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CREEED, El Paso Community Foundation and UTEP launch teacher initiative

By Sara Sanchez/El Paso Inc. staff writer Oct 6, 2020

Backed by a \$1.36 million grant, an El Paso-based education nonprofit, the El Paso Community Foundation and the University of Texas at El Paso have launched a new effort to expand teacher recruitment, training and retention efforts in the region.

On Tuesday, the Council on Regional Economic Expansion and Educational Development, or CREEED, announced the initiative, which is supported by a grant from the Prentice Farrar Brown & Alline Ford Brown Foundation, for which Bank of America is the trustee.

The grant will be used to expand several CREEED and partner initiatives, including the Miner Teacher Residency Program and mentorship programs for early-career teachers. It will also strengthen the region's teacher pipeline and create pathways to teaching for K-12 students.

Amy O'Rourke, director of the Choose to Excel program at CREEED, said the grant came from work done by a 2019 task force that was charged with identifying needs of the region's teacher pipeline.

She said the task force wanted to prioritize support for teachers in their first three years in the classroom so that they have the tools to stay in the profession longer.

"Research shows there's a dramatic turnover of teachers in the first three years because it's overwhelming and hard, and they don't always have the support in place to overcome those challenges, so they pursue other opportunities," O'Rourke said.

Some of the grant funding will be used to support new teachers, according to CREEED, and UTEP is developing a program to match early-career teachers with experienced ones who can serve as mentors.

The majority of the teachers in the El Paso area went to El Paso schools, including the region's public school districts, El Paso Community College and UTEP.

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Clifton Tanabe, dean of the UTEP College of Education, said the college has taken a tough look at the programs offered and is trying to better align them with what's needed in the region.

Some of the grant funding will go toward creating pathways and identifying potential future teachers from high school students, according to CREEED.

"Teaching is not a fallback in this region; it's an impactful profession with tremendous career pathways," Tanabe said. "Our students will go out, get a third-grade class, and by year 2 or 3 they start getting better. But the third graders in that classroom only have one year. Our teachers have to be ready to teach at a high level on that first day."

The grant will also be used to support up to 35 teachers in EPISD and Socorro ISD, and 15 in the Ysleta ISD.

The support is through the Miner Teacher Residency Program, which was established in 2019 with a partnership with US PREP, or University-School Partnerships for Renewal of Educator Preparation, a coalition supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The residency pairs a UTEP College of Education student with an experienced teacher in classrooms throughout the participating school districts, and includes a stipend.

The grant funds will be managed over the next year by both CREEED and the El Paso Community Foundation. They will work alongside UTEP and the El Paso, Socorro, Ysleta, Canutillo, Fabens and Tornillo independent school districts.

Stephanie Otero, vice president of operations at the El Paso Community Foundation, said that the task force is focusing on the local schools because that's where teacher candidates are coming from.

"We're geographically isolated," Otero said. "So our focus has to be UTEP and Region 19."

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