responsibility)

Challenges: substantially declining standardized test scores, falling graduation rates and increasing diversity (more than 400 students come from families who collectively speak at least 50 different languages).

Features:

Creating number of technology-based programs to improve student assessment.

Giving staff the data they need to understand children's individual strengths and weaknesses.

Giving parents access to and training about the same data.

Extensive professional development for all teachers and administrators to implement a more individual, student-centered approach to teaching.

Establishment of a community center to provide technology training and school readiness activities for parents.

◆ **Metropolitan School District of Warren Township, \$4,369,600**

Comprehensive program to improve K-12 education

Challenges: population with low average household income; fewer of its high school graduates enroll in college and fewer of its adults have a college degree than the state's average in either category.

Features:

Customization of education to meet student needs.

Transformation of the roles of teachers and learners.

Integration of technology into the curriculum.

Building stronger partnerships with the community.

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Targeting basic skills, especially literacy, and providing professional development for teachers that includes technological applications.

Reorganization of the 3,000-student Warren Central High School to create a more personalized environment by dividing the school into small units.

◆ **Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, \$3,948,092**

Virtual Learning Community

Challenges: multilingual, diverse district; decreasing ability to educate all its students, about 30 percent of whom are not achieving at grade level.

Features:

Community learning centers that will give students more time and opportunities to study and give their families access to technology.

Enrollment in online university courses.

Programs in tutoring and mentoring.

Early literacy activities.

After-school and summer learning opportunities.

Professional development for staff.

◆ **Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, \$5,175,200**

SCOPE (System Change Offering Personalized Education) Program

Challenges: poor literacy rates, increasing diversity, schools that are too large to meet students' individual needs (e.g., Ben Davis High School with 2,600 students), inconsistent parental involvement.

Features:

Change learning culture to offer programs and initiatives that connect students to peers, adults and resources.

Develop an education plan for each student to tailor the student's learning experience according to his or her needs, interests and abilities. The plan will

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follow the student from grade to grade and through graduation from high school.

Establishment of professional development programs to aid staff in making this change to a personalized learning culture.

The Marion County Public School Initiative was preceded by the Endowment's Marion County Private School Initiative which in July resulted in awards of \$24.1 million to 14 private schools and the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Both these efforts complement the Endowment's statewide initiative called Community Alliances to Promote Education (CAPE), its grant programs with institutions of higher education in Indiana and its other programs to raise the state's educational attainment level.

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For more information about each district's plans, please contact the following persons:

Indianapolis Public Schools
Duncan N.P. Pritchett, superintendent, 226-4000

Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township
Timothy Hyland, superintendent, 423-8200

Metropolitan School District of Perry Township
Douglas Williams, superintendent, 780-4200

Metropolitan School District of Pike Township
Edward Bowes, superintendent, 387-2220

Metropolitan School District of Warren Township
Peggy Hinckley, superintendent, 532-6100

Metropolitan School District of Washington Township
Eugene White, superintendent, 845-9400

Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township
Terry Thompson, superintendent, 243-8251