

The University of Chicago, along with Harvard University, will help administer a \$10-million, multi-year program aimed at improving education in America. The money was provided by Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Chicago philanthropists.

Run by the Griffin Foundation, the program will analyze teacher incentives, student performance, and what makes a good learning environment.

The program will be led by two U of C economics professors, John List and Steven Levitt, as well as Roland Fryer, an economics professor and faculty director of the Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard.

List, an economist who focuses on field experiments, has been studying incentives in education for the past two years.

"I think urban education's broken," List said. "I think this research agenda will help to give us a sense of what are the optimal ways to administer pre-K and K-12."

Seven million dollars will be spent on a study beginning at the preschool level. Preschoolers will be broken into three experimental groups, or arms, of 150 students each, selected from a pool of 1,000 students chosen by a lottery system, in addition to a control group.

The first arm will create the Griffin Early Childhood Center, a preschool, created by the program, in Chicago Heights, IL. The second, who will not attend the Center, will be offered student incentives of up to \$7,000 for meeting a series of goals established with a parent, and the third will be offered incentives of the same amount, but they will be put in a college fund.

Advisors at the school will monitor their own 150 students, as well as students in the study who are attending other schools, and the academic progress of all the participants will be monitored until they graduate high school.

Lists predicts that investing in students will improve academic success. "Arms one, two and three will be a wild success, compared to the control group."

The big question, List said, is which of these arms will be most effective. "We're going to see what are the best ways to spend local dollars."

The remaining \$3 million will be spent on research at the K-12 level, and will look into teacher incentives based on students' success, as well as incentives for students mentoring each other.

In a University press release, Superintendent of the Chicago Heights School District Tom Amadio, said the research will do a lot for the community.

“We are incredibly excited and thankful for this opportunity, which will benefit both our school district and the Chicago Heights community by broadening educational opportunities for our students.”

Chicago Heights was chosen both for its lack of a preschool facility and its diverse population.

The donation was made through The Griffin Foundation, which supports education, science, and the arts and was founded by the Griffins in 2009. Kenneth Griffin is the founder of Citadel, a hedge fund management company, and Anne Griffin is the founder of Aragon Capital Management, a venture capital group.