

RESEARCH BRIEFS

Proficiency by 2014: Closing the Achievement Gap

As part of a statewide education initiative, Western Kentucky University and other state AEL, Inc. co-venture partners are collaborating with the Kentucky Department of Education to try to close the minority achievement gap. The other AEL Inc. partners include universities from Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and in Kentucky, University of Kentucky and University of Louisville. In his efforts to move all children in Kentucky to proficiency by 2014, Commissioner Wilhoit has charged the group with identifying successful

strategies of individual schools and school districts to decrease the minority achievement gap. Western Kentucky University is a major player in the efforts to move all children in the commonwealth to proficiency. As such, the University is in a position to help improve the education of all of our youth.

Through a grant from KDE, Dr. Jackie Pope-Tarrence, Associate Professor of Psychology, is assisting three of the seven pilot school districts in their efforts to research and evaluate the development and implementation of strategies designed to reduce the minority achievement gap and move all students to proficiency.

Although there are common questions that will be addressed across all of the participating districts, each district has implemented its own plan in an effort to close the gap.

Researchers at the three universities will:

- assist the school districts in deciding the types of data to be assembled
- help the schools implement the necessary procedures to collect the data
- assist with analyzing and interpreting the data collected
- help each district address key questions common to all participating school districts
- determine which strategies were successful and disseminate this information to other schools across the Commonwealth

Each district and participating school has organized a team of administrators, teachers, and staff personnel to implement their plan and assess its effects on student achievement. Assistance from the participating universities will help schools use data more effectively in making curriculum and instructional decisions, help faculty use data to confront issues that are critical to improving student achievement, help school administrators and teachers use data to develop strategies for engaging parents and the community in decreasing the gap, and help school administrators and teachers use data to evaluate the effectiveness of chosen strategies.



Dr. Jackie Pope-Tarrence



Liz Jensen and Denise Henry, far left, two WKU Writing Project teachers at Cumberland Trace Elementary School, Bowling Green, have lunch with Governor Patton at the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English/Language Arts Annual Conference, February 2002, at Ft Thomas, KY.

WKU Writing Project Improves Teachers' Skills

"As a teacher I feel revitalized both personally and professionally. I feel a confidence I haven't felt before in my writing and teaching." — Anonymous

The WKU Writing Project — an affiliate of the National Writing Project (NWP), now in its 17th year at the university — is designed to make K-12th grade teachers better writers and teachers of writing. The project is funded annually by the NWP and the Kentucky Department of Education for about \$50,000 a year. Dr. John Hagaman, Professor of English, has managed these funds to improve public school teachers' abilities to teach writing; and the summer institutes have paid great dividends for students.

Dr. Hagaman has perfected the summer institutes. Every summer 20 exemplary teachers are invited to participate in an invitational Institute on Western's campus. Teachers brainstorm, write, revise, workshop, and publish their writing; research current theory and practice in the teaching of writing; and demonstrate best teaching practice before their peers. The participants laud the workshop.

"The greatest benefit of my experi-

ence in the WKU Writing Project has been a refocusing of my methods, strategies, and evaluation techniques for teaching writing. I feel as if I have been able to develop more fully my philosophy of teaching writing." — Jon Fredericks, Barren County Schools

There are many similar comments that come in from the evaluation of the activity each summer and during fall follow up school visits to observe the teachers implementing what they learned in the workshops.

To make this happen, the Kentucky Department of Education, the National Writing Project, and Western



A writing response group from the 2002 June WKU Writing Project Institute share their writing at an orientation session, prior to the Institute's opening.

have collaborated to fund the Project for over a million dollars over the years. Teachers receive both a stipend and graduate credit hours for their participation. The results are impressive.

Nearly 340 teachers will have completed the Project by summer's end, empowering them to reach students and other teachers in their home districts and schools. The State of Kentucky benefits from increased quality in teacher performance: over a dozen Project teachers have become principals, six have been tapped by the KDE for state positions, four have be-

come presidents of state professional organizations, and over a hundred function as writing consultants or Cluster Leaders for their schools. Finally, Western benefits by assisting teachers in achieving their Rank I and II, and National Board certification — and by keeping active in the development and evolution of the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

Listen to the teachers:

"I've taught high school English for 31 years. The WKU Writing Project was the single best teacher preparation I've ever had. How I wish I had had that opportunity in the early years of my

teaching." — Carolyn Smith, Grayson County High School

"The Writing Project has been the best and most beneficial thing I have done in graduate work. Not only did it improve my comfort level with writing, it also improved my competence. My students, however, have benefited the most!" — Jayne Squires, Green County Middle School

First Steps Monitoring, Resource and Assistance Project

The First Steps Monitoring, Resource and Assistance Project directed by Dr. Vicki Stayton has been housed at Western Kentucky University since July 1, 1993 with total funding over that period of time being approximately \$1,000,000. Funded by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services, the project has two major goals: (a) to provide training and technical assistance for professionals and family members specific to First Steps' (early intervention) services for infants and toddlers with disabilities; and (b) to monitor programs that provide First Steps' services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Geographically, this project serves the counties within the Barren River and Green River Area Development Districts.

Two professional staff members, a program consultant, and a parent con-

sultant provide the training and technical assistance. The program consultant has professional experience in the First Steps' program, and the parent consultant has a child who received First Steps' services. Training and technical assistance to First Steps occurs



Brain research has documented the need for varied stimulation early in life.

through workshops, on-site consultation, and quarterly informational meetings. An extensive resource center with a variety of print and video materials is housed on Western's campus and is available for use by First Steps' providers and families within the region, as well as Western faculty and students. In addition, the program and parent consultants serve as staff to the regional First Steps' advisory groups, the District Early Intervention Committees, in both the Barren and Green River Area Development Districts.

One professional staff member, a monitoring specialist, ensures that the First Steps' programs in these two regions are following state policy and regulations in the implementation of early intervention services. The monitoring specialist also has professional experience in the First Steps' program. Monitoring occurs through paper review and on-site visits to programs on an alternating schedule. Written reports are provided to the Kentucky First Steps' office in Frankfort with any follow-up with programs initiated through that office.

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences Grant Addresses Diversity in Public School Leadership

Dr. Lois Jircitano of the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Research directs the WKU Administrative Leadership Institute-Principalship Program. This grant is funded at \$135,000 by the Kentucky Department of Education. It is designed to address the under-representation of minority administrators currently available in the State of Kentucky. Applicants are selected from several geographical areas, from

a pool of candidates serving in various positions in the Kentucky schools. Individuals are recommended for participation by building supervisors; and represent multiple disciplines, years of experience, and different grade levels.

Students can earn a Master's Degree in Education, while obtaining administrative certification. Upon graduation, students become eligible for employment in an administrative

capacity throughout the state. Several have achieved these positions during the four years the program has been in existence.

The WKU Kentucky Administrative Leadership Institute-Principalship Program has contributed to the development of a diverse corps of qualified leaders essential to assisting Kentucky schools to meet the challenges of a multicultural global economy in the 21st century.

WKU Projects Receive Research Enhancement Grants

Six Western Kentucky University faculty members have received awards totaling more than \$120,000 in the Kentucky NSF EPSCoR Research Enhancement Grants competition. Of the seven full \$25,000 awards made to universities in Kentucky, researchers in Western's College of Science and Engineering received three of them. The Research Enhancement Grants provide valuable seed money to support and encourage science and technology research and often supplement existing grants to move the state's research agenda forward.

The National Science Foundation established the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research

(EPSCoR) in the late 1970s to balance the geographical distribution of federal research funds. The goal of the Kentucky NSF EPSCoR Research Enhancement Grant Program is to encourage talented faculty to remain in the Kentucky education system and to strengthen undergraduate teaching and research in the areas of science and technology.

The WKU faculty members who received awards are:

Dr. Michael Carini, Physics and Astronomy, "Photometric Monitoring of BI Lacertae Objects," \$10,173.

Dr. Bonnie Furman, Biology, "Resurgence of Elk (*Cervus Elaphus*) in Kentucky: PCR-Based Standards for

Long-Term Population Monitoring and Use in Law Enforcement," \$25,000.

Dr. Sigrid Jacobshagen, Biology, "Circadian Output Pathways Studies in *Chlamydomonas*," \$13,439.

Dr. Doug McElroy, Biology, "Spectral Sensitivity and Tuning of ERG b- and d- Waves in Lake Malawi Cichlid Fishes," \$25,000.

Dr. Ralph Salvatore, Chemistry, "Cesium Base Promoted Chemoselective P-Alkylations for the Generally Efficient Synthesis of Substituted Phosphines," \$25,000.

Dr. Young-Seok Shon, Chemistry, "Synthesis and Technological Applications of Functionalized Dendritic Nanocapsule," \$22,450.

Western Leads Social Work Training in the Region

The Western Kentucky University Program of Social Work's Training Resource Center (TRC) is an adult professional development program. The Training Resource Center is a Federally funded project under contract with Kentucky's Cabinet for Families and Children. The TRC's primary client is the Training Branch for the Division of Community-Based Services.

Each year the TRC receives a grant in excess of \$100,000 to provide multipurpose adult professional development training for social, human, and juvenile justice services professionals. It addition, it develops quality educational experiences for at-risk and delinquent youth.

Western's efforts, through the TRC, are part of a larger public service effort. In 1989, Western became the first training consortium of what now includes all eight of Kentucky's public universities. The University Training Consortium (UTC) is a unique, nationally recognized profes-

sional development partnership between Kentucky's eight public universities and the Cabinet for Families and Children. Each year this partnership helps provide more than 2,400 training events.

The primary goal of WKU's University Training Resource Center is to support opportunities to further enhance the excellence in training, teaching, and organizational growth for those human service workers (which total nearly one thousand) in the regions of Barren River, Green River, and Lincoln Trail. Thus, nearly every county west of I-65 and east, from the Land Between the Lakes, is included.

The TRC is committed to providing adult and child welfare workers with the necessary professional training to meet the demands of their jobs, to enhance job performance, and to improve service delivery. As a service oriented program, the Training Resource Center has adopted five principles of opera-



tion which guide its efforts: quality and timely service, a spirit of collaboration, friendliness and sincerity, making the Center a good place to work, and the development of outstanding staff and students.



THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.

PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

In December 1998, President Gary Ransdell directed the formation of the Western Kentucky University Research Foundation, Inc. (WKURF) to facilitate and expedite scholarship at Western. His vision resulted in approval of the WKURF by the WKU Board of Regents in September 1999, the State of Kentucky in November, and by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit to serve the educational needs of Western and the community in February 2000. Since July 1, 2001 the WKURF has become operational as the unaffiliated fiscal agent of most external funds from grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements.

The WKURF is governed by a thirteen-member Board of Directors that is community-oriented. The Chair of the Board must not be a Western employee. Community members serving on the board hail from a variety of community agencies and businesses. Six members of the board represent Western's principal academic units. Serving the board in *ex officio* capacities are the WKU President, Chief Financial Officer, Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and the WKURF Executive Director, who is charged with the financial management and development of the foundation. A Business Manager assists the Board in ensuring that accountability, allocability, and consistency standards are met. The board's guidance and the cooperation of senior university officials have enabled the WKURF to implement a management agreement and financial procedures with WKU. Currently, the board is working to provide more incentives for faculty members performing research and creative activities.

The rapid growth of external funding in the form of grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements stimulated

the formation of the WKURF. Over the past five years the efforts of Western's faculty and staff members, along with their students, have increased external awards from \$11,500,000 to nearly \$23,000,000. The Foundation is thus a big step to the next level of funding. The goal is to reach the \$30,000,000 mark by June 30, 2006. However, the figures are not as important as the research, instruction, and public service programs that these funds make possible. New programs to increase student learning and faculty development are the results of these combined efforts. New positions in all of the academic colleges and many support units have invigorated Western with activities and infrastructures that would not have been possible under state funding alone.

The WKURF provides many services that would not otherwise be available to Western. It promotes financial flexibility, provides incentives for intellectual property opportunities, provides customized services for contracting with business and industry, and, most importantly, helps Western to attract and retain quality researchers. The WKURF accomplishes these services by promoting the development, implementation, and coordination of extramurally-funded sponsored programs. The investment policy of the Board of Directors has the potential for providing even more incentives to best accomplish our educational purposes.

We hope that you'll take an interest in the growth of the WKURF as one new feature among many exciting areas of growth of Western Kentucky University. You can reach the WKU Research Foundation at 270-745-4652 and ask for Dr. Phil Myers, the Executive Director, or e-mail research.foundation@wku.edu.