



Council Bluffs

Community School District
...Where Dreams Begin!

News Release

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Iowa West Foundation Commits \$5.2 Million over Five Years to Strengthen Teaching Effectiveness and Support Student Learning in the Council Bluffs Schools

Grant to Fund Curriculum Development, Instructional Coaches and Summer School

(Council Bluffs, IA) – The Council Bluffs Community School District is proud to announce the Iowa West Foundation will make another significant investment to improve opportunities for educational attainment in Council Bluffs. The Foundation will invest \$5.2 million in funding over five years.

According to Superintendent Martha Bruckner, the support from the Iowa West Foundation will play a big part in the District's work to help ensure each student is successful. The District has made a 100% graduation rate a priority.

In 2007, an independent Pottawattamie County Needs Assessment identified the top need in the community as increasing the graduation rate. The Council Bluffs Community School District has shown recent improvement, with a 74.56% graduation rate for the graduating class of 2008, up from the 70.35% rate in 2007. This increase resulted in the district moving out of last place for graduation rates in the state, but still struggling with 204 dropouts from the class of 2008 and the third lowest graduation rate.

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“The Foundation identified increasing educational attainment as an over-arching goal to address community needs,” said Todd Graham, Iowa West’s President & CEO, “and this commitment is another significant step to reach that goal.”

The grant will make it possible for the district to fully implement a program in which eight on-staff instructional coaches will provide leadership in developing curriculum and providing direct support to strengthen teaching effectiveness in middle school and high school language arts, math, science and social studies classrooms.

The coaches will work one-on-one and with teams of teachers to strengthen their effectiveness in the use of best teaching practices to maximize student learning. Additional grant funding will provide resources for the district to complete curriculum updates in other subject areas, such as world languages, music and the fine arts.

“The Curriculum/Instruction Coaches will allow our secondary teachers to strengthen their instruction in the core area classrooms,” Dr. Bruckner said.

Another major investment of the grant will make it possible for 700 students in the Council Bluffs Schools to participate in a comprehensive, month-long summer school program, beginning in the summer of 2010. The goal of the five-year summer school grant will be to close the achievement gap and reverse the summer learning loss that often occurs for students between school years. The program will be voluntary and open to all students, but particular attention will be paid to recruiting students who are struggling academically and are at risk of falling behind their peers.

According to Dr. Bruckner, current summer school offerings are limited and offered only to those who qualify for special education services and those who need to attain credits not earned the prior year. “The support for summer school will give us the opportunity to host a

summer experience that will engage students in ways far different than the normal school year,” she said.

This latest investment in resources from the Iowa West Foundation builds upon the support the Foundation has provided to the Council Bluffs Schools to accelerate meeting the community’s top need and to amplify the district’s improvement efforts. Prior grants supported:

- Completion of a curriculum management audit and a strategic planning process;
- School Administrative Managers (SAMs) in seven schools for three years;
- an upgraded computer system network, a student data analysis system, and a curriculum management system, which are critical for schools to monitor and assess student progress; and
- planned shuttle buses to improve access for students to educational opportunities in the district.

The initiatives were developed in cooperation with Education First Consulting, which also has worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on creative education programs based on successful best practice research.

According to Dr. Bruckner, the partnership and support from the Iowa West Foundation will make a difference for students and the entire community. “The Foundation and its partner Education First have been insightful in helping the District to carefully design and thoroughly evaluate all of the grant-funded initiatives,” she said. “I know that educators from across the country will be following these new and innovative practices in the Council Bluffs Schools.”

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