

RESEARCH UTILIZATION BRIEFS:

UNIVERSITY-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS



UNIVERSITY COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
DECEMBER 2009

In their research on effective leadership preparation, Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Deborah Meyerson, Margaret Terry Orr, and Carol Cohen (2007) identified several key program features in preparing strong educational leaders. Among these important features it was found that “strong partnerships with schools and districts to support quality, field-based learning” (p. 12), were particularly impactful. Partnerships can provide a district with access to high quality and contextually relevant preparation, supportive learning structures, and in-service development and have the potential to leverage the collective capacity of both the district and the university if they are both willing and able to work together from start to finish (see also: Browne-Ferrigno, 2004; Goldring & Sims, 2005; SREB, 2008).

EXEMPLARY PARTNERSHIPS

Importantly, each of the programs examined by Darling-Hammond, et. al. (2007), which qualified as highly effective, had strong partnerships that appeared to contribute profoundly to the programs’ successes. Several UCEA institutions were featured in this research. For example, Bank Street College worked closely with Region 1 of the New York City Public Schools to create a cohort-based preparation program focused on the unique needs of that district. Similarly, the University of Louisville worked in partnership with the Jefferson County Public Schools to develop a certification program for aspiring principals that built on the district’s in-service framework and aligned with its approach to teaching and learning. Finally, the University of Connecticut’s UCAPP program faculty worked closely with districts, such as Hartford, and the state principals’ association to provide in-depth field experiences for its candidates.

Darling-Hammond, et. al. (2007) pointed out that each of these programs, and the others included in their report, were distinguished by the commitment of key members of both parties to make the partnership work. Moreover, they explained that commitment went well beyond words to include the development of formal written agreements, the identification of candidates, co-constructing new curriculum, districts providing credit subsidies, universities providing tuition waivers, and both organizations seeking and finding resources for coaches for new principals and faculty for district-based preparation and professional development.

UCEA MEMBER STANDARDS REQUIRE PARTNERSHIPS

For decades, UCEA has encouraged the development of partnerships among its membership. One of UCEA’s membership standards, in fact, explains that member programs should have in place long-term formal relationships with one or more school districts, and other appropriate agencies, that create partnership sites for clinical study, field residency, and applied research (UCEA, 2008). A strong example is the University of Missouri, where college leadership and faculty have developed and sustained the Missouri Partnership for Educational Renewal (MPER). Based on the renewal ideas of John Goodlad, MPER provides a mutually beneficial relationship where the college and districts partner around preparation, professional development, research, and renewal and reform initiatives.

PARTNERSHIPS CONTRIBUTE PROFOUNDLY

Much of the research on university-district partnerships stresses the importance of partnerships for developing

targeted recruitment, an efficient hiring pipeline, affordable internships, and strong clinical preparation. Indeed, the need for more impactful clinical training has encouraged a growing number of universities to collaborate with schools and districts in the design and delivery of principal preparation programs. Similarly, districts have turned to universities to develop preparation programs tailored to their district's needs. However, as the Missouri example illustrates, partnerships can develop well beyond efforts related to initial preparation. Indeed, partnerships not only provide the most effective means for preparing principals for specific district and regional contexts, but they also expand the resources available to both university preparation programs and to school districts. Additionally, once formal partnerships are established, leadership development is much more likely to become an ongoing priority for both districts and universities, beginning with preparation and then followed by comprehensive efforts to build leadership capacity within the district.

FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

A growing number of university-district partnerships are working together to provide preparation. Experience and research have identified ideas and strategies for developing partnership that can facilitate the efforts of partnership developers (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004; Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2007; Goldring & Sims, 2005). According to research conducted by SREB (2008), for example, certain factors can help a partnership become more effective. They refer to these factors as enabling conditions. They include things like:

1. Developing a common vision for the program, candidate learning and leadership outcomes,
2. Developing a shared commitment to the partnership the partnership, expressed through official written agreements and the allocation of resources (human and fiscal) to support the development and implementation of the program,
3. Clearly defining expectations for the roles and responsibilities of both parties,
4. Developing a process for gathering, analyzing and communicating formative and summative evaluation data to both parties, and
5. Identifying and ensure mutual benefits for both parties.

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This brief, developed by Michelle D. Young, is part of a Research Utilization Brief series co-sponsored by UCEA and The Wallace Foundation. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research regarding effective leadership preparation and development, particularly research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, with faculty, staff and leaders at the program, institutional and state levels, as it is these individuals who are in positions to use this research to make positive changes.

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December, 2009