By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

Teachers in Liberal can now learn many valuable strategies and techniques in ESL (English as a Second Language) courses that will assist them in educating culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Through Project PEER (Persistent Educational Excellence Response), teachers will need to complete 15 hours of courses to qualify for ESL endorsement in Kansas.

“Our project focuses on assisting Liberal teachers with their ESL endorsement,” said USD No. 480 Director of Federal Programs Laura Cano.

The entire program is available through K-State Distance Education, with support provided through a toll-free number, e-mail and a Web site.

“Participants enroll in one course per semester and attend an introductory session in Liberal,” Cano said. “After the introductory session, participants work in collaborative groups to complete assigned work according to a given timeline and submit all assignments electronically.”

Project PEER is a Title III, federally-funded program, according to Cano.

“We have the opportunity to offer professional development to 100 educators in USD 480 over a five-year period,” she said. “These classes will be offered in two project cycles. While cycle one is almost complete, we are excited to begin a new cycle for 50 participants in fall 2009.”

Project abstract

Through the proposed project, Kansas State University will collaborate with the Liberal school district to address three acute

needs:

o Persistent academic achievement difficulties in English Language Learner students; o Address the very limited number of ESL endorsed educators in this high-need district; and o Address gaps in site-based professional development capable of meeting the identified needs, classroom practices and district challenges of school educators in the rapidly changing Midwest region.

Project goal

Project PEER is a proposed National Professional Development program.

“It is spearheaded by Kansas State University and will systematically address the acute needs of Liberal, a rapidly changing and geographically isolated school district of the Midwest,” Cano said.

She said in particular, the project will target, observe, measure, analyze and report persistent, high-quality teaching for, and educational achievement gains among, ELL students in USD 480.

Key outcomes

o A curriculum of teacher education that has been appropriately adapted to meet the professional development needs of school educators in rapidly changing rural schools.

o Course-based professional development designed to build capacities for critically reflective and need-specific practices for two cadres of 50 in-service educators (total of 100) during the five-year term of the project.

o Professional development that leads to an ESL endorsement in the state of Kansas.

o Teaching strategies specific to ELL student assets and learning needs in grade-level classrooms.

o Classroom instruction guided and evaluated by content and language objectives.

o Professional development systematically evaluated on an in-process and post-training basis.