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Indiana communities team up for TEAMS grants from Lilly Endowment

From Lake County in the north to Spencer County in the south, 11 school corporations have received grants totaling \$258,827 from Lilly Endowment Inc. in the Endowment's new TEAMS (Targeting Educational Achievement for Maximum Success) program.

The competitive grants program invited all Indiana school districts to form collaborative teams to explore, discuss, evaluate and propose a plan or program that will better prepare their students for higher education. The team needed to include, at least, the superintendent, a principal, a teacher, a parent and a school board member.

The school corporations could apply for grant funds for a variety of purposes, ranging from implementing a sharply focused program to studying some issue and then planning how to address it.

The chief reason for instituting the program was the Endowment's long-standing concern about the state's low educational attainment levels. (Indiana ranks near the bottom of the states in the percentage of its adult population with a baccalaureate degree.)

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“In the last few years, the Endowment has funded initiatives, projects and programs to help address this issue at various levels of the education spectrum and to raise public awareness and concern,” said Sara B. Cobb, Endowment vice president for education.

“We designed the TEAMS program so that the most relevant parties would be engaged together in determining how their school corporation could most effectively address an issue relating to improving student preparation for higher education. We were most pleased with the response and the discussion it appears to have generated,” she said.

“Virtually all the proposals showed a high level of local conversation among various constituencies. This response is another indication to us that Indiana communities are becoming increasingly aware of and concerned about the educational needs of their citizens,” she said.

Indiana school corporations receiving the TEAMS grants are:

Cannelton City Schools, \$25,000

John Thomas, superintendent

With one of the lowest college enrollment rates in the state, Cannelton wants to target students early enough to influence course selection and college-going behaviors. Cannelton Schools will establish a comprehensive program, including visits to college campuses and job sites, college nights and college readiness camps for eighth- and ninth-graders.

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Carmel Clay Schools, Carmel, \$25,000

Ernest A. Husarik, superintendent

Funds will go toward a professional development program for teachers in the upper elementary and middle school grades. Test data show that, while many students' reading scores are increasing, too many are still scoring below expectations. An ongoing initiative will build local expertise in teaching and assessing strategic reading skills in grades four through eight.

Jay School Corp., Portland, \$25,000

Thomas Little, superintendent

Funds will support a professional development program to increase teachers' abilities to teach reading. (Currently, only the third-graders in Jay County meet or exceed the Indiana average on the ISTEP+.) Teachers will learn new strategies for teaching reading across all grades and content areas, thus increasing students' preparedness for higher education.

Mooreville Consolidated School Corp., \$25,000

William E. Roberson, superintendent

According to recent statistics, Mooreville High School has lagged behind the state average in the percentage of its graduates who pursue higher education, and too

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many of those who enroll in college do not graduate. A new program will target ninth-graders, making sure that they demonstrate successful academic progress, have a four-year plan to support postsecondary attendance and identify a field of career interest.

North Adams Community Schools Corp., Decatur, \$25,000

Jim Compton, superintendent

Program will aim at high school students' ability to read, write and speak. North Adams has targeted reading development at the elementary school and middle school levels and has seen dramatic improvement in scores on standardized tests. Many middle and high school students, however, struggle to pass state literacy standards. The funds will support a series of strategies, including professional development and training for high school faculty, to raise students' literacy skills.

Paoli Community School Corp., \$25,000

Alva L. Sibbitt Jr., superintendent

The corporation intends to target early elementary reading skills by focusing on parents. Orange County now ranks last of Indiana's 92 counties in economic development, and unemployment is in the double digits. Less than 50 percent of the district's adults have earned a high school diploma, and less than 3 percent have received a college degree. To address the cycle of illiteracy, Paoli will offer a comprehensive program for parents that includes basic literacy and writing development skills,

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introduction to the library and book-selection techniques, GED training and parenting education.

Springs Valley Community Schools, French Lick, \$8,902

Roger Fisher, superintendent

Project will study the feasibility of instituting a teacher appreciation compensation package and work through the details of the plan. Like several other school systems in Indiana, Springs Valley has paid teachers principally on the basis of seniority rather than on their skills and achievements. The district believes teachers should be rewarded when they do their best to improve education.

Tell City-Troy Township School Corp., Tell City, \$25,000

Larry Phillips, superintendent

Because of Tell City's location, distance learning technology will be used to increase professional development opportunities for staff members. (A lack of time and money severely curtails attendance at workshops and conferences.) A survey showed that staff members are interested in increasing their expertise in areas like teaching strategies for remedial learning, technology training and literacy.

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Tri-Creek School Corp., Lowell, \$24,925

Donald R. Yeoman, superintendent

A staff development plan will target middle school teachers. Staff members are concerned by their lack of strategies to deal with different levels of academic ability and increased cultural diversity. Teachers will be trained in a method known as differentiated instruction, which means that they learn how to respond to individual learners' needs.

Vigo County School Corp., Terre Haute, \$25,000

Danny Tanoos, superintendent

Funds will be used for a program to improve reading comprehension skills at Terre Haute's two middle schools that have the city's lowest socioeconomic population. Because of income level, many of these students will qualify for financial aid to pursue higher education, but without strong academic skills, many will not succeed. Through this new program and bolstered through their relationships with Indiana State University, the two schools will pursue professional development to improve students' reading skills and document students' success through detailed data collection and analysis.

Whitley County Consolidated Schools, Columbia City, \$25,000

William J. Carnes, superintendent

Funds will be used to implement the Baldrige in Education initiative, a process of "continuous improvement." (Indiana law now mandates that schools will be accredited according to a standard of "continuous improvement.") Some districts in Indiana are

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using the Baldrige process, and schools in five other states are reporting success. For example, North Carolina has been using the process for nearly 10 years and has seen its SAT scores rise 40 points. Whitley County will train all of its 500 staff members in the Baldrige process within the next 18 months, including teachers, custodians, instructional assistants, office managers, bus drivers and principals.

NOTE: All statistics in the program descriptions have been supplied by the school corporations.