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University-School Partnerships A Collective Approach to Teacher Preparation

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Given the emphasis on partnerships and continuous improvement efforts (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016; Council on Accreditation of Educator Preparation Board of Directors, 2015), university and school constituencies may consider partnering to advance educator preparation programs. Using the Professional Learning Community model as a framework (Hall & Hord, 2001; Eaker & Sells, 2016), this short article examines how a School of Education (SOE) collaborates with local school-sites. The elements for a PLC include: (a) shared values and vision, (b) collective learning and application, (c) supportive and shared leadership, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (Hall and Hord, 2001). Such collaborative foundations helped to reimagine a more thoughtful integration between partnerships and continuous improvement to further the following areas: (a) School partnership development; (b) Continuous improvement system development; and (c) Teacher preparation program design.

Given that the focus of this article concentrates on one university site, a document analysis allowed for the investigation of emerging themes related to university-school partnerships within a SOE (Yin, 2009). First, the processes of university-school partnerships were examined by reviewing the literature in the area of creating strategic partnerships (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Second, document analysis of the Memorandums of Understanding, individual partnership work plans (if applicable), institutional descriptions of personnel roles and responsibilities, and organization charts were reviewed for each existing partnership. Third, to identify linkage between the partnerships and decision-making regarding resource allocation, the budget requests and grant submissions put forward in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2016 were also reviewed. By utilizing pattern analysis with the multiple data sets, emergent themes were identified to inform practices.

School Partnership Development

Trust is the foundation that sets the stage for successful strategic partnerships. The degree of trust between stakeholders may be established over a period of time by agreeing to co-constructed goals and showing behavior aligned with shared goals (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Additionally, detailing expectations for future interactions and establishing how information will be shared may strengthen the initial phases of relationship building within the partnership (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Strategic partnerships require a considerable amount of time and dedication to ensure trust, ongoing communication, transparency, and positive intentionality that will ultimately set the stage for each stakeholder. That said, prac-

tical implications may aid in operationalizing shared goals only if a foundation of trust has been developed, maintained, and sustained between partners. With that context in mind, the following key findings were identified specific to creating strategic partnerships after analyzing multiple data sets: a) A clear and shared mission and vision is integral to the university-school partnership, b) Roles and responsibilities should be detailed and outlined for all stakeholders, c) Co-construction of assessment philosophy and learning outcomes should be mutually agreed upon, d) Shared governance and processes for joint decision making should be shared and documented, and e) Funding and processes for resource allocation should be negotiated (See Table 1). In turn, the aforementioned agreements will set a foundation for norms and expectations to successfully approach the operationalization of initial partnership building for optimal results.

Foundational elements for the creation of strategic partnerships include trust, shared meaning, and strategic alignment (Eddy & Amey, 2015). For example, reoccurring meetings with appropriate stakeholders is encouraged to facilitate ongoing communication. Moreover, transparency during the meetings is vital to promote positive intentionality. A clear and shared mission and vision involving all stakeholders will strengthen a community dedicated to supporting students, teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators at every level in education (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Relationships influence the decision-making process within partnerships and sets expectations early on in the process for mutual understanding and decision-making (Eddy & Amey, 2015).

For example, leaders should consider how to approach staffing plans (i.e., hiring processes) for the school-site and incorporate such guidelines into the Memorandum of Understanding. Stakeholders may also consider co-constructing roles and responsibilities for all members within the community: a) students, b) parents, c) teachers, d) school-site administrators, e) university partner, and f) community partners. The outline of such duties may be used to reference the type of role each stakeholder will assume and the expectation specific to the roles presented from the perspective of the community. Lastly, different types of school governance models may create barriers to partnering or foster collaboration (Eddy & Amey, 2015). University-school partnerships may consider exploring governance, staffing, and budgeting autonomies to create democratic leadership and shared decision-making. Appropriate governance models may also ensure the university-school mission and vision is aligned with the financial expenditures of all stakeholders and increases the likelihood of external funding (i.e., grants) to help support such goals.

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Continuous Improvement

To date, teacher preparation programs are under great pressure to adapt to new curricular and instructional frameworks (i.e., Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies) while also assessing program preparation effectiveness of state and national standards (i.e., California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation). That said, if we are to provide our youth high quality education, Schools of Education, PK-12 schools, districts, and organizations must come together in collaboration to ensure educational experiences are aligned and grounded in common teacher preparation outcomes to effectively bridge researched-based approaches with practical experiences.

Evidence-based research and assessment must occur to determine whether the partnership is achieving its intended goals (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Developing collaborative relationships with administration and teachers at multiple school-site partnerships may aid in the selection and collection of data specific indicators in an effort to inform teacher preparation program design efforts on a continuous basis. Strategic partnerships also involve the creation of shared terms and language (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Additionally, the co-construction of educator preparation instruments for assessment (i.e. clinical evaluation instruments) may contribute to more authentic practices and outcomes focused assessments to investigate effectiveness related to best practices in the field.

Table 1
Developing Strategic University-School Partnerships

DEVELOPING STRATEGIC UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Building Trust

- Detail Expectations for Future Interaction
- Establish How Communication will be Shared
- Outline Anticipated Level of Campus Presence
- Stakeholders to include: Administrators (School, University, District), teachers, teacher leaders, families and students, community members

Shared Governance: School Model Structures	Co-Construction of Agreements and Processes	Unified Mission, Vision, and Goals	Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities	Assessment Philosophy	Resource Allocation Methods
Create governance structure for increased decision making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget autonomies • Staff selection autonomies • Principal selection autonomies • Curriculum and assessment autonomies • School schedule autonomies 	Document Governance Structures and Agreements in Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	Create shared terminology and language	Develop organization chart for clear structures and communication	Identify relevant data indicators for assessment of strategic goals	Align resource allocation and financial expenditures with unified mission, vision, and strategic goals
Establish equal stakeholder representation for decision-making	Co-Construct Work Plan to detail processes for autonomies	Align strategic goals	Develop responsibilities for ALL stakeholders in the community	Co-construct instruments for assessment of strategic goals	Collaborate on opportunities for external funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants • Donations
		Create timeline and action plan for future implementation	Develop approaches to hiring processes	Make data based decision making for partnership improvements	
		Revisit mission, vision, and goals continuously	Assign key leaders to action plan for strategic goal implementation	Continue to document and assess for systematic improvement	

While Being Mindful of State and National Requirements on Local School Sites and Institutions of Higher Education

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Teacher Preparation Programs

Strategic partnerships between universities and school-sites may benefit teacher preparation programs. By schools serving as anchor school-sites, a collaborative approach between IHEs and school-sites, will improve the likelihood that teacher candidates receive a high quality clinical experience. Doing so while placing more emphasis on continuous improvement efforts may allow for data-driven decision making to enhance various programmatic components (i.e., courses offered, university structure, operations to support program implementation, and K-12 teacher leader development) aligned with current content, state, and national standards in pursuit of the highest quality of teacher preparation.

Thus, a successful strategic partnership may create nurturing opportunities for aspiring teacher education candidates to develop, practice, and demonstrate content knowledge and skills and may also strengthen the University's understanding related to teacher education candidate learning and development specific to the preparation of teachers. The need for a university presence at partner school-sites may bridge the gap between the university (theory) and PK-12 schools (practice) in a more thoughtful and reciprocal manner (Eddy & Amey, 2015). Moving forward, it is imperative that practices specific to the operations of creating strategic partnerships are discussed further to meet the needs of future educators today. By working together in partnership, we may position ourselves together to develop a new cadre of teachers entering the field to effectively raise academic achievement and positively impact the lives of the youth in schools.

Conclusion

If the PLC is the point of emphasis for university-school partnerships moving forward, elements of the PLC must ground the work of strategic partnerships. This approach will allow for optimal outcomes, thus supporting and enhancing educator preparation models that will ultimately benefit PK-12 student learning. This article serves as the launch to more conversations exploring and advancing strategic partnerships in pursuit of educational equity and excellence. In order to determine whether strategic partnerships are creating aligned and complimentary experiences for future educators, a commitment to collaboration as well as continuous improvement must be in place and data sharing practices should be used to assess for effectiveness.

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