

USI full-year student teaching pilot benefits students, local schools



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Fifteen University of Southern Indiana students are participating in a new full-year student teaching pilot program called “Teach Now, Transform Tomorrow.” USI has partnered with the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) to provide students with extensive

hands on experience, while serving as a resource for two local schools.

Unlike other student teaching programs, which revolve around the University calendar and last only one semester, the pilot program spans the entire EVSC school year, allowing participants to form closer bonds with their students and cooperative teachers.

Lodge and Lincoln are the two participating EVSC schools. Both have struggled to raise their state grade and were chosen because a majority of the students attending are low income or high risk. One goal of “Teach Now, Transform Tomorrow” is to teach education majors about the unique needs and challenges facing low-income students and, at the same time, to create a more productive learning environment for those students.

Katelyn Powless, 22, a senior at USI, student-teaches in a second-grade classroom at Lincoln. The Boonville native said she quickly learned it was important for students to know she cared about them and had their best interests in mind. “It’s difficult sometimes to work with high risk students, but the reward is so much greater,” she said.

Discussions about the pilot program began last August during a brainstorming session with USI and EVSC faculty. Gina Berridge, associate professor of education, and other education professors wanted to form a partnership with EVSC, “but we didn’t know what that partnership would look like,” she said. “Our resources were our students, and their resources were their schools. It’s a great opportunity to have our students go work at schools that need help the most.” The fact that USI’s new program spans a majority of the public-school year sets it apart from a majority of student teaching programs offered at other universities. Berridge said this was

important to her and others at the meeting. By extending the program's length, students get the opportunity to see how teachers begin the school year and establish relationships with their students from the beginning.

USI's student teaching program is rigorous. All of the candidates went through the same interview process as a teacher. Students were matched with their cooperative teachers in April and began preparing for the school year at the end of July.

Participants have nearly all the same responsibilities as an EVSC teacher, including lesson planning, looking at assessment data, and such as bus and walker duty. Throughout the school year, participants take on more of the instruction time and, by the final six weeks, will teach the entire class themselves.

In addition to teaching in the classroom five days a week, all of the students are taking full course loads of upper-level classes. Berridge and Terri Branson, another USI instructor involved in the program, teach some of the classes in a spare room at the schools, while other classes are offered online or at night.

Berridge said she and Branson try to make the assignments flexible, while also maintaining the standards of 300- and 400-level courses.

Mf6xerf Qscbz1j0xy Bpdbxzt7evlp Doqv6umkbcUSI senior Elizabeth Wilm, 21, student teaches in a fifth-grade class at Lincoln. An Evansville native, she is a member of the USI tennis team, and said it can be difficult to manage her busy schedule. "Last year I was a college student, and now I have the same responsibilities as a teacher," she said. "This is almost like my first year of teaching."

But, participants in the program said they wouldn't trade the experience. "I've learned more in this program than I learned from three years in a classroom," Powless said. "It's one thing to have someone lecture to you, and another to actually do it."

USI and EVSC will research and monitor "Teach Now, Transform Tomorrow" over the next year to determine how well the program works. Berridge said she thinks it has a bright future and will likely return next year. "We've had really positive feedback from the principals," she said. "They think it's working, not only for their schools, but also for our students."