

March 3, 2010

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Dear Colleagues.

I was pleased to receive Dr. Canada's December 22, 2009 letter informing me that the Education and Educational Psychology Department planned to form a Steering Committee on Teacher Preparation Program Initiatives. This school year, I have been appointed to serve as a member of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendent's Task Force to make recommendations for the transformation of education in the State. So I have witnessed across the State that there exists a consensus that it is indeed time for much needed change in all of our schools! Additionally, I have been asked to meet with Commissioner Meotti in March to speak about preparation programs for teachers and administrators. I wanted to forward to you our ideas prior to further meetings with others.

I do understand that my September 16th assessment of the skills and experiences of the graduates from various schools in Connecticut may seem, on the surface, to be unfair. Also, I understand that the Western's education program consists of four years of study compared to the five year Masters offered through the University of Connecticut. However, it remains my contention that Western's program can

be transformed to make its graduates very highly competitive with those from other universities if the university works in a new partnership with local school districts.

With my colleague, Janice Jordan, and with the input of many of our teachers and administrators, I have developed the following proposal. Please allow this correspondence to serve as a proposal to the Department of Education at WCSU from Dr. Jordan and me to fundamentally transform teacher education.

The goals of this proposal:

1. To support WCSU in their admittance and preparation of the strongest teaching candidates possible who can successfully address the complexities of Connecticut's diverse classrooms;
2. To produce teacher candidates whose experiences and skills will prepare them to compete very favorably with the graduates of any school in America;
3. To build very effective reciprocities among the WCSU Department of Education and the school systems of western Connecticut, WCSU's primary service area;
4. To place WCSU teacher candidates for specific periods of time into public school settings, beginning in their freshman year, in ways that will deepen their understanding of classroom "best practices," and greatly increase their ability to demonstrate those skills found in the newly revised *Connecticut Common Core of Teaching* (2010);
5. To create and support cohorts of "Professional Learning Communities" of WCSU pre-service teachers who will work in laboratory public schools and complete specially designed teacher development practica as well as participate in original action research;
6. To radically change the expectations placed upon those public schools that host pre-service teachers so that on-site cooperating teachers meet the challenge of preparing the next generation of pre-service teachers.

The concept supporting this proposal

We do not make this proposal without having completed significant research into what we believe to be the "problem of teacher preparation." The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) created a Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation, Partnerships, and Improved Students Learning. Their final recommendations, due in spring 2010, are expected to call for "...bolstered clinical fieldwork – including simulations, case studies, and analyses of teaching – in addition to student teaching that takes place in schools." The goal of this panel is to assist teacher preparation colleges to re-conceptualize teaching as a practice-based profession in the mold of medicine or clinical psychology and to update their training programs accordingly. The report calls for bringing alternative preparation models with a clinical focus, such as teacher residencies, [into the teacher preparation programs]. In looking at such models, the NCATE panel could potentially set a longer, more rigorous bar for clinical fieldwork. Re-defined Teacher Residencies may emerge as a promising way to increase clinical field work and provide intensive monitoring and support for pre-service teachers by local universities and school districts working together (Sawchuk 2010).

Although we applaud the NCATE panel's direction, we must counsel that improving pre-service teaching *must* include much stronger and more effective collaborations among local university teacher preparation programs, local school districts, state departments of education, and other stakeholders invested in improving teacher pre-service education.

The scholarship supporting this proposal:

The Bethel Public Schools and other western region school systems are anxious to work with Western Connecticut State University to create the model of teacher preparation envisioned by these organizations and educational researchers. In preparing this recommendation, we completed a wide range of reading, some of which is listed below, as well as qualitative research on the topic of teacher preparation:

Bonk, C. J. (2009). *The world is open: How web technology is revolutionizing education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Connecticut State Department of Education. (February 2010). *Common core of teaching: Foundational skills*. Hartford, CT: State Department of Education.

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching, 2nd Edition*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Danielson, C., Axtell, D., Bevan, P. Cleland, B., McKay, C., Phillips, E., & Wright, K. (2009). *Implementing the framework for teaching in enhancing professional practice*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Darling-Hammond, L. et al. (2008). *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching for understanding*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford, J. (Eds.) (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lemov, D. (2010). *Teach Like A Champion*, San Francisco, CA. John Wiley.

Jordan, J., et al. (2009). *What new teachers have to say about their pre-service preparation*. Manuscript not yet submitted for publication.

Jordan, J. et al. (2009). *What mentoring teachers have to say about the pre-service preparation of new teachers*. Manuscript not yet submitted for publication.

Sawchuk, S. (January 20, 2010). NCATE panel weighing fieldwork for student-teachers. *Education Week*. 29. 7.

Trilling, B. and Fadel, C. (2009). *21st century skills: Learning for life in our times*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tucker, P. D. & Stronge, J. H. (2005). *Linking teacher evaluation and student learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wagner, T. (2008). *The global achievement gap: Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need and what we can do about it*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

The teacher commentary supporting this proposal:

Moreover, prior to shaping these recommendations for teacher preparation, the administrators of the Bethel Public Schools completed two focus group sessions with 60+ teachers in two groups. One group consisted of teachers with 1-3 years of experience, and the second group consisted of experienced teachers who mentored beginning teachers in recent years.

The focus group questions examined pre-service teacher preparation from the viewpoint of the teachers involved. The comments made by both teacher groups proved to be instructive about the depth of preparation programs at several local universities, most especially WCSU, since those graduates made up the majority of the responders.

The teachers in the focus group with 1-3 years of experience believe that their student teaching experiences were the most effective component of their pre-service learning, and not the learning experiences they had in university classrooms. In addition, the teachers said that the quality of their student teaching experiences was solely dependent the preparation, experience, and commitment of the cooperating teacher. Areas of concern verbalized in these focus groups included:

1. The Life of the Professional Teacher:

Universally, teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience reported that their pre-service education did not prepare them with any knowledge or coping strategies to address the physical and mental stress teachers experience in classrooms. The typical teacher's work load and the expectation that they will be able to manage multiple demands at once are serious challenges to new teachers. Teachers expressed that there was little emphasis placed on developing the type of "professionalism" and "habits of mind" espoused in the *Common Core of Teaching* or in the state's *Teacher Code of Professional Ethics*. They also indicated that the need to be highly collaborative and able to work as active contributors in Professional Learning Communities were not part of their experiences in the profession.

2. The Teaching of Reading and Writing:

Respondents reported that they were not sufficiently prepared in content pedagogy—especially in the teaching of reading or teaching students how to learn. Coursework at the elementary level was generalized and not useful in actual school settings, according to many new teachers. Most particularly, new teachers indicated that there was insufficient pertinent instruction in the teaching of reading and writing at *all* levels. There was insufficient instruction in how to use small group instruction effectively, and how to set up and manage groups. No college coursework addressed the question, "What do I do if my students don't learn the material the first time I teach it?" They indicated that they had little

experience in thinking diagnostically about daily formative assessments or using them to prepare lessons for the next day.

3. Creating Safe, Respectful, Well-Organized, and Productive Classroom Environments and Building a Culture for Learning in the Classroom:

Respondents reported that coursework having to do with student management, discipline and establishing classroom routines was of little value to them when confronted with a real classroom. The general sentiment was, "You have to do it to learn it." Many mentoring teachers and new teachers expressed that teachers appeared to lack a fundamental understanding of the best ways to manage classroom behavior and to avoid punishing rather than building alternative ways of behaving.

Respondents were highly critical of professors who have not been in a public school classroom for 20+ years – and they labeled this as "a credibility gap." New teachers also indicated that colleges and school districts need to "check out" the knowledge and commitment of assigned cooperating teachers to be sure that they are models of "best practice" themselves.

WCSU respondents reported that they learned a lot from observing classes in Bethel Public Schools or in other schools. The consensus was that pre-service teachers benefit from spending more time with real teachers in the authentic contexts of schools if they want to build classroom cultures for learning.

4. The Criticality of Observing and Working with Experienced Teachers When Planning for Instruction:

Respondents indicated that their exposure to lesson planning in college was artificial and minimally useful. Situations were often contrived, in their view. The teachers reported that they were required to design rubrics for lessons that they quickly realized were not going to work in real situations. Respondents indicated that they were told to develop "engaging" lessons, but they did not know their audiences, never actually presented lessons, and, therefore, never learned if their designs were engaging. They complained that the "bigger planning picture" was never covered. They spoke of the need to do these things in real classrooms with real teachers.

In addition, "student engagement" was only presented in a surface level. Pre-service and experienced teachers all commented that understanding and applying differentiated practices, constructivist activities that give students more choice and increase commitment to learning, or cooperative grouping strategies that really worked to help students work interdependently were rarely part of their preparation at WCSU and other schools. Again, the teachers said more "real world" experiences would have helped a great deal to build confidence and skills.

5. The Importance of Knowing How to Integrate Technology into Learning:

The use of technology in pre-service classrooms was very limited and training in the integration of technology into lesson planning was virtually non-existent. There was little to no instruction on the ISTE Technology Standards for teachers or for students. Digital Citizenship was not a focus in coursework. There was virtually no experience with on-line courses, several specific research tools and information literacy skills, or data-management tools in pre-service. Teachers admitted that, for the most part, they learned to use school technology on the job. The concepts found in the 21st Century Skills curricula are not being taught to pre-service teachers.

On a related topic, teacher preparation to conduct research in a modern library with many on-line resources appears to be very diverse. Some of our teachers are very comfortable conducting their own research and using on-line tools to do so, while others have had limited experiences with this.

6. The Use and Management of Student Learning Data:

In pre-service, teachers reported they had little experience with the analysis of student learning data or student work artifacts, and little to no preparation in understanding summative or formative assessment. Many admitted that they were unfamiliar with those terms until they were interviewed for a teaching position. Some teachers admitted that they were taught general concepts of data gathering, but this teaching did not extend to using data to revise or differentiate instruction. Assessment was presented theoretically, "not doing anything with the data, just knowing it could be developed."

7. Scientific Research-Based Interventions and Professional Learning Communities to Improve Learning:

Again, many teachers reported that they had not heard of SRBI or Professional Learning Communities until asked in job interviews. Since Scientifically-Research Based Intervention (SRBI) is a federally mandated intervention program (RTI) just implemented in Connecticut, it is important for pre-service teachers to think of the impact of such a mandate on regular education classrooms. Actually, new special educators explained that they had greater exposure, but did not understand the concepts in action until they were in an actual school setting. Most respondents indicated that their exposure came in the form of "watching a movie on it." In terms of Professional Learning Communities, the respondents indicated that their first exposure was in Bethel, in spite of the fact that PLC's are critical to teacher collaboration and instructional improvement.

8. The Importance of Experiencing Special Learning Situations:

A significant number of teachers indicated that they "had one class dealing with defining the types of disabilities, but no indication of instructional modifications that might be required to teach special needs children." The comment, "I learned what I needed to know by co-teaching once I got here..." seemed to reflect the consensus of the group.

Many teachers indicated that they had not ever seen an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan, and they were not aware of what to expect in a PPT (Planning and Placement Team) process. Respondents largely agreed with one teacher who commented that she had her "...first look at a PPT on day 4 of the job in Bethel."

Several new teachers and their mentoring teachers claimed that pre-service did not help them make the connections between theory and school reality when it came to special learners. They noted that teaching English Language Learners was not mentioned at the university level in some colleges, and gender learning differences were not a topic in their coursework. In addition, learning that students are all different and that teachers don't just teach to one type of child, but to everyone they have, was very hard for new teachers. They told of spending many hours working on lessons to engage "different" learners or students with attention and motivation problems.

9. The Imperative of Differentiation:

Respondents overwhelmingly reported that professors “...kept mentioning ‘differentiating’ in classes,” but teachers felt that there was no detailed explanation of how to differentiate and what it looked like in actual practice. Others reported that any focus on differentiation in their college coursework was on high-ability or low-ability children only, and never on the other reasons for differentiating instruction.

It seems there is a strong and clear message being sent that Western graduates strongly endorse any move by the Department to examine the content, relevance, and depth of the current university coursework.

The principals’ commentary supporting this proposal:

Additionally, in assembling this recommendation, we consulted our school principals who have been and will be in a position to hire WCSU teacher candidates. They were asked to brainstorm “must haves” to distinguish successful teacher candidates.

1. Must Have Experiences

- Candidates should be able to use a variety of technologies to enhance instruction.
- Candidates should have observational experience (at a minimum) of the special education process (PPT, IEP, interventions, goal setting, accommodations, and modifications) well beyond simply being able to speak about the law.
- Candidates should be able to explain the differences between formative and summative assessment. They should observe and be a part of developing both for a real setting and then making instructional changes based upon assessment results.
- Candidates should have multiple experiences with mentor teachers in developing lessons for coherent instruction, and analyzing student work within the context of a unit or course, setting the standards for student work, and determining the quality of completed work.
- Candidates should experience professional development activities in a school setting with teachers who are themselves learning and reflecting on practice.
- Candidates should have observed the establishment of classroom management and work procedures in the first days of the year in a public school setting, and should have completed a personal management plan based upon these observations.
- Candidates should be very familiar with the state mandated *Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT)* and the *Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT)*, and with the State of Connecticut’s Grade Level Expectations (GLE’s) in Reading, Writing, Science, and Mathematics.
- The candidates should have experiences which develop their questioning skills on many levels, and their student engagement skills—especially of reluctant learners.

2. Must Have Skills

- Reflective learner skills
- Technology skills
- Oral and written communication skills
- Enthusiasm and positive attitude
- Solid content knowledge
- Collaboration skills
- Ability to accept constructive feedback
- Lesson planning

- Feedback skills to students and parents
- Literacy strategies for all grade levels
- Questioning skills

3. Habits of Mind

- Strong work ethic
- Life long learner
- Personal and professional reading
- Professionalism
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Positive personality factors
- Accountability
- Compassion

The proposal --- Foundations of Classroom Performance in Practicum Experiences

We heard from teachers was that their best learning was in the public school classrooms, not in any university classroom. A careful examination of university coursework needs to be completed to make sure that learning is relevant and useful. Major choices should be significantly restricted at the elementary level to language arts, math, or science and elective course should be aimed at the act of teaching. At the secondary level, the university must develop its own system to “certify” that students are well-versed experts in the content of their discipline.

Our teachers told us that they were not prepared to deal with the most essential expectations of the profession. Those elements need to be specifically identified and targeted. We believe that the university should partner with a limited number of public schools and a limited number of public school professionals who will uphold specific professional standards and who are willing to mold pre-service teachers by working to provide very specific experiences.

Teacher candidates should begin their preparation in their freshman year. GPA minimum requirements should be increased. Candidates should complete 48 hours of directed observation in each of the practicum experiences suggested below. The definition of “directed observation” is that cohorts will be assigned to a specific school for a specific purpose, i.e., to observe the IEP and PPT process at work in a school setting; to be part of the Professional Learning Community setting goals and developing assessments; to observe the actual delivery of services to special needs students; to develop and provide Tier I and Tier II intervention lessons for targeted children; and to complete a journal entry for all of these activities.

We believe that WCSU pre-service teachers should form their own Professional Learning Teams, early on, to complete the above-noted experiences as a group, thereby replicating the work of Professional Learning Communities. They should learn and demonstrate the behaviors of colleagues committed to helping each other learn.

We believe that the practicum experiences should be low cost to students, that public school professionals should be contract employees assigned to complete specific tasks, required texts should be common resources, not individually purchased and that university professors should be in public schools not less than weekly.

Below are specific practicum experiences which we believe will help all pre-service teachers to be better prepared for the professional life of a teacher. We know that these experiences will require a great deal more of the participating public schools and of the WCSU education faculty, but we wholeheartedly believe these are critical to addressing the “problem of teacher preparation.” We also know that they are not all-inclusive, but are ones we believe are essential for pre-service teachers.

We believe that this approach is low-cost and will make Western students highly competitive in the marketplace. We respectfully submit them to you for your consideration. Our administrative and teaching staffs are anxious to begin such a partnership.

If we can accomplish these goals, Western students will be the best prepared in Connecticut, will be highly sought after, and will be highly competitive in the job market.

Sincerely,

Gary M. Chesley, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Janice M. Jordan, Ph.D.
Associate Superintendent

Instructional Practicum

Management of Student Behavior (first semester, 48 hours)

- Observe: Experienced teachers setting rules; establishing classroom procedures; holding parent/teacher conferences; supervising student assemblies; participating in a "Hands Up" meeting; participating in a student discipline meeting; implementing Positive Behavior Supports
- Do: Cafeteria duty; bus duty; ride a bus route; interview students assigned to detention or in-school suspension; interview students in alternate high school; interview an Assistant Principal; interview a school counselor and/or a school psychologist.
- Read: "Classroom Management That Works" by Robert Marzano (2003)
AND
"Solving Thorny Behavior Problems: How Teachers and Students Can Work Together"* by Caltha Crowe (2009)
OR
"Sammy and His Behavior Problems: Stories and Strategies from Teacher's Year"* by Caltha Crowe (2009) *See info@responsiveclassroom.org
- Produce: A behavior management plan that could be implemented in a classroom. Include five rules and five procedures that are considered of greatest importance for a highly effective learning environment. Prepare for verbal presentation and critique by a panel of three experienced teachers.

Instructional Practicum

Special Education in a School Environment (one semester, 48 hours)

- Observe: Experienced special education teachers in these contexts: Learning center; a program for students identified with ED; an alternative program; special education classes and collaborative/co-taught instructional settings; providing specialized instruction; parent/teacher meetings; meetings with regular education teachers; PPT's and IEP development (particularly accommodations/modifications as they relate to instruction).
- Do: Attend a PPS/special education teacher meeting; attend a PPT; interview a special education teacher in each of the specialized areas (collaborative or co-taught classroom, learning centers, special education classes; interview the department chair of special

education or Learning Initiatives Teacher at the elementary or middle school; attend a Professional Learning Community meeting.

- Read: *The Differentiated School* by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2008)
AND
When Kids Can't Read by Kyleene Beers (2003)
AND
Brain-Based Teaching with Adolescent Learning in Mind by Glenda B. Crawford (2007)
OR
More Tools for Teaching Content Literacy by Janet Allen (2008)

- Produce: A differentiated instructional plan for a content area lesson that includes accommodations/modifications for instruction and assessment.

Develop a summary and critique of 2 recent articles about the delivery of services and instruction for special education students with ADHD, LD, and Autism. Prepare for verbal presentation and critique by a panel of one experienced regular education and one experienced special education teacher and one administrator.

Instructional Practicum

Educational Integration of Technology into Instruction (one semester, 48 hours)

- Observe: A "Tech Champion" teaching a lesson integrating technology components into your specific curricula; a technology Professional Learning Community meeting within your building/district; a classroom/student utilizing assistive technology; diagnostic use of technology with a student; a teacher using data collection technology (*DRA Online, IEP Direct, Senteo* student response, etc.); a data team meeting where data is being analyzed; a *Moodle* course being used in a hybrid classroom; a Library Media Specialist giving instruction on media literacy (credibility/reliability in web sites, online databases, intellectual property rights)
- Do: Participate in a webinar offered by ISTE or another professional development organization in an unfamiliar content area; interview a K-8 technology teacher; interview a district technology coordinator; interview a Library Media Specialist
- Read: "Digital Citizenship in Schools" by Mike Ribble & Gerald Bailey (2007 ISTE Publications)
National Educational Technology Standards for Students (2007 ISTE Publications)
National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers (2008 ISTE Publications)
- Produce: Create and teach a lesson focusing on one of the nine elements of digital citizenship and incorporating NETS*S standards in an appropriate grade level/content area.

Instructional Practicum

Formative and Summative Assessments (one semester, 48 hours)

- Observe: Teachers identifying Power Standards and “unwrapping” those standards; Teachers creating formative and summative assessments based on the state department of education Grade Level Benchmarks or content standards; teachers discussing and interpreting results of formative and summative assessments; teachers developing SRBI (Scientifically Research Based Interventions) using data from formative and summative assessments.
- Do: Assist a teacher or teaching team in developing one formative and one summative assessment; observe students as they take that formative and that summative assessment; assist in analyzing results of a formative assessment and planning for an individual or small group intervention based upon that analysis; assist in analyzing results of a summative assessment and planning for whole-class instruction based upon that analysis.
- Read: *Classroom Assessment* by W. James Popham (2002)
Common Formative Assessments by Larry Ainsworth and Donald Viegut (2006)
- Produce: a summary paper of what was learned from the data collected on the formative and summative assessments which were developed, implemented, and analyzed; include differentiated formative and summative assessments for students with special needs in the analysis

Instructional Practicum

Reading Instruction in Elementary School (One Semester, 48 hours)

- Observe: Classroom teachers delivering reading instruction whole class, shared reading lessons and in small guided reading groups; reading specialists during intervention lessons; classroom teachers and reading specialists delivering phonics and word work instruction; teachers administering a *Developmental Reading Assessment* and performing miscue analysis; teachers discussing and interpreting the results of *DRA* and miscue analysis; an instructional Professional Learning Community where teachers are analyzing reading assessment data to create SMART goals and action plans for instruction.
- Do: Assist a teacher in the planning of reading lessons which include the analysis of assessment data and anecdotal records to plan for small group strategy and guided reading lessons; assist in selection of materials to be used for instruction for these groups; observe the lessons, taking anecdotal records of student behaviors and actions during lessons; analyze data with teacher after lesson and assist with planning goals and objectives for the students' next guided reading lesson.
- Read: (Choose two of these or members of the student team should jigsaw these books)

Making the Most of Small Group Instruction by Debbie Diller (2007)

On Solid Ground: Strategies for Teaching Reading K-3 by Sharon Taberski (2000)

Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (1996)

Four Powerful Reading Strategies for Struggling Students: Grades 3-8: Small Group Instruction That Improves Comprehension by Lois Lanning (2008)

Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well by Regie Routman (2002)

Produce: Prepare a shared reading lesson to model a specific reading strategy and administer a *DRA* including a miscue analysis of two different students. Analyze results of assessment and plan for a guided reading lesson for each student based on the results. Present plans for instruction to an experienced teacher and reading specialist.