



Charles R. Coble

In 1996, The University of North Carolina developed a plan that strongly emphasized the strategic involvement of school districts and communities in the preparation and development of teachers, administrators, and other education professionals. The likelihood of long-term success increases as the partners and interested stakeholders understand the factors contributing to successful partnerships. In the most urban areas of the state—Charlotte, Greensboro, Durham, and Raleigh—the partnerships are beginning to address some of the larger social context of the schools, such as family literacy and health needs.

Going to Scale: North Carolina's Education Partnerships

All North Carolinians, like the rest of the nation, want an educated, responsible, and productive citizenry, a safe society, and a sound economy. A responsible citizenry and a creative and productive work force can be a reality, however, only in a society that expects and supports high quality public schools.

Well-prepared and effective teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school professionals are central to quality education. Past efforts to improve the competencies of professional educators, as well as school improvement generally, have been largely piecemeal and without adequate collaboration between public schools and institutions of higher education. To be successful, the initial and continuing education of school-based professionals must be a joint responsibility of both the public schools that employ them and the colleges and universities that initially prepare them and then subsequently provide opportunities for their continuing professional development.

What is needed are strong partnerships that will support the continuous improvement of both PK-12 schools (and their faculties) and university-based professional education programs (and their faculties) and, thereby, the enhancement of student success at every level. However, the term “partnership” has become another buzzword in education. Without definition and without an understanding of what it takes to build and sustain partnerships, the term becomes essentially meaningless.

Partnership Defined

In the absence of an operational definition for the term “partnership,” and without standards for assessing successful ones, essentially any transaction between persons or organizations could be called a partnership. More important, with neither definition nor standards, there can be no accountability. There is a wide range of existing relationships between universities and schools, from simple episodic transactions to complex ongoing collaborations. What distinguishes between these polarities is the “value added” to university-school relationships as they grow from transactions to partnerships. Cortada (1995) identifies increased risk and complexity and the extent of rewards and trust as indicators of movement toward true partnership. The term is used, in the context of developments in North Carolina, to mean a thoughtfully created, value-added, mutually beneficial relationship between organizations that is nurtured over time and leads to measurable results (Coble, 1998). The small, but important, step in North Carolina of defining what is meant by partnership has been helpful in communicating among partners and to the public. This working definition also provides clarity in developing a statewide accountability plan.

University-School Teacher Education Partnerships

The collaboratively developed plan currently under way in North Carolina establishes a network of University-School Teacher Education Partnerships (USTEPs) involving 15 campuses of the university system: Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A & T State University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, UNC-Asheville, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Greensboro, UNC-Pembroke, UNC-Wilmington, Western Carolina University, and Winston-Salem State University. The USTEPs connect university faculty and public school educators in ways that can enhance the initial preparation, induction, and continuing professional development of teachers, administrators, and other school personnel.

Toward that end, public school practitioners and professional educators in universities throughout North Carolina are developing a systemic approach to achieve simultaneous reform in teacher education and school renewal. With the support of Governor James B. Hunt Jr. and the General Assembly, faculty and public schools educators are collaborating to:

- restructure and improve both initial preparation and continuing professional development programs for teachers, school administrators, and other specialists, with particular emphasis on beginning teachers;
- renew and improve the public school curriculum;
- conduct school-based research that improves classroom practice; and
- share and disseminate best practices throughout the state (Deans' Council on Teacher Education, 1996).

The North Carolina university-school teacher education partnerships align with the 1996 recommendations of the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future entitled, “What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future.” They are especially relevant to the Commission's second recommendation, which calls for reinven-

tion of teacher preparation and professional development. The partnerships also align well with the 1997 report of the North Carolina School Improvement Panel entitled, "Bringing it All Together for Children in Public Schools." One of the key strategy recommendations in that report focuses on the need to provide better training and preparation of educators.

The Need for Reinvention

In North Carolina, 16% to 20% of new teachers leave after the first year. Currently about 35% of all teachers drop out of teaching by the end of the fifth year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1996). Insufficient preparation, difficult teaching assignments, multiple class assignments, and a general lack of support are usually identified as major factors that cause beginning teachers to leave the profession (The Public School Forum of North Carolina, 1996). Those who remain often feel isolated, with little opportunity for collaboration with other teachers or for continuing professional development (The North Carolina Professional Practices Commission, 1995).

The development of the USTEPS will help to address many of the concerns teachers cite by better preparing them to teach and supporting them during their initial years in the classroom. Establishing a statewide network of partnerships schools will create clinical settings for the preparation, induction, and continuing professional development of educators. The partnerships are, thus, conceptually similar to the linkages between teaching hospitals and medical schools for the preparation of physicians.

Guiding Principles

During 1996-1997, university and public school educators met to craft some guiding principles, to be used to frame their future work. They agreed upon five guiding principles for the development of the University-School Teacher Education Partnerships:

1. Strengthen relationships and shared responsibilities among schools, colleges and universities, and communities in the initial preparation, induction, and continuing professional development of highly skilled teachers, administrators, and other school personnel in North Carolina schools.
2. Build on successes of current model clinical teaching programs and establish professional development partnerships for the initial preparation, induction, and continuing professional development of career teachers, administrators, and other school-based personnel.
3. Extend and improve the school-based components of both initial preparation and continuing professional development programs.
4. Strengthen the linkage between the theory and practice of teaching and learning, thereby narrowing the gap between what is known to be effective practice and how it is applied.
5. Focus and share the resources of the colleges and universities, schools, and communities to improve curricula and increase student learning in both schools and teacher education programs (Deans' Council on Teacher Education, 1997).

In 1997, the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina approved and presented to the governor, the advisory budget commission, and the general assembly a request for \$1.8 million for each of two years to support this fundamental transformation of teacher education in North Carolina. The need was compelling enough to gain the full support of Governor Jim Hunt, who at the time was also serving as chair of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

University and public school faculty and administrators used the guiding principles in proposing a four-phase process to plan and implement the USTEPs, consisting of Planning, Pilot, Implementation, and Continuation. The complete plan and time lines are outlined below.

Planning Phase (January 1997-June 1997)

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation allocated an initial sum of \$35,000 to support the planning phase of the partnerships, and the 15 public universities with teacher preparation programs are contributing direct and in-kind costs that amount to well over \$200,000.

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation grant and university funds also supported local and statewide meetings of university, public school, and community teams to meet and develop a common core of understanding and a framework for the reform of teacher education. The framework for change was designed around the five guiding principles, but tailored to the specific partnership programs developed by each public university.

Each university assembled a planning team consisting of teachers, building level administrators, superintendents or other central office administrators, university teacher education faculty, the director of teacher education, business and community leaders, and deans. In several cases, representatives from the Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Community Colleges, private and independent colleges, and others were involved in the planning process.

During this phase, each planning team developed a two-year work plan for the University-School Partnerships in 1997-98 and 1998-99 that addressed the guiding principles. Each work plan included descriptions of:

- how the goals and objectives of the partnership relate to the knowledge base and conceptual framework of the preparation programs for teachers, administrators, and other educators;
- roles, relationships, and responsibilities of all the key stakeholders, including university and public school faculty and administrators, private colleges, businesses, and community groups;
- the partnership curriculum, planning process, delivery system, and evaluation strategies;
- how the partnership was attending to issues of diversity;
- ways in which technology was intended to be utilized to address the goals of the partnership;
- proposed resource commitments for the partnership, including current and expansion funding;
- time lines for implementing the partnership goals in 1997-98 and 1998-99; and
- expected continuing activities and required resources after 1998-99.

Pilot Phase (July 1997-June 1998)

The university chancellor and board of trustees approved the collaboratively developed USTEP plans of all public school superintendents and boards of education involved in the partnership. These plans included a strategy for identifying and developing clinical schools for the initial and continuing professional development of teachers and other school-based professionals, and were completed and submitted to the UNC General Administration by July 15, 1997.

The Deans Council on Teacher Education, in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction, identified a National Review Panel (NRP) of recognized experts in teaching and teacher education to review the partnership proposals. The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation provided additional funds to support the work of the panel, whose responsibility was to evaluate the clarity and strength of the plans.

The NRP met and discussed ways to ensure consensus on expectations and protocols prior to the review process, as well as assessing each work plan for congruence with the guiding principles, and made recommendations for improvement. It was also granted the flexibility to return plans for clarification and revision before making final recommendations, which they did in every case. The review process, which involved partnership presentations to the NRP, was completed by August 15, 1997.

Proposals judged "acceptable" by the panel were eligible to receive Pilot Implementation funding, distributed on the basis of student enrollment and documented graduation rates from teacher education programs. An "economies of scale" formula assured that smaller producers of teachers, such as UNC-Pembroke or Winston Salem State University received more funding per student than the large producers such as Appalachian State University and East Carolina University, though ASU and ECU received a larger total allocation than the smaller institutions.

Only plans that were finally approved by the review panel and the UNC General Administration received funding for pilot implementation. One university received no pilot funding in the first year, three received planning funds, and the remainder received pilot funding to support first-year activities outlined in each campus' approved workplan.*

Implementation Phase (July 1998 -June 1999)

University-School Teacher Education Partnerships that received acceptable reviews during the pilot phase or who revised their initial plan to better align with the guiding principles were eligible to receive second-year funding from the UNC Board of Governors for implementation. As in the pilot phase, funds may be used to support a wide range of activities, including joint university and school staff development, stipends for classroom teachers working with preservice teacher-interns, employment of clinical faculty, travel funds, and other needs as identified in the approved partnership plans. Expansion budget funds may not be used to add tenure track faculty in the university or in the public schools.

*Note: Several constituent institutions were well along in the creation of clinical schools and professional development schools. These institutions utilized the additional funding to extend their partnerships with the public schools.

The National Review Team was invited to visit each campus and select school sites during the implementation phase to assess the progress and success of the USTEPs in implementing activities and meeting the goals set forth in their approved plans. Findings were to be reported back to the UNC General Administration and to the partnerships for the purpose of supporting universities and schools in the change process by June 30, 1999.

Continuation Phase (July 1999-continuing)

All 15 public universities with teacher preparation programs were strongly encouraged to achieve the program changes required to receive continued funding for their partnerships. In anticipation of this goal, the UNC Board of Governors has requested continuing funds from the North Carolina General Assembly for ongoing operation of the partnerships. However, continuation phase funding was released when the NRP and the UNC Board of Governors granted final approval.

A plan for an annual evaluation of the partnerships is being developed in collaboration with the deans and staff of the State Department of Public Instruction and the UNC Board of Governors, and aligned with the proposed North Carolina "THE Report Card" currently under development as mandated by the Excellent Schools Act of 1997. The audit will include the scores of preservice teachers on PRAXIS tests and other performance measures, the results of follow-up surveys of graduates, performance review data from employers, the results of surveys of employer satisfaction, and employment and teacher retention data.

Universities will be supported for strengthening the partnerships continuously as new knowledge of teaching and learning emerges from research and from "best practice." Extended graduate-level preparation of teachers in clinical schools and professional development schools recommended by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future will likely emerge as support for the reform continues.

Lessons Learned

The USTEPs are still very young and more is yet to be accomplished. However, even in the early years of the change process, much has been learned by both university and public school educators: Some of the lessons learned are:

Partnerships are beneficial.

- Partnerships can produce beneficial results that are only possible through collaboration.
- Partnerships can bring professional enrichment and renewal to participants in the public schools and the universities.

Thoughtful selection of partnership participants is an important first step.

- Involving both university and public school faculty in the selection of partnership sites will ensure that teachers are prepared in specific disciplines and areas of study.
- "Mutual selection" in teacher-intern matching will improve compatible pairings and increase the likelihood of successful learning experiences.

- Allowing clinical teacher self-nominations will help to ensure that clinical teachers are internally motivated rather than externally pressured to participate in the partnerships.

It is important to take time up-front to lay a foundation for teamwork.

- Building relationships among key participants at the beginning will help to build trust and establish ties for open communication.
- Clarifying goals, roles, and strategies for implementation (e.g., which teaching model to use) will limit future confusion and conflict.
- Convening a half or full-day retreat for participants focused on mission, vision, and goals is a relatively quick and effective way to begin to accomplish partnership objectives.

All stakeholder groups should be involved at appropriate points throughout program development and implementation.

- All stakeholder groups should be given opportunities to contribute ideas, communicate their interests, and ask questions before decisions that affect them are made.
- Planning should involve individuals who will be instrumental in later efforts.
- Student cohorts should be formed and interns assigned during the development phase.
- Interns should participate in the preparation for the opening of school and the first week of fall classes both because it is a good idea and because it is manageable.

Cultural differences between partners must be acknowledged and addressed.

- Every organization has its own unique culture. Building mutual understanding of differences (e.g., priorities, and reward systems) can strengthen partnerships.
- Partnerships must create value for all parties. For schools, value may mean improved student performance; for universities, it may mean advances in research.
- While university faculties have traditionally held primary responsibility for teacher preparation, the partnerships require shared ownership of this responsibility.

The scope of activities undertaken must be realistic with respect to available resources.

- Prioritize goals
- Begin with a relatively simple focus. Trying to do too many things at one time can dilute the overall effectiveness of the partnership.
- Use regional technology plans to help universities and school districts make most effective use of instructional technology resources and forge better communication as well.

Failure to plan ahead can hinder success and result in disappointment over unmet time lines.

- Securing long-term financing can help bring stability to partnerships. Periodically communicating the partnership benefits to those footing the bill and to those who influence the funding agencies improve the probability that they will keep these programs in their budgets.
- Unforeseen difficulties always arise during implementation. Allow extra time when giving projected final dates for the achievement of specific milestones.
- The time of preservice teachers, teachers, and university faculty must be secured well in advance (e.g., one year before) to ensure that they will have adequate time available to devote to the partnerships.

Training is necessary prior to implementation.

- Once planning is completed, all participants should meet again to discuss how the partnership will be implemented.
- Participants need to know how their individual efforts are important to the overall success of the partnership.
- Effective, school-appropriate methods of training clinical teachers and university supervisors must be provided by the partnership.

Evaluation, documentation, and communication of program performance is essential.

- Measurements of program effectiveness are necessary to support funding requests.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of partnership activities must be routinely conducted.

Individual responsibilities for evaluation and documentation must be clearly communicated and consistently reviewed.

- Participants must share successes and lessons learned.

Summary

The North Carolina University-School Teacher Education Partnerships are premised upon John Goodlad's conclusion that "any teacher education program created or conducted without the collaboration of surrounding schools is defective" (Goodlad, 1991). A shared vision, mission, and goals that are jointly crafted by members of both universities and schools must guide successful partnerships and focus equally on transformation of the school and teacher education program. Partnerships must be guided by a structure that supports equal participation by members in a clearly articulated decision-making process and empowers them to develop policies to oversee implementation of plans. Finally, they must establish an ongoing communication and feedback system at many levels in both organizations so that everyone in the partnership organizations can assess and monitor progress to identify problems and develop self-correcting mechanisms.

It is especially important that the mission and vision of the partnership be embedded deeply within participating organizations, so that the partnership will continue even if the leadership changes. (To date, nine of the fifteen deans of education have changed in the two years since the USTEPs were initiated.)

Public school and university partnerships that follow these strategies have the potential for becoming potent agents for simultaneous reform and continuous improvement in public schooling and teacher education. Effective partnerships should also help rebuild public confidence in both public schools and schools of education. The continued support of the governor, the general assembly, and other policymakers is critical. By maintaining a focus on the value-added approach to partnership and by faithfully implementing the guiding principles, the 15 USTEPs in North Carolina can become more successful and credible over time. Success will mean better initially prepared teachers, increased retention rates, and a whole new generation of competent, caring, and qualified teachers for the public schools of the state.

Suggested Readings

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- North Carolina School Improvement Panel, "Bringing It All Together for Children in Public Schools." (Raleigh, NC: Author, 1997).
- The Public School Forum of North Carolina, "A Profession in Jeopardy." (Raleigh, NC: Author, 1996).

Note: More information about the University-School Teacher Education Partnerships and related initiatives can be located at the following website: <http://www.ga.unc.edu/21stcenturyschools>

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Published quarterly for the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities by Towson University
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Phone (410) 830-3468 Fax (410) 830-3456