The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the College of Education $7.5 million for its Collaboration and Resources for Encouraging and Supporting Transformations in Education (CREST-Ed) program, which is designed to increase the number of teachers committed to high-need schools in urban and rural settings.

The College of Education will partner with Albany State University, Columbus State University, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future and nine county school systems to recruit, train and support 250-300 students who want to teach in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

“The idea behind this grant is to broaden the scope of the work we’re doing and connect more with young people about teaching or working in STEM fields,” said Gwen Benson, CREST-Ed principal investigator. “And we want to share our knowledge and experiences with institutions who are committed to serving students in high-needs schools.”

$7.5 million grant extends College of Education’s partnerships with local schools and universities to prepare and support high-quality educators

Learning in Schools

The future STEM teachers trained through CREST-Ed will have access to teacher residencies, extended field experiences that put students in classrooms for the entire academic year.

Benson said the teacher residencies are a key component of preparing teachers for the demands they’ll face when they’ve graduated and found jobs at high-need schools.
“I hope that by the end of this grant, we've truly had an impact on teacher preparation and community members start to see the value of teacher residencies,” she said. “I'd like to see our teacher residency used as a national model.”

The grant will also implement and expand on its Cross Career Learning Communities initiative – which brings teachers and administrators together to discuss best practices and increase student achievement – and develop Practitioner Learning Communities to allow for discussions around more specific subject areas, such as math, science and literacy.

Community Outreach

Though many of CREST-Ed’s programs incorporate college students and current teachers working in the field, it will also reach out to high school students interested in teaching math and science by expanding the college’s Academy for Future Teachers (AFT) to Albany State and Columbus State.

This three-week summer program invites rising juniors and seniors to campus to discuss education, communication styles and professional development, as well as learn ways to teach math and science for elementary, middle and high school students. AFT also incorporates Georgia’s College and Career Readiness Standards, a new statewide accountability system aimed at ensuring all Georgia public school students are prepared for higher education and career opportunities.

Benson also hopes to see more parental involvement through this grant, as faculty from the college’s Department of Kinesiology and Health develop nutrition classes for high school students at partner schools – and their families – to attend, and the college’s Center for School Safety, School Climate and Classroom Management brings its research on bullying and cyberbullying to the table.

Sustaining School Partnerships

The CREST-Ed grant is the third major grant project the College of Education has received to develop partnerships with local K-12 schools and train teachers to serve traditionally underserved populations.

In 2003, the five-year, $6.5 million Professional Development School Partnerships Deliver Success project (PDS2) helped the college reach out to schools in metro-Atlanta to share current research, professional development opportunities and strategies to improve student achievement.

The college expanded its K-12 school partnerships in both rural and urban areas when it received a $13.5 million Teacher Quality Partnership grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2009 to establish the Network for Enhancing Teacher Quality (NET-Q) project.

With the new CREST-Ed grant, Benson said the college will be able to maintain the collaborative partnerships it's cultivated since 2003 and continue learning innovative ways to train STEM teachers for the classroom.

“It’s exceptional that we’ve been able to create and sustain partnerships with the K-12 schools that we’ve worked with over the last 12 years,” Benson said. “They’ve given us feedback on how our teacher candidates are doing and we’ve learned more about the needs of students and teachers in high-need schools. It’s taken effort on both sides.”

“THE IDEA BEHIND THIS GRANT IS TO BROADEN THE SCOPE OF THE WORK WE’RE DOING AND CONNECT MORE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT TEACHING OR WORKING IN STEM FIELDS.”

-GWEN BENSON
College of Education Associate Professor Caitlin McMunn Dooley was awarded a three-year, $1.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation to develop a curriculum for integrating computer science into urban elementary school classrooms.

Dooley is working with the International Society for Technology in Education and the Georgia Institute of Technology on the Integrated Computer Science in Elementary Curricula (iCS) project, which is designed to improve elementary students’ capacity for academic learning, creativity and motivation as they learn about computer science.

Third through fifth grade teachers at one metro-Atlanta elementary school will integrate computer science into project-based learning using the same strategies industry leaders use to create websites, apps, games and other digital media. Their experiences and results will be compared to those of a nearby school doing a similar project-based method without integrating computer science.

In addition to creating a curriculum that other teachers can use in schools to integrate computer science into their lessons, Dooley hopes the project can shed light on how historically underrepresented groups can become participants and leaders in an increasingly digital society.

“Our goal is to invite children and their teachers to explore digital literacies, motivate learning and nurture creativity,” Dooley said. “By focusing students’ learning on how to create and adapt new technologies, teachers will be well-suited to innovate and inspire learning with technology and provide pathways for kids to access well-paying jobs in the future.”

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MINRS project to help children needing additional support to succeed

College of Education Associate Professor Stephen Truscott received a five-year, $1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs for the Multi-level Interventions for Non-Responders (MINRS) project, which will prepare school psychologists to work with children with special needs in both special and general education classrooms who require concentrated effort and additional supports to succeed.

Truscott will work with fellow college faculty members and co-principal investigators Joel Meyers and Catherine Perkins; the Center for School Safety, School Climate and Classroom Management; the Alonzo A. Crim Center for Urban Educational Excellence; the Center for Leadership in Disability in Georgia State’s School of Public Health; and four local school districts – Atlanta Public Schools, Clayton County Schools, Fulton County Schools and Marietta City Schools – to recruit, train and support 40 scholars dedicated to providing behavioral and mental health services to diverse special education students who do not respond to interventions once they are identified as having a disability,” Truscott said. “There is a continuing need for data-based assessment and intervention for students in special education to ensure they progress academically and behaviorally.”

Although some improvement in educational and mental health outcomes for students at risk for placement in special education has been made, much less emphasis has been given to students who do not respond to interventions once they are identified as having a disability,” Truscott said. “There is a continuing need for data-based assessment and intervention for students in special education to ensure they progress academically and behaviorally.”
Three faculty members in the College of Education’s Department of Counseling and Psychological Services have been awarded a five-year, $750,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Rehabilitation Services Administration to prepare rehabilitation counselors to work with people with mental illness.

Dennis Gilbride, Cirleen DeBlaere and Franco Dispenza will work with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and Boston University’s Center for Psychosocial Rehabilitation to train counselors to help people with mental illness and psychiatric disabilities find jobs and integrate into the community.

“The nationally accredited rehabilitation counseling program at Georgia State University has a long and successful history, and this grant will allow Georgia State to become a leader in vocational rehabilitation training designed to help people with psychiatric disabilities,” Gilbride said.

The grant will also enable them to address diverse populations living with psychiatric disabilities, including ethnically and racially diverse, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, and people living with multiple marginalized intersecting identities, in order to better understand and alleviate the stressors they experience in their lives.

“Besides developing new graduating classes of clinical rehabilitation counselors specializing in psychiatric disabilities, this grant will allow us to consider innovative training and practice-related needs for the profession of rehabilitation counseling,” Dispenza said. “This grant will also allow us the opportunity to help facilitate the needs of persons living with multiple marginalized identities, persons of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and the LGBT population.”

School psychology students in the MINRS project will complete a one-year practicum and a one-year internship placement in local schools, where they’ll work with a school-based mentor to provide interventions to students who need targeted mental health counseling and behavioral interventions. Students and their mentors will also attend the National Association of School Psychologists conference annually and have access to professional development sessions on topics related to school psychology – allowing both parties to learn how best to support special education students and share their findings with others working in the same field.

“Our goal is to leverage our cross-disciplinary resources and expertise to address long-standing issues in education that no one agency or discipline can tackle on its own,” Truscott said.
Exploring teacher effectiveness and increasing access to effective teachers for all students

Assistant Professor Stephanie Behm Cross will work with faculty, staff and administrators at Emory University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, the School Reform Initiative and Atlanta Public Schools on a grant project exploring teacher effectiveness and increasing equitable access to effective teachers for low-income and high-need students.

Cross will be the principal investigator for the College of Education’s portion of the Collaboration and Reflection to Enhance Atlanta Teacher Effectiveness (CREATE) project, which will focus on implementing a teacher residency program and giving teachers increased opportunities for collaboration and reflection.

The project, funded by a $3 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, will study how teacher residency programs can curb new teacher attrition rates and the impact high-quality teachers can have on high needs students.

By the end of the project, Cross and her colleagues hope to have trained 46 new teachers, supported more collaboration among an additional 230 teachers and impacted 2,330 kindergarten through 8th grade students in high needs schools in Atlanta.

Elementary school literacy coaches, special education teachers learning new instruction format

The Reading Recovery program housed in the College of Education is working with The Ohio State University, Clemson University and Emporia State University to provide training and support to elementary school literacy coaches and special education teachers as part of a three-year, $2.9 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant.

This grant will allow researchers to design an instructional format that helps students with disabilities improve their literacy skills. Reading Recovery and the other partner universities will provide training on the new instructional format to school literacy coaches, who will then show special education teachers how to implement it.

By the end of the three-year grant period, the partner universities will have prepared a total of 136 special education teachers to use the newly-designed instructional format.

Evaluating how schools address needs of students exhibiting mental health, behavior problems

Professors Joel Meyers, Ken Rice and Kris Varjas received a five-year, $826,000 grant from the Georgia Department of Education to evaluate its Georgia Project AWARE, which is designed to identify and support students experiencing or at risk for emotional and behavioral problems.

In this project, the Georgia Department of Education will work with several partner agencies to implement School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBS) – a prevention-oriented method teachers and administrators can use to address the needs of students exhibiting a range of mental health and behavioral problems – at Griffin-Spalding Schools, Muscogee County Schools and Newton County Schools.

For their part, Meyers, Rice and Varjas will annually collect data from statewide assessments and interview community members and state and local project leaders to determine the effectiveness of these interventions.