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**UCLA Center X** is pleased to announce Project Exc-EL has been identified as a *Highly Rated Application* by the U.S. Department of Education.

Three school districts (White Plains, Tarrytown and Ossining) will partner with UCLA's Center X to implement a multi-year program aimed at creating expanded and personalized learning opportunities for students in middle and high school who do not speak English as their first language. Known as Project Exc-EL, or Excellence for English Learners, the program will combine evidence-based strategies for classroom teaching with support provided by community partners and agencies including the Center for Secondary School Redesign, Westchester Community College, Pace University and the RSHM Life Center. Plus Alpha Research, based in Arlington, VA, will provide evaluation and research support.

"I am really excited about the opportunity to collaborate with other districts and provide common experiences for our families and staff as well as opportunities to learn from each other," said Ossining Superintendent Ray Sanchez. "UCLA has some outstanding educators who are working on ways to close the achievement gap and they will be sharing effective strategies with our teachers."

Teams of educators will be trained in research-based instructional techniques proven effective with English learners. The teams will meet regularly to discuss the students' progress and explore their strengths and challenges, with an eye toward adjusting instructional approaches. Students who need additional help to master the curriculum will have access to tutors as well as to online learning programs and extended day course work.

Because struggling students often have needs that go beyond the classroom, Project Exc-EL teams also will provide outreach to families, with workshops on such topics such as college and career readiness, financial aid and immigration law. This will ensure that families of EL students are involved in the school community. Other supports for families and students will be explored, including visits to area colleges, internships and mentoring to better prepare students for college and career.

In a case study described in the narrative on the project, the writers described a student named Erick who missed 25 days of school in the first semester, and frequently cut classes or fell asleep in class. Upon investigation, school staff discovered that Erick had become the head of the household. After meeting with Erick and his family, the school allowed him to take two courses online and enrolled his younger siblings in an after-school enrichment program. They also began helping him search out scholarships for students who are not documented. With the support of the team, Erick is on track to graduate and is planning for the future.

The U.S. Department of Education announced results for the fourth round of the Investing in Innovation (i3) competition on November 8, which will award the 25 highest-rated applications (HRAs) more than \$135 million to expand innovative practices designed to improve student achievement. These 25 potential grantees, selected from 618 applications and representing 13 states and the District of Columbia, must secure matching funds by Dec. 11, 2013, in order to receive federal funding.

"In this era of rapid change, we must make sure that our students are keeping pace with the rigor, relevance and changing demands of the global job market," U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said. "I am encouraged by the innovative ideas to accelerate student achievement demonstrated in these applications."