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Feature Article

PARTNERS: a Framework for a Partnership Model in a High-Need, Urban School District
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Abstract

This article examines a school-university partnership, which initiated a professional development school-inter in a high-need urban district, as a mechanism toward improving student achievement. Scholarly literature-ba are examined as part of the model's framework. The strategies pertain to forming and sustaining the partner: context of considerable instability

Article

A School-University Partnership Model



Figure 1. REAL partnership model

Project REAL (Rockford Education Alliance) is a comprehensive school-university partnership between Northern Illinois University (NIU), Rock Valley College (RVC), and Rockford, Illinois Public School (RPS) District 205. The focus partnership is to improve student performance and enhance the quality of teacher educators. Shared decision making, teacher recruitment, teacher education reform, extending pre-service clinical experiences, professional development

enabling effective instructional leadership are key factors to ensuring a successful collaboration among the partners in the project. The overall goal of the partnership is to raise student achievement in mathematics and reading so that Rockford Public School students in the four PK-12 partnership schools meet or exceed standards on State of Illinois assessments within five years. To assist in achieving the goal of the partnership, there are six objectives embedded within the partnership model (see Figure 1):

- 1: Creating Shared Decision-Making
- 2: Developing a Future Teacher Pool
- 3: Reforming Educator Preparation
- 4: Expanding Clinical Experiences
- 5: Providing Professional Development
- 6: Enhancing Managerial and Leadership Skills

Partnership Overview

Partnerships between schools and universities have played an important role in the improvement of teaching specifically within the realm of teacher education preparation and professional development (Osguthorpe, Har Black, 1995; Winitzky, Stoddart, & O'Keefe, 1992). For example, partnership models have been at the center of the professional development school (PDS) movement (Holmes Group, 1986) and within the assessment/accreditation community such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (Walker, Sorensen, & Downey, 2007). Further, within higher education, research on designs for measuring the plausible value of partnerships in terms of student achievement, teacher retention, or leadership initiatives (Walker, Sorensen, Downey, Smaldino, & Lieberman, 2006) have become prevalent at international research conferences such as the American Educational Research Association.

According to Teitel (2003, p. xiii), partnerships between schools and university often are realized via professional development school initiatives, where student learning and teacher development are paramount outcomes. The four-part mission: new teacher preparation, faculty development, improvement of teacher practice, and improved student achievement. Additionally, NCATE's (2001) PDS standards focus on (1) creating a positive learning environment that supports both professional and children's learning, (2) upholding professional standards for teaching, (3) developing a university/school community with shared responsibility, (4) ensuring professionals are prepared to meet the needs of all learners, and (5) providing resources and structures that support the partnership work. For Project REAL, its partner schools undertake these PDS principles via: (1) clinical placements for teacher candidates, (2) on-site professional development for classroom teachers, (3) collaborative curriculum development at both the university and PK-12, and (4) research jointly conducted on teaching and learning.

Purpose

With this focus on the practical and research-based merits of partnerships, at various educational levels, as a part of the improvement of teaching and learning, we would like to discuss the framework behind the partnership model. Specifically, concerning how to cope with partnership change, in a PDS context, once the partnership has been established in a high-need, urban setting of considerable instability.

Partners

Rockford Education Alliance: Project Real Organization Chart

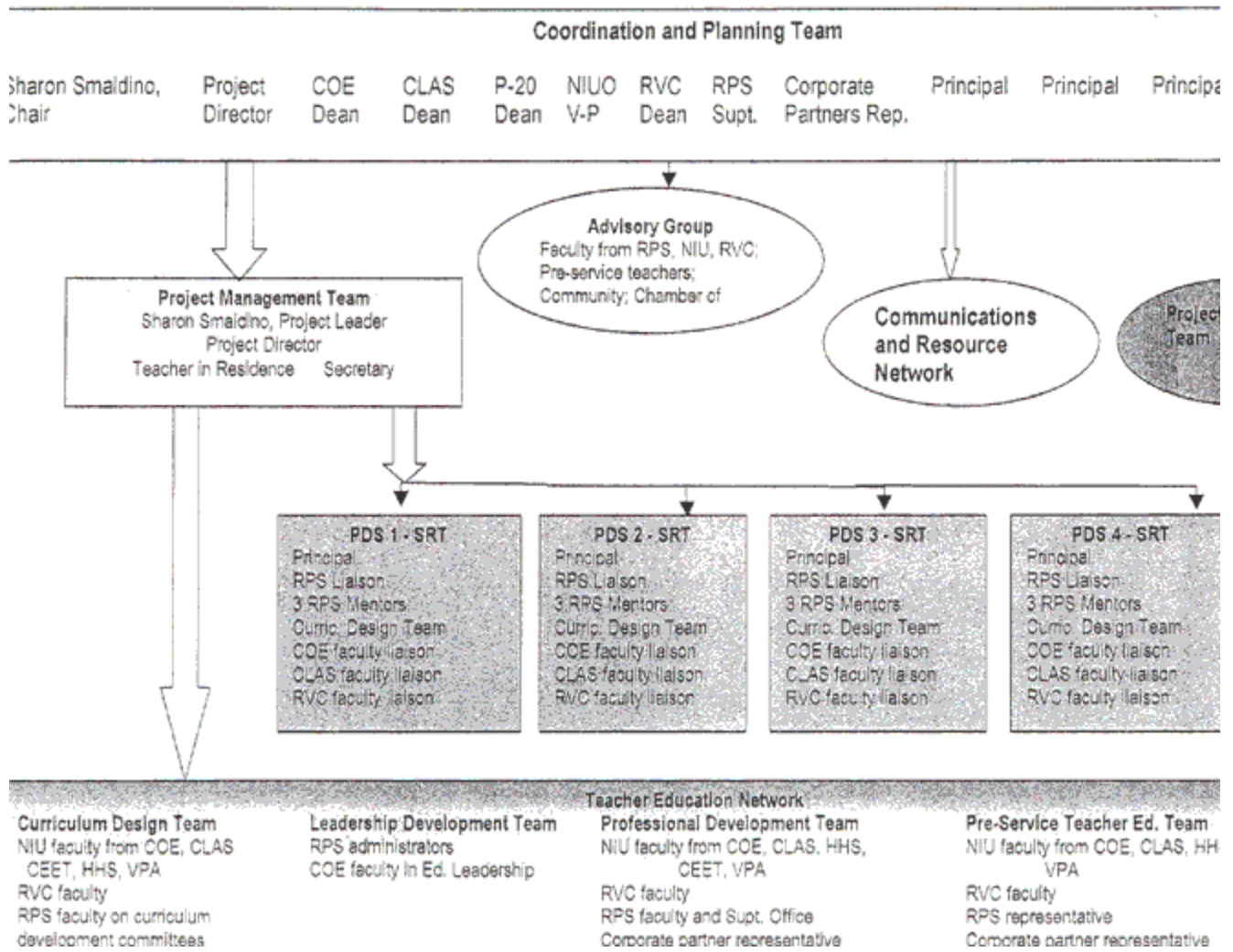


Figure 2. REAL partnership organizational chart

Given that the partnership’s urban school district has a unique history of federal jurisdiction over it, for instance progressing in academic areas typically measured to determine educational success, how did this partnership prosper when confronted with initial low morale and perpetual change in leadership and educators? One plausible explanation, in relation to the partnership’s operating model in Figure 1, is in the overarching theoretical framework of actual practice by the partnership of: PARTNERS:

- P - Positive Change
- A - Accountability
- R - Respect
- T - Time
- N - New Concepts

E - Engage Leadership

R - Resilience and Persistence

S - Strategic Thinking

P: Positive Change

We found that partnerships should view change, which in any partnership endeavor is inevitable especially th the partnership, as positive. That is, partnerships, in the face of change, should revise, rework, and rethink a toward responding to change, and also the assessment of how change impacts the goals of the partnership (2005). We saw change as positive in its function as a critical mechanism to:

- Respond to change and take action
- Create new opportunities
- Bring new strengths and perspectives
- Force re-evaluation of the partnership direction

A: Accountability

Partnerships need a defined system of accountability, where partners remember and remind one another at v that everyone is responsible for adhering to and realizing the goals and objectives of the partnership from its conceptualization through realization (Teitel, 2003). We found in our partnership that accountability impacted areas:

- Structure of the partnership
- Consistency of the partnership vision
- Educating and re-educating partners
- Communication with partners and other participants
- Orientation for new partners and participants
- Expectations

R: Respect

If there is little, waning, or no respect, which includes little engagement and the marginalization of voices wit partnership, it will eventually be unsuccessful with potential harmful consequences (Murrell, 2001). Thus, bui respect at the various levels of the partnership is difficult, given partners' diverse cultures and climates of op however, it is a critical component of any partnership that has sustainability. Within our partnership, we foun was given and endured through a systematic approach involving:

- Mutual respect for partners
- Priority setting and re-evaluation
- Organizational structure

- Administrative direction

T: Time

Like any form of collaboration or relationship, partnerships take time to coalesce. Partnerships need many for saving and time-sensitive initiatives such as time for training, time to disseminate research results, time for time to reflect (Hunkins, Wiseman, & Williams, 1995). We found that the following structure to our partnership most effectively in terms of building relationships, meetings, and commitments (see Figure 2). The value of partnership to:

- Plan and implement simultaneously
- Build relationships
- Attend meetings
- Respect partners' time and commitments

N: New Concepts

Partners within partnerships will initiate new concepts and inquiry, often quite different from the original concept analysis that drove the need for the creation of the partnership (Hunkins et al., 1995). We found that the new concepts and modes of examination should be valued and discussed due to the persistently-evolving nature of partnerships and the contexts in which they operate. Thus, we advocated that partners embrace new concept learning to:

- Educate and re-educate
- Create a Professional Development School model
- Develop other partnerships
- Rethink pre-service training
- Mentor

E: Engage Leadership

All partnerships need to engage the leaders of the entities involved in the partnership. However, within the school and the university/college, the engagement of all levels of leadership, such as assistant principals, building liaisons, mentors, superintendents, associate deans, and deans, is vital to the sustainability of the partnership (Winitz). The engagement of leadership in our partnership has shown to:

- Inspire leaders to support the vision
- Articulate the partnership message
- Create new networks and new connections
- Share decision making through communication

R: Resilience and Persistence

If a partnership is going to have prolonged sustainability and impact, partners need to be resilient and persist in partnership goals and objectives in the face of changing contextual forces and internal and external factors in the partnership (Teitel, 2003). We found that persistence was a fundamental factor in the early, and also in the later phases, of our partnership, which enabled us to:

- Stay focused
- Address complex issues and road blocks
- Communicate
- Continue a shared vision

S: Strategic Thinking

Finally, strategic thinking, which in Figure 2 can be seen as an interconnected concept throughout the numer partnership, is of primary importance to the vitality of the partnership. For our partnership, whatever change within it, which happened on a consistent basis, the partnership was always focused on its foremost goal of achievement and continual assessment of this achievement in relation to the PDS partnership (Wong & Glass, we found that strategic thinking enabled the partners to:

- Keep focus
- Assess strategies
- Collaborate on partnership implementation
- Review progress and the future direction of the partnership

Conclusion

The PARTNERS model will continue to be the theoretical framework and actual practice of the PDS partnership achieve the goal and objectives of the project and continue its enduring sustainability. Data derived from the lessons learned, and ongoing practices in teaching and learning between the partners, indicates that this part persist, yet evolve as school-university needs and circumstances dictate, in its core areas of PARTNERS. That Change will be the accepted norm with new endeavors related to Project REAL. Partners will be more comfort change related to the partnership because of the known Accountability factor. Respect for all partners will cor expand, whether there is a need to respect university instructors to conduct research or the need to respect t district's choice of curriculum. Time will continue to be taken to nurture the partnership and identify New Con need arises. Engaging Leadership at the district and university levels will remain a critical component emphasis decision making and the importance of all partners' voices. Resilience and Persistence will continue to be an e for the sustainability of the partnership and the continual goal of increasing student achievement through Str. and the future direction of the partnership.

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