

3-20-2014

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Recommended Citation

Public Affairs, Roger Williams University, "Grant to RWU and Providence Schools to Aid Educators in Improving Math Proficiency" (2014). *Featured News Story*. 382.

https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news/382

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Grant to RWU and Providence Schools to Aid Educators in Improving Math Proficiency

Funds will support K-3 mathematics teachers serving English Language Learners in five Providence elementary schools



Webster Avenue Elementary School in Providence Image Credit: Providence Schools

March 20, 2014 | Public Affairs Staff

BRISTOL, R.I. – The Rhode Island Office of Higher Education has awarded a \$145,000 grant to Roger Williams University (RWU) for the first year of a new collaborative program in partnership with the Providence Public School District (PPSD) aimed to improve mathematics achievement for English Language Learners in five local elementary schools from kindergarten through third grade.

The new professional development program, PRIME-ELL (Providence Rhode Island Mathematics Excellence – English Language Learners) will create mathematics professional learning communities where local K-3 teachers will work with RWU faculty and students to build on existing math curriculum, learn best practices and develop specific classroom strategies to better meet math learning goals and improve academic achievement for English Language Learners.

“We are very grateful to the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education for this grant and to the faculty and students of Roger Williams University for their partnership to improve academic achievement in mathematics for our English Language Learners,” said Providence School Superintendent Dr. Susan

Lusi. "We are working daily to improve the education we provide to our ELL students and deeply appreciate the support of RIOHE and the partnership of Roger Williams University in this effort."

Latinos make up 75 percent of the English Language Learners (ELLs) in Rhode Island, who are students actively acquiring English, and whose primary language is one other than English. The [Latino Policy Institute](#) (LPI) at [Roger Williams University](#) released research in 2013 that shows local Latino students score two to three grade levels behind their white peers in math. With this new research from LPI, the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education initiated a Call for Proposals for a new grant created specifically to improve mathematics education for ELLs in the state.

By following a mathematics learning community (MLC) professional development model, the PRIME-ELL program aims to decrease that achievement gap between ELL students and their peers by helping PPSD teachers improve their knowledge and instruction of math. The program will be led by RWU faculty from its School of Education, Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences as well as regional and national ELL specialists including the Latino Policy Institute.

"With this federal grant, the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education is specifically targeting improved teaching and learning in mathematics for elementary school students who are English Language Learners," said Clark Greene, interim Commissioner for Higher Education. "The goal for the funded projects is to ensure professional development opportunities are not only responsive to the needs of districts and schools, but also inform our educator preparation programs. We have a collective responsibility in higher education to strengthen teaching and learning in K-12 and the collaboration between Roger Williams University and Providence Public Schools was evident in the PRIME-ELL proposal. I look forward to seeing the end results of this work."

Over the course of the three-year grant, the program will feature 11 professional development sessions each year including a weeklong summer institute with the goal to reach approximately 85 PPSD teachers and 1,400 ELL students across nine schools. Five PPSD elementary schools will begin this spring including: Asa Messer Elementary, George J. West Elementary, Reservoir Avenue Elementary, Webster Avenue Elementary and William D'Abate Elementary.

"The faculty leaders from RWU in the PRIME-ELL program, from our School of Education and the Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences, have unique expertise and experience in implementing professional development programming in math and we look forward to collaborating with the PPSD faculty to implement best practices that better match different teaching approaches to the specific learning challenges facing Rhode Island's ELL students," says Kelly Donnell, associate professor of education, Roger Williams University. "The PRIME-ELL program also offers our education students a rare opportunity to learn from local educators and get involved in real-world research and curricula development all while offering a fresh perspective on classroom innovation and how we can improve student success in urban schools."

The grant awarded to RWU and PPSD is funded by the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education's Higher Education Partnerships Grant Program through the federal Title II, Part A-Teacher and Principal Training and Recruitment Fund.

About Providence Schools: *The Providence Public School District (PPSD) is the largest school district in the state of Rhode Island. PPSD operates 39 schools serving approximately 24,000 students and their families. The mission of Providence Schools is to prepare all students to succeed in the nation's colleges and universities and in their chosen professions.*