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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SCHOOL DISTRICTS JOIN EIU'S PDS INITIATIVE

CHARLESTON -- The Effingham, Danville, Decatur and Centralia school districts have formed a partnership with Eastern Illinois University's College of Education and Professional Studies that is designed to improve all aspects of education for both teachers and students.

The four school districts have signed agreements with EIU to become Professional Development Schools (PDSs).

The Charleston school district is contemplating becoming a Professional Development School site.

PDSs are public school sites that involve teachers, administrators, business and industry, students and parents, university faculty and community members in the educational process, according to Veronica Stephen, EIU's PDS coordinator.

Instead of meeting 50 minutes a day, three times per week (a regular on-campus section), students sign up for a two-hour block every day, five days a week. Part of their time is spent in classes and the remainder with a cooperating teacher at the PDS site. Each student is assigned to one teacher throughout the

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semester, providing a comprehensive picture of life in that classroom.

"By involving all individuals included in the teaching/learning process, PDSs create a community of learners," Stephen said.

The ultimate goal of all of those involved in the PDS initiative is to improve educational opportunities for and learning by public school children, Stephen explained.

She said in addition to providing better educations for students -- both at the university and public school levels -- the program is helping university faculty and public school teachers alike become better teachers.

Charles Joley, who retired as dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies (CEPS) in February, was a proponent of the PDS concept. "This is the most exciting venture I've ever been part of in my many years of service to the college and university."

Reflecting on this development, Debbie Owen, Effingham assistant superintendent, said, "Effingham Unit #40 is very excited about the opportunity to be a Professional Development School. This new concept will provide our district with the chance to become more involved in developing quality teachers. We see ourselves in this partnership as an integral part of shaping tomorrow's schools and are pleased that Eastern has extended this opportunity to us."

Mary Ellen Varble and Carol Helwig, co-chairs of the CEPS Professional Development Schools Committee, see the project as a vehicle for more meaningful

relationships between the university and public schools, as well as a means of renewing professional interests.

Varble, chair of Eastern's student teaching department, has seen public school teachers involved in the program gain a renewed interest in the profession themselves by becoming mentors to young teacher education students. Established teachers also benefit by having help in the classroom itself. "There's a real need," she said, "especially in the language arts area."

Varble also speaks of the benefits to students enrolled in Eastern's teacher education programs, pointing out that PDSs provide future teachers with a more gradual introduction to the challenge of teaching in front of a classroom.

The program thus far also has saved some students intent on becoming teachers from making mistakes. "I have had two or three say it was a great experience, but (teaching) is not for them. You don't find that out by just observing," Varble said.

She added that by finding out early, rather than waiting until it was time to student teach, these particular students saved themselves both time and money in pursuing an unwanted career.

Public school administrators also benefit from the PDS program. "It gives them more of an opportunity to look at potential teachers," Varble said.

Finally, the PDS concept offers opportunities for the continuing professional growth of EIU faculty, who supervise pre-service teacher education students at

PDS sites.

Maryann Dudzinski, the special education department's representative on the PDS steering committee, said EIU faculty work collaboratively with teachers and administrators in the public schools sharing information on effective teaching practices and discussing current issues in education.

"Everyone who participates in the PDS program comes out a winner," Dudzinski said.

For more information about Eastern's Professional Development Schools initiative, call Stephen at (217) 581-2524 or (217) 662-8553.