



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

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GOV. BLAGOJEVICH'S OPPORTUNITY RETURNS PROGRAM LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE E-LEARNING INITIATIVE IN MADISON AND ST. CLAIR COUNTY

Almost \$370,000 Will Help Students Earn Degrees Online And Prepare For World Of Work

MADISON – In an innovative effort to ensure more at-risk young people are earning their high school degrees and are better prepared to thrive in the world of work, Governor Rod Blagojevich announced almost **\$370,000** in *Opportunity Returns* funding for a pilot program in Madison and St. Clair County called the *Illinois e-Learning Initiative*. This comprehensive plan will explore the potential uses and cost-effectiveness of an Illinois e-Learning network for achieving three objectives with at-risk students still in school and out-of-school students. The goals are for each student to earn a high school diploma, develop career and educational plans to assist in managing the transition from school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and attain reading and math levels necessary to enter employment and community college credit programs without further help. The project will also provide youth the opportunity to achieve the information technology skills necessary for competing in the 21st Century economy. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Director Jack Lavin, whose agency is providing the grants, announced the *Opportunity Returns* funding today with other state and local leaders at Madison High School, which will be one of the four e-learning locations in Madison and St. Clair County.

“We must do all that we can to give our young people the skills they will need to not only graduate from high school, but to also plan for careers in our constantly evolving economy. Helping students achieve what they might have thought was unachievable is a crucial step in instilling the confidence they will need to reach even loftier goals in the future. The *Illinois e-Learning Initiative* is the kind of creative effort we must continue to make to ensure no young person is being left behind in Madison and St. Clair County or throughout Illinois,” Governor Blagojevich said.

Madison County is being awarded almost \$180,000 and St. Clair County is receiving an \$187,000 grant. Twenty-five students will be enrolled in the e-learning pilot program in each county. Students can do their coursework at Madison High School or the Madison County Employment and Training Center in Granite City. In St. Clair County, students will participate at Brooklyn-Lovejoy High School or the Illinois Employment and Training Center in East St. Louis. There will be an educational resource specialist who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the students. They will create and monitor the individual graduation plans for each student and ensure that all course work is completed. They are also responsible for monitoring the career development section of the plan and coordinating with the Local Workforce Investment Area Youth Services providers, who will supply actual career development counseling services.

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A key aspect of this initiative is providing these young people with an attractive alternative for gaining a regular high school diploma, while helping them overcome barriers that prevented them from doing so in a traditional high school atmosphere.

“Governor Blagojevich and I know that we must never give up on our young people. The *Illinois e-Learning Initiative* is the kind of innovative program that is giving those students who might need some extra help a chance to excel. This is a great example of how *Opportunity Returns* is making a tangible difference in our lives,” State Senator James Clayborne (D-East St. Louis) said.

“Getting a good job today without a high school diploma is nearly impossible, which is why I applaud Governor Blagojevich’s support of the *Illinois e-Learning Initiative*. We must continue creating and funding programs like these that are going to provide our young people with the tools and skills they need to achieve their dreams,” State Representative Thomas Holbrook (D-Belleville) said.

“Sometimes we must work with our young people in unique ways outside of the classroom in order for them to reach their academic and economic potential, and that is exactly what Governor Blagojevich is doing through the *Illinois e-Learning Initiative*. By investing in this program, we are opening the door for better opportunities for young men and women who need a helping hand,” State Representative Wyvetter Younge (D-East St. Louis) said.

“Governor Blagojevich understands that reaching those young people who might leave or have already left school, and providing them with a clear path to a high school diploma, will pay important economic dividends for years to come. Providing these students with a non-threatening and supportive environment will help ensure that they receive the education they need and instill the confidence to move on to college or a good job. These are investments that we must continue to make because we are investing in our future,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

The *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois’ history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn’t work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort for the Southwest region was the product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The specific projects that the Governor has announced for Southwest Illinois are designed to be flexible and effective. This plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

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