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LINDENWOOD PARTNERS WITH SOUTHWEST CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

June 15, 2023

Needing a university that offers a master's degree in school counseling to partner with, the Southwest Center for Educational Excellence linked up with Lindenwood University and applied for a \$4.2 million Mental Health Professional Demonstration Grant.

The grant will provide scholarships to recruit and retain practicing teachers and graduated students committed to working as school counselors in high-demand public school districts. Approximately 20 member schools (K-12) are part of the grant.

Funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Mental Health Services Professional Development Grant Program will support the Southwest Center for Educational Excellence's efforts to build a well-trained and diverse behavioral health team in high-need schools in Southwest Missouri.

The number of candidates in the counseling school emphasis program will add two cohorts of counselors, increasing the census 100% from Fall of 2022, according to Professor of Counseling Dr. Sarah Patterson-Mills.

"More importantly, Lindenwood University's Counseling Department will be afforded the opportunity to equip K-12 schools with much-needed qualified and certification-tracked service providers," Patterson-Mills added. "These candidates-in-training will be placed within districts that do not have ample resources to meet our Missouri children and families' mental health needs."

The Southwest Center applied for the grant in the fall of 2022.

"Lindenwood was selected as a grant partner because the Southwest Center recognizes the established reputation of their ability to prepare counselors for our school workforce," Project Administrator Dr. Melissa Massey said.

The grant kicks off this fall with 25 students enrolled at Lindenwood. Another 25 students will start in 2024.

“We are so excited to be working with the Southwest Center on this grant,” said LU Project Coordinator Wendy Linton, a retired school counselor. “I know the positive impact of having trained school counselors can have on our schools.

According to research conducted in Missouri, Linton said, schools with a ratio of 250 students per counselor boast higher graduation rates and better attendance, while discipline referrals have declined.

“Meeting children’s social and emotional needs does affect their academic and career outcomes,” Linton added.