Building partnerships to improve educator preparation and professional development

Today’s...challenges demand that teachers work in collaboration with other experts. If educators embrace the resources of the new knowledge economy, our schools could become hubs in a new kind of learning community, led by teams of experienced and novice teachers, consulting technology and content experts, and learning coaches. Yet to coordinate these opportunities and ensure that resources are directed toward student learning, teachers cannot continue to work alone. (http://www.nctaf.org/strategies/create/index.htm)

Introduction

Our interest in building partnerships with other institutions that prepare professional educators and with local schools and districts stems from our belief that educator preparation and professional development are responsibilities that are best shared by institutions of higher education and P-12 schools. The expertise of teachers, administrators, and university faculty members can all contribute to educator professional development at all stages in a person’s career, to enhanced action research, and to better learning environments for everyone involved. These kinds of partnerships between educator preparation programs and P-12 schools are mutually beneficial as they lead to better preparation, better ongoing professional development and, most importantly, higher P-12 student achievement. The partnerships also create efficiencies as planning for the use of professional preparation and professional development dollars is collaborative and targeted toward the highest needs of the school districts.

What kinds of partnerships are we talking about?

1) Partnerships for educator preparation. Pre-service teachers, school counselors, and school principals who experience coherent, extended clinical placements with qualified, well-prepared mentors are more likely to stay in the profession longer, improve student achievement and receive higher evaluations from administrators who supervise them. In our partnership vision this means that:

a. “Clusters” of 6-8 pre-service educators from different professional education programs will be placed in schools together (when possible, students would remain in the same school for the full length of their clinical placement). This “clustering” would allow programs to allocate more resources to each school where pre-service educators were placed as each program would be working in fewer schools. It would also allow educator preparation programs to assign one supervisor to a group of pre-service educators and increase the presence of professionals associated with these programs in each school. This will facilitate communication and support both
for pre-service educators and for cooperating teachers (CTs), administrators, and others working with pre-service educators.

b. Cooperating educators, teacher education faculty and school staff would have opportunities to share their expertise with each other and with pre-service educators through co-led workshops and/or other instructional collaborations (e.g., CTs co-teaching methods classes with college and university instructors or CTs inviting faculty into their classrooms to co-teach and/or to model instructional practices).

c. Cooperating teachers and others in the school would have opportunities (potentially credit-bearing) to work with university faculty and supervisors to develop skills needed for successfully supporting pre-service educators (including strategies for conducting formal and informal observations, helping new teachers identify areas needing growth, and giving feedback on teaching).

d. Cooperating teachers will have opportunities to meet regularly with other CTs and supervisors and cohort leaders to review program goals, learn about and provide input on university assignments, reflect on the progress of the pre-service teachers and discuss other issues that arise in the course of the student teaching experience.

e. Higher education institutions with educator preparation programs will collaborate with one another and with district leaders to build more common approaches to placement and support for student teachers. This will help ensure common understanding of program similarities and differences and ensure that lines of communication are opened between professional education programs and schools where pre-service educators are placed.

2) Partnerships for educator induction and support. Induction and mentoring are an essential part of ensuring that educators successfully make the transition from their preparation program into the profession. In our partnership vision this means that:

a. College and university faculty already working with pre-service educators in the schools will also work with school administrators and experienced teachers to develop mentoring programs designed to increase the support provided to teachers in their first three years of teaching. Cooperating teachers and others will have opportunities to extend their knowledge of teacher professional development and become school-based mentors for new teachers.

b. Support for new teachers would include one-on-one mentoring as well as participation in Professional Learning Communities lead by teacher-mentors or university or college faculty or supervisors.

c. Higher education institutions with professional preparation programs will collaborate with one another and with school district leaders to develop and implement models for new teacher induction and support during the first three years of teaching.
3) 

**Partnerships for ongoing educator professional development.** Ongoing professional development is essential to the profession; not only does it result in increased longevity for educators, it promotes the development of leaders (teachers, counselors and administrators) who can facilitate school-wide reform efforts designed to improve student learning. In our partnership vision this means that:

a. College and university faculty and staff will work with school administrators and other professionals to establish Professional Learning Communities for all interested school personnel. The nature and structure of these PLCs will be tailored to the needs of each school’s community, staff and students.

b. Teachers and other school professionals will have opportunities to extend their learning in areas specifically designed to meet the needs of their students. For example, groups of staff might participate together in workshops or classes designed to increase their understanding of how to use data for school improvement, how to conduct action research on classroom practice, or how to implement proficiency-based instructional strategies in the classroom.

c. Higher education institutions with teacher preparation programs will collaborate with one another and with school districts to develop and implement effective models and programs for ongoing teacher professional development.