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State Farm Awards Grant in Support of Bloomington Junior High School and Illinois Wesleyan University Partnership

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. --State Farm Insurance Companies awarded Illinois Wesleyan University and project director, Robin Leavitt, IWU associate professor of educational studies \$50,000 for a pilot project titled "Promise and Potential: A Public School-University-Community Partnership." The award is designed to support the academic achievement of middle school students, enhance pre-service teacher education and the professional development of teachers. The program is in cooperation with Bloomington Junior High School (BJHS) and the IWU Teacher Education Program.

Robin Leavitt, associate professor of Educational Studies at Illinois Wesleyan said, "This project emerged from several years of working with BJHS faculty, staff and students. We wanted to do more to support BJHS students and teachers as they in turn support the pre-service teacher education program at Illinois Wesleyan. Most university-public school partnerships are large-scale projects; we wanted to demonstrate what could be accomplished when a smaller university and school collaborate. The long-term goals of this program are to make a difference in the lives of young adolescents and to support the development of responsive, reflective and effective teachers."

State Farm support of the partnership during the 2001-2002 school year will allow the development and implementation of the three program goals (described below). In addition funding will support the documentation and assessment of the program's impact on BJHS and IWU students and faculty.

The project goals are:

- Intervention for middle school students at risk of school failure: The IWU Educational Studies department will place a number of IWU students at BJHS who will provide more than 2200 hours of supplemental educational services to BJHS students that BJHS teachers would not otherwise be able to provide. Some IWU students will serve as "coaches," while others will work in classrooms and with the middle school teachers on educational research directed at professional development. Leavitt emphasized the shared belief of partnership participants that "these BJHS students are youth with promise and potential. Research tells us that the involvement of caring adults and mentors can make a significant difference in the lives of youth on the margins."
- Pre-service teacher education: With the mentorship of BJHS teachers, IWU teacher-certification candidates will develop their knowledge and skills in meeting the diverse needs of students in public schools, particularly those at-risk for school failure.
- Professional development of teachers: BJHS teachers will benefit from the shared research of IWU students and faculty as they endeavor to address everyday classroom issues and engage in ongoing professional development as they face the complex array of challenges in today's classrooms.