Inside School-University Partnerships: Successful Collaborations to Improve High School Student Achievement

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Educational partnerships between public schools and institutions of higher education provide a powerful means for enhancing student achievement and cultivating college going cultures. Throughout California, many school-university partnerships currently exist and are working hard to close the opportunity and achievement gaps that separate groups of students.

Sponsored by the *Building Educational Success Through (BEST) Collaboration in Los Angeles County* initiative, this practical guide is meant to serve as a resource for educators in school-university collaborations focused on improving the college readiness of high school students. The best practices described here came from participants in six successful collaborations who attended the “Together for High School Success: Learning from Our Partnerships” conference held in November 2005. Conference participants also identified the collaborations that are offered here as successful models of partnership work.
Building a Foundation for Successful Partnership Relationships

There is no universal recipe for building school-university partnerships that sustain themselves and achieve their goals. Best practices are site specific and are developed progressively over time. There are, however, several key elements to building a solid foundation for successful partnerships, including the following:

- **Trust**
  Developing a sense of trust among school site staff and all external partners including institutions of higher education, businesses, and community organizations

- **Shared vision**
  Ensuring that all members of the partnership share a common vision and are accountable for achieving mutually identified goals

- **Explicit assessment and accountability**
  Devising formative and quantitative assessments to measure achievement and, equally important, establishing a documentation system in order to account for and demonstrate outcomes

- **Communication**
  Creating a sustainable communication system across all levels (e.g., within the school, between school and partners, with the district) as a means of preventing a loss of communication due to frequent staff turnover

**Best Practices for Achieving Educational Goals**

Best practices are the strategies and activities that are effective in given contexts in accomplishing partnership goals and/or addressing partnership challenges. Included in this section are strategies and activities that conference participants identified as best practices for achieving three important goals that will improve high school student achievement and college going. For each goal, an existing program model that exemplifies a best practice is described.

*Goal 1: Develop and Implement a Relevant, Preparatory Curricular Model*

Educators should focus on designing a curriculum that is socially relevant and prepares students for success in college and the professional world. Good curricular models create long-term academic trajectories for high school students. The Robert A. Millikan High School PEACE Academy and its ELEVATE Program are a fine example of an effective small learning community that provides such a curriculum.
Developing an Integrated Curricular Approach:  
A Small Learning Community Program

Robert A. Millikan High School PEACE Academy and ELEV ATE Program

The PEACE (Personal success through Empowerment, Academic achievement, Conflict resolution, and Ethics in action) Academy is an international negotiations and leadership small learning community that prepares critical thinking, community-minded, college bound students to make an impact on their world. This academy engages students in learning through simulations and games (Contemporary World Project through Stanford University and International Negotiations through Whittier College), community service, field trips, student government, mentoring, and debates. PEACE students learn about the world through hands-on learning and real world experiences.

Within the PEACE academy, ELEV ATE (Enriched Learning Experiences Via Applied Technology Education) is a collaborative, technology-based program/connection sponsored by Verizon. This program blends global studies, environmental science, and philosophy/ethics together in order to engage students in an enriched curriculum. ELEV ATE combines the efforts of students from three states to sustain relevant and responsible community involvement across the nation. Millikan High School is one of three sites participating in this curriculum, with classrooms in New Jersey and Indiana also involved in the program. Weekly or monthly Town Hall Meetings are held via videoconferencing and the teachers meet regularly (both virtually and in person once a semester and over the summer) to coordinate curriculum and activities. Monitored online communications and collaborations via chat rooms, email, and message boards are used to sustain interactions outside of the classroom between and among students and teachers.

The program is evaluated in a variety of ways including the use of student and teacher surveys, the degree of community involvement by students, attendance at community interventions (e.g., beach clean ups), number of hits on the online chat room and message boards, and student success on the AP Environmental Science Exam. Other forms of measurement include the number of students who commit to volunteer in community environmental agencies, number of students who pursue philosophy and ethics in college, position papers/proposals for community interventions, financial support from local businesses, student created web sites and other products, and the use of Browsburg’s “Understanding by Design” method to develop and align curriculum with assessments. The curriculum is directly tied to state content standards and is explicit in how it meets each standard. The specific content standards addressed by the ELEV ATE curriculum include: Principles of American Democracy 12.2, 12.3, 12.6, 12.10, and Reading 2.6, Writing 1.3, Writing 2.6, and Listening and Speaking 1.6, 1.0. Instructional goals and curriculum content are aligned with these standards.

Further Information:
For more information about Robert Millikan High School visit the school web site at: http://www3.lbusd.k12.ca.us:81/millikan/
For details about the PEACE Academy visit: http://www3.lbusd.k12.ca.us:81/millikan/SmallerLearningComm/Academies/Peace/program.html
Strategies for constructing effective curricular models include:

• Developing a preparatory curriculum that helps demonstrate a clear path to college
  o Create activities that give students a concrete sense of what they need to do in order to successfully apply to college
  o Instruct students on how to set short and long term goals and how to monitor their progress
  o Set high expectations for student achievement
  o Cultivate a school and classroom culture in which students are taught that they have choices
  o Teach students explicit strategies for making informed decisions about their future opportunities

• Implementing a small learning community model
  o Foster an environment for parents, students, and teachers to develop close, long lasting relationships throughout high school
  o Allow teachers to work with the same students for four years so that they develop intimate knowledge of each student’s individual needs
  o Encourage shared teacher planning time so that a standards-based curriculum across subjects is integrated and common assessments are developed
  o Set rigorous standards for student performance
  o Cultivate a program culture based on mutual respect between teachers and students

• Designing relevant and engaging curriculum with connections to the real world
  o Focus on building a bridge between academic learning and professional opportunities
  o Collaborate with community partners in order to develop internships that allow students to apply their classroom learning
  o Plan job shadows in which students can apprentice with a working professional for a day or portion of the day
  o Develop project-based activities that incorporate real world issues so that students can apply their academic knowledge and see its relevance

• Making explicit how the curriculum and learning activities relate to state content standards
  o Identify the exact content standards to be directly incorporated in the lesson
  o Set explicit goals for learning outcomes based on the respective content standard
  o Create relevant curriculum, learning activities, and assessments
  o Evaluate student learning on a regular basis and adjust the curriculum model accordingly

• Engaging in collective goal setting and curriculum development
  o Collaborate to set and achieve reasonable instructional goals
  o Provide consistent common planning time so that teachers can build integrated units across academic domains and create common assessments
  o Develop evaluation strategies and collaborate to assess curriculum effectiveness and identify areas for improvement

Goal 2: Provide High Quality, Relevant Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers
It is important to provide quality professional development opportunities for both experienced and novice teachers. Professional development should occur regularly and should be directly relevant to teacher interests. The UCLA Center X instructional coaching model is a fine example of high quality, relevant professional development with teachers in Locke, Jordan, and Fremont High Schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District.
Teacher Professional Development: An Instructional Coaching Model

The UCLA Center X - LAUSD Partnership
In Fall 2001 a School-University Partnership was established between what was then Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Local District I, and what is now LAUSD Local District 7, and UCLA Center X in order to support literacy across subject matter areas. The partnership brings together Local District teachers, administrators, and parent leaders, and Center X professional developers, teacher educators, and teachers. The partnership focuses on content literacy, standards-based instruction, and instructional leadership through on-going professional development and coaching. The overall goal is to develop a collaborative relationship between Center X and the Local District’s secondary teachers such that both parties engage in content literacy-focused professional development as a part of teachers’ ongoing work and do so in a way that impacts the literacy achievement of high school students in the Local District.

As a part of the Center X – LAUSD Local District 7 partnership, UCLA subject matter coaches are paired with Locke, Jordan, and Fremont High Schools so that the English, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science departments at each site have ongoing professional development support. As a part of the professional development work, the UCLA coaches at each site spend time supporting teachers in their classroom work as they make sense of using these literacy strategies. In addition, content professional developers work with teachers outside their classrooms one day a month on content literacy. All professional development occurs at the school site and is specific to the needs of the teachers in a given content area at a specific site. A unique aspect of the partnership is that the professional development sessions take place during the work-day rather than after school or on Saturdays. Teachers are subbed out of classes monthly to participate in professional development around literacy strategies and standards-based instruction.

In addition, each content area at each school has designated a cadre leader responsible for leading and supporting the content literacy work of colleagues in her or his respective department. Cadre leaders and Center X coaches work closely together to ensure that the needs of teachers are met by providing both expertise with content and literacy and also resources to support their work. Center X coaches and cadre leaders meet once a month (rotating school sites for meetings) to examine student work and instructional practices, discussing the challenges and successes they have encountered throughout the previous month.

Further Information:
For more information visit the UCLA Center X web site at: http://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/partnerships.php or contact Robin McDonald at mcdonald@gseis.ucla.edu.
Effective teacher professional development can be achieved by:

• Increasing teacher investment in professional development by implementing work that emphasizes leadership skills for teachers
  o Encourage teachers to lead training sessions and serve as facilitators in workshops

• Ensuring that professional development opportunities convey clear, concrete implications for instructional practice

• Offering professional development that focuses on creating ways for teachers to collaborate in a supportive, teacher-driven environment

• Providing novice teachers with preliminary training and student teaching opportunities that are situated within the school and/or in the community where the teacher intends to work
  o Have teacher education programs hold core courses at school sites and incorporate unique issues facing the schools and students in the community

• Expanding professional development to include teachers observing other classrooms
  o Have teachers use the observations to refine their own instructional practices and pedagogy

Suggestions for the timing, content, and structure of professional development include:

• Conducting professional development on a weekly and monthly basis

• Holding content-based sessions during the school day

• Scheduling common planning time

• Providing teachers with a substitute so that they can plan within their specialty and grade level

• Conducting grade-level after-school planning sessions on a weekly basis

• Planning Saturday workshops that include a variety of activities
  o Analyze student assignments from the previous months as a process for reflection on teacher and student work
  o Collaborate to create and refine standards-based unit plans
  o Evaluate test results to decide what is happening with student learning
  o Develop or review/revise rigorous culminating tasks

Effective one-on-one coaching in a teacher’s classroom includes:

• Providing real-time feedback on existing instructional practices

• Developing standards-based lessons, culminating tasks, common assessments, and test preparation modules

• Observing units modeled by the coach in the teacher’s classroom room

• Employing coaches who are seen as credible by the teachers and school staff

• Having coaches seen to be advocates for and allies of the teachers
• Having coaches collaborate with staff on program development
  o Support school and district literacy goals
  o Take a leadership role in the school literacy committee
  o Collaborate to develop CAHSEE/CST test preparation modules that support school-wide
efforts to promote test readiness

• Having coaches facilitate communication between high school feeder schools and the ninth
grade teachers.

Goal 3: Provide Parents with the Means to Support Partnership Work

Parents play essential roles in ensuring the success of partnership-inspired activities at the school
site. In order to support partnership goals, parents need consistent information about their children’s
academic experience and college going needs. More informed parents tend to be more involved
parents. The UCLA Parent Curriculum Project is a fine example of a successful parent participation
program.

Parent Involvement: Leadership Development for Parents

UCLA Parent Curriculum Project

The UCLA Parent Curriculum Project (PCP) is a professional development program for parents
eager to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. PCP aims to build
the knowledge and leadership of parents, to increase their involvement in schools, and to create
a neutral and supportive environment in which parents can reflect on education, schooling, and
reform. Parents develop leadership skills in communication and mediation to assist other parents
in connecting with counselors and teachers so that all parents can help navigate their children
through the school system.

The UCLA Outreach Parent Leadership Institute is an important component of PCP. UCLA subject-
matter project consultants, EAOP advisors, and parent leaders provide parent participants with the
opportunity to experience learning in a student-centered classroom environment. This leadership
institute enables parents to make sense of the complexities involved in preparing urban students
for college. In addition to an overnight residential retreat on the UCLA campus, this thirteen-
week institute consists of standards-based instruction in language arts, science, social studies,
and mathematics. Parents also learn about the history of education, assessments, rubric creation,
and testing. Parents have the opportunity to participate in outdoor activities, communication
workshops, and college preparatory coursework. Another crucial part of the institute involves
parents applying what they have learned by creating tangible plans for parent involvement at their
school.

Further Information:
For more information on PCP visit http://www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu/projects/parentproj/index.
html or contact Laila Hasan at hasan@gseis.ucla.edu.

To learn more about Parent U-Turn, a group of Lynwood parent activists who completed the
PCP program and continue to be involved in advocacy and reform, visit http://tcla.gseis.ucla.
edu/rights/features/7/parents/index.html.
Educators can enhance parent involvement through:

- Holding regular (bimonthly) parent meetings at the school site
  - Consider parent work schedules when planning these meetings
  - Provide child care and/or transportation to and from meetings whenever possible

- Providing parents with opportunities to understand their child’s academic experience
  - Give parents information about SATs, college admissions processes, and effective study skills
  - Plan Saturday parent seminars at the school site where parents can participate in mock SAT tests and other simulated college preparatory activities
  - Invite parents to attend college-related field trips and plan a wide range of field trips that vary in terms of duration, date, and time so as to accommodate parent work schedules

- Informing parents about local parent education programs that are sponsored by universities and community organizations

- Conducting home visits in order to create a new space for parent-teacher interaction and redefine norms for parental involvement in student achievement
  - Schedule the visit around parental work schedules
  - Participate in family meals or other activities as a springboard to meaningful connections between the school and home contexts
  - Reduce discomfort parents may experience at school by having the teacher become a familiar figure before the first school visit

Best Practices for Enlarging the School-University Partnership

School-university partnerships are greatly enhanced when community programs and organizations and local businesses join in the collaboration. Outreach to community and business organizations is an important aspect of good partnership work. Partnering with existing community programs can save time and resources while expanding the opportunities and programs available to support students. Building partnerships with local businesses is an effective strategy for acquiring program resources and creating powerful student opportunities such as internships and job shadows. The Robert A. Millikan High School ELEVATE program is an excellent example of the opportunities for learning and development that community organizations and businesses can provide in a partnership.
Partnering with Community Organizations and Businesses: Resources and Student Opportunities

Within the PEACE academy, ELEVATE (Enriching Learning Experiences Via Applied Technology Education) is a collaborative, technology-based program/connection sponsored by Verizon. ELEVATE represents a successful effort to integrate community resources in a tangible way to promote student achievement. This program has built relationships with local businesses and community organizations all of which have provided funding and/or program support in the form of guest speakers and other student opportunities. The following list describes each partner and its contributions to this integrative program:

- Verizon has provided facilities and technical support in the planning and implementation phase.
- The Long Beach Education Foundation has provided part of the funding and continues to advocate the program at the district level.
- The Kiwanis of Long Beach are currently working with AudioVisual Integration Systems to further advance the technology offerings in ELEVATE.
- CILC (Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration) in conjunction with Rockman et al. researches program progress and monitors the use of Vistas (an online collaborative that allows teachers to post lessons and discuss matters relevant to the curriculum).
- LBUSD Technology Curriculum Leader also provides funding and support.
- CTAP (California Technology Assistance Project) has also funded portions of this reform and continues to provide professional development opportunities.
- Heal The Bay has sent guest speakers to help the program solidify content knowledge and increase service learning efforts in the community.

Further information:
For more information about ELEVATE visit: http://www3.lbusd.k12.ca.us:81/millikan/SmallerLearningComm/Academies/Peace/program.html

Incorporating community and business organizations effectively into partnerships can involve:

- Collaborating with leaders to build relevant programs for neighborhood youth.
- Recruiting partners by communicating concrete plans for how their contributions will impact student experiences.
- Leveraging existing program models and tailoring them to the respective student population.
  - AVID, EAOP, GEAR UP, and MESA programs are examples of existing models that are easily adaptable to specific school needs.
• Developing concrete plans for how any contributions from community and business organizations will be used (e.g., specific equipment, instructional materials, field trips)

• Establishing goals for how contributions will improve program outcomes
  o Use contributions, whenever possible, in ways that result in tangible student learning and development outcomes

• Creating assessment plans that measure outcomes and include accounting for all contributions
  o Establish explicit measures and data collection plans in order to ensure that relevant data are available for reporting purposes

• Including partners in program activities so they can directly observe how their contributions are improving education
  o Have them participate in school events, visit classrooms, and interact with students

• Maintaining regular contact with partners so that they are consistently informed of program progress
  o Prepare monthly newsletters to communicate important program accomplishments

• Providing appropriate documentation to community and business partners
  o Write regular reports to partners that describe the allocation of resources and what impact the contributions are making on student achievement
  o Be prepared and willing to answer contributors’ questions
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