

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

NEWS

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Illinois State University Receives Grant from the U.S. Department of Education to Train Future Teachers of English Learners in Lake County

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Illinois State University's College of Education is again the recipient of a grant to help Lake County paraprofessionals make the transition to certified teacher with Bilingual and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) approvals.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement announced the award of the five-year grant for Transitioning Paraprofessionals into Teachers of English Learners (TPTEL), a partnership between Illinois State, the University Center of Lake County and Waukegan, North Chicago, Zion and Round Lake school districts with the aim of increasing the number of skilled teachers who work with Latino students learning English.

"There is a shortage of qualified teachers for English language learners," said Deborah Curtis, dean of the College of Education at Illinois State. "The TPTEL partnership will help address this gap."

In 2003 Illinois State University received a pioneering Transition to Teaching grant that made it one of the first in the nation to help paraprofessionals complete an initial bachelor's degree and teaching certification. Beatriz Alvarez was among the first of the program's 60 graduates completing her degree in 2006. Alvarez worked for six years as a paraprofessional at Little Fort Elementary and is now in her sixth year as a teacher at Glenwood Elementary in Waukegan. "The Transition to Teaching program opened the doors for me to grow and obtain an education and to do what I love, teach," said Alvarez. "The schedule was created around us providing us the opportunity to keep working while attending classes." She has gone on to earn a master's degree from American College of Education, a Type 75 Illinois Administrator's License, and is currently working on her reading specialist endorsement from Southern Illinois University.

The TPTEL program will begin the recruitment and training of over 50 paraprofessionals currently serving English-language learners as teachers' aides or as support staff in schools in the spring of 2012. The five-year project will guide paraprofessionals earning teaching certification and bilingual and ESL approval.

This "grow your own" strategy is designed to help school districts gain new teachers by investing in professionals who already have ties to their communities, said Maria L. Zamudio, project director and assistant coordinator of bilingual education at Illinois State. "These are individuals who are already in the field, and will obtain the credentials they need through our program at Illinois State University. We will deliver the coursework on site at the University Center of Lake County at Waukegan."

For more information about the Transitioning Paraprofessionals into Teachers of English Learners program contact Christina Moe, project coordinator, at cmmoe@ilstu.edu or (847) 665-4101.