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NEWS RELEASE

DAYTON SCHOOLS JOINING GROWING NUMBER OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS TURNING TO UD FOR GUIDANCE IN TEACHING LITERACY

DAYTON, Ohio — When Dayton School District administrators stepped up efforts to deliver students from academic emergency, they turned to the University of Dayton for some back-to-school help.

This fall, 28 Dayton elementary school teachers have joined 28 teachers from nine other districts participating in the Ohio Literacy Specialist Project administered locally by the University of Dayton. Launched in fall 2000 and funded by the Ohio Department of Education, LSP is “a statewide professional development initiative that disseminates a core curriculum for literacy teaching in Ohio schools,” according to its Web site at www.literacyspecialist.org. In other words, the project aims to improve student learning by increasing teacher learning.

The premise is simple — the key to improving literacy in children is to first bring educators together on the same page. With a common framework of effective teaching strategies, students in kindergarten through third grade will have a better shot at learning to read well and independently, project administrators say.

At UD, elementary teachers designated by their school districts as literacy specialists meet one day a month during the academic year for training in the program’s core curriculum. UD’s Pat Grogan and Katie Kinnucan-Welsch, professors of teacher education in the School of Education and Allied Professions, administer the program for Montgomery, Shelby, Darke, Warren, Butler, Preble and Clark counties. The literacy specialists in turn facilitate the study and application of the curriculum with other teachers in their districts.

“The core curriculum is not a program, but is a framework to understand how best to teach reading and writing,” Grogan said. “It’s a wonderful tool that allows you to evaluate your program to see if it meets what has been designated best practice and make decisions accordingly.”

In its first two years, UD has built participation to include 28 teachers from Sidney, Franklin, Greenville, Lakota, Richard Allen, Lebanon, Tri County North, Tecumseh and West

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Carrollton schools. By bringing Dayton schools on board for the 2002-2003 academic year, the number of literacy specialists training through UD has doubled. Because of the size of Dayton's contingent, training is held in the district's Roosevelt Center. The remaining teachers train on campus.

"We made a commitment to move our students out of academic emergency by building their Ohio proficiency test scores by five percentage points each year, so our focus is on literacy," said Stacia Smith, associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction in Dayton Public Schools. "We're sending teachers from all of our K-6 schools to participate in training and help build our knowledge base. By having those literacy specialists work with our other teachers on modeling, resources, methods and other elements of the program, all our teachers will be talking the same language. That will be a key step in helping us achieve our goals."

According to Grogan, the idea of talking the same language — consistency — is as critical to improving literacy as is quality of teaching. "We're not advocating one-size-fits-all, we're advocating consistency," Grogan said. "Consistency is what's important for the kids. It's too hard when teaching is going in so many different directions, especially when a child is moving from one school to another or even from one classroom to another."

Aside from UD, participating universities are Akron, John Carroll, Kent State, Ohio, Ohio State and Youngstown State universities and the University of Cincinnati and University of Toledo. Field faculty from those universities meet monthly in Columbus with LSP director Catherine Rosemary, associate professor in the department of education and allied studies at John Carroll University, for program planning and development.

Since the project began, nearly 200 literacy specialists have shared the curriculum with some 2,200 teachers in 98 school districts.

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