

Creating a School/University Partnership

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Introduction to the Sample MOU

Each school/university partnership is unique. Partners seldom have a blueprint or roadmap to guide their efforts. Learning to work in new ways means that the member organizations of the partnership cannot simply continue to do business as usual. Partnership work, therefore, is labor-intensive, creative, and messy. It takes time to iron out the bugs. Often the urgent daily work of creating excellent schools demands that school districts and universities rely on the tried-and-true methods because these methods are well-known and it is tempting to fall back on what is familiar. The important thing is to *get the job done*.

However, evidence is mounting that “getting the job done” with these methods is not accomplishing what we want (SREB, 2009). Thus, there must be a strategic investment of time and resources to craft a new process. This is exactly what the new guidelines for preparation of Illinois school leaders are designed to do: create a new environment of partnership so that universities, school districts, and other stakeholders may learn to work in new ways to prepare transformative school leaders of the future.

“Joint productive work” (Murrell, 1998) means working out the details of partnership without a blueprint or template to guide these deliberations. However, partnerships can learn from the work of others who have been doing this type of work in their communities in recent years. Lessons learned in their beginning efforts can inform the work in other places while each partnership faces their own unique local challenges.

The following document “Sample Memorandum of Understanding” is intended to offer guidelines for thinking, talking about and establishing local partnerships. The sample MOU is derived from the past experiences and hard-won lessons of other school districts and universities. It tries to give a nuts-and-bolts introduction to the types of conversations that should begin to take place as school district and university leaders come together to learn new ways to work together to improve the leadership of Illinois schools.

Listed below are some **discussion points** that will assist you in developing a detailed MOU, designed to address the specific needs of your partnership and reflect the unique relationship between the parties. A MOU should clearly delineate the specific roles and responsibilities of each of the parties involved and identify those areas of shared responsibility. MOUs are most effective when they are treated as living documents. Regular review and revision is necessary, as this will provide the foundation for an effective and sustainable partnership.

1. Work collaboratively to **identify, recruit, develop and support** school leaders;
 - a. The partnership must confer on the current process of identifying potential school leaders and create/articulate a new process. How will decisions be made and what role does each party play in this process?
 - b. What skills, attributes and knowledge will candidates be expected to possess and which will be learned and cultivated during the principal prep program?
 - c. In these discussions, what will be the school district's role in communicating with its faculty and staff about the new process and its timeframe?
 - d. What standards and criteria will the district use to select prospective new leaders to apply for the program? And, will the new programs prompt changes at the district level in selection of new principals?
 - e. Under the new process, what will be the university's admission criteria?
 - f. How will the school district support aspiring principals while they are enrolled in their university preparation program?
2. Develop principals and assistant principals capable of **transforming our schools** into true learning communities;
 - a. This conversation requires an examination of the current status of local schools in light of state and national standards; What does the district expect and what can the university provide?
 - b. The partnership must look closely at the needs of the local community and its current and emerging student populations; How will this be translated into the curriculum?
 - c. What changes need to be made at the district or university level to support these students?
 - d. How are the university's graduates contributing to the transformation now? How do we capture and retain what works and how do we identify and change that which doesn't work?
 - e. What district owned data and data systems will be shared with the university, for use in its programs?
 - f. What data analysis or research will be shared by the university to inform district policies and procedures?
3. Provide **appropriate course work** leading the aspiring principal candidates to successful and timely program completion;

- a. The school district and the university will design a program of courses that will enable prospective principals to complete courses within a reasonable time period.
 - b. Courses need to be tied directly to national standards and also reflect the unique needs of the community;
 - c. How will the partnership work to ensure that the 5 strands required by the state are infused throughout the curriculum?
 - d. How will the program be structured to ensure a focus in all courses on: the PK-12 continuum; include all students (Special Education, English Language Learners, Early Childhood & Gifted); and working collaboratively through building teams to focus on instruction, curriculum, assessments and district needs for school improvement?
4. **Continuously assess** the effectiveness and relevance of course work and internship experience in a way that improves outcomes;
 - a. The university will use the resources of the partnership to assess the program, including courses, texts, instructors and assessments and make program improvements according to the changing needs of the both partners; What is the district's role in this and how will the assessment outcomes be communicated?
 - b. How will the program assessment process be created to provide on-going involvement with the school district in the assessment of outcomes;
 - c. An agreement of what data will be collected and how it will be analyzed to determine outcomes; including specifics on which party is responsible for collection and analysis.
5. Prepare students for **internships** and support them during their internships;
 - a. The courses will prepare students for starting the critical internship phase;
 - b. The school district will support the University in placing and supervising interns, including ensuring that mentor principals meet the state qualification requirements;
 - c. The school district will assist the University in evaluating interns' performance;
 - d. The university and the district will work in collaboration to determine potential policy and procedural barriers to the internship experience and create solutions that improve outcomes.
6. Provide **comprehensive mentoring, coaching and support** during the internship;
 - a. The partnership will provide mentoring and supervision for interns throughout their internship experience; including both a qualified host principal and a university supervisor;
 - b. The university and the district will discuss appropriate levels of involvement, including expectations on participation by university of district personnel in seminars, school-based events, etc.

- c. The partnership may draw upon external resources (such as the Illinois Principals' Association) to assist with mentorship of interns;
- 7. **Convene on a regular basis** a design team made up of university personnel and district personnel for the purpose of reflecting on the design of the leadership program, admissions criteria, curriculum, student assessment, outcomes evaluation, district needs, and other areas of mutual interest;
 - a. The partnership must institute a regular communications process (including face-to-face meetings) to discuss the workings of the program;
 - b. The meetings should include joint or rotating leadership, agenda-setting and monitoring;
 - c. Will this group be the group that provide mentoring and supervision for interns throughout their internship experience? If not, how will that group be determined and when will they meet?
- 8. **Evaluate district and university policies and practices** in the recruitment and retention of high-quality school leaders;
 - a. The school district will use the expertise of the university in evaluating its operations with regard to the corps of school administrators;
 - b. The university will use the expertise of the school district in evaluating its operation with regard to the preparation of school administrators;
 - c. The partnership may choose to use the expertise of outside evaluators to examine their joint efforts to prepare transformative school leaders;
 - d. The partnership will agree to comply with any reporting requirements made by the state and to share information prior to submission.
- 9. Bring to the table the **critical human and material resources**, as needed, to support the partnership's efforts;
 - a. Leadership should come from the highest levels of both organizations;
 - b. Partnership work is labor-intensive which requires that both organizations make a commitment to allow and promote participation of faculty, teachers and administrators within the bounds of current work descriptions and responsibilities;
 - c. The partnership may create new roles and responsibilities to support the partnership efforts, integrating them into the institutional structure;
 - d. The partnership must articulate the evolving roles and responsibilities clearly and communicate these changes to important stakeholders within and outside the partnership;
- 10. Provide **funding, time, space and other resources** to support the work of the partnership;
 - a. Partnership efforts will require dedicated resources;

- b. Each organizational member of the partnership will articulate the human and material resources that are available for purposes of maintaining the partnership;
 - c. The organizational members will contribute a fair share of resources and will monitor time, people and materials involved in the partnership efforts;
 - d. The partnership may seek external resources such as grants to support this work; Joint or individual proposals will require collaboration between partners and will not create a competitive situation on the part of the partners.
11. Collaborate in an **annual planning, evaluation and goal-setting** process;
- a. At least annually, the partnership will come together to evaluate past efforts, plan the next year's activities, and set performance targets and goals;
 - b. The partnership will communicate the plan, the evaluation and the goals to stakeholder groups;
12. Critically review and **assess evidence** of the partnership's work, including reporting to ISBE.
- a. Both separately and jointly, the partners will review the year's efforts. The partnership will communicate to ISBE and other stakeholders on the progress made and goals for the future.

Recognizing that each MOU is unique and will reflect the specific needs and assets inherent in each university/district partnership, we have included a **Sample MOU** as an illustration of what can result from the discussion prompts listed above. Please note this is just an example, and your MOU may be more or less detailed when it is completed.

**Memorandum of Understanding
Between the University of _____ and _____ District
Regarding a Partnership to support Principal Preparation**

In support of creating a pool of highly-qualified candidates to fill principal and assistant principal vacancies, the University of _____ and the _____ District make the following agreements:

That the University of _____ will:

1. In collaboration with the District, identify, recruit and select school leadership students that both parties agree have the potential to be effective principals or assistant principals;
2. In collaboration with the District, design a principal preparation program that is both rigorous and relevant, and will produce high-quality, transformative school leaders;
3. Provide the appropriate coursework, and collaborate with the District in providing appropriate internship and residency experiences, which will lead to candidates successfully securing an Illinois Principal Endorsement;
4. Prepare students for the rigorous year-long principal internship, and support them in their placements;
5. Provide guidance to the District on effective training and support for Mentor Principals;
6. Collaborate with the District in defining the roles and responsibilities of for the principal interns, Mentor Principals, and University Supervisor;
7. Define how candidate will be assessed and how District input will be utilized, and define expected competencies possessed by program completers;
8. University Supervisors will meet on site with the Mentor Principals at least four times throughout the year-long internship;
9. University Supervisors will maintain regular communication with Mentor Principals and provide frequent feedback to principal interns;
10. Ensure that the internship experience provides the state required exposure to diverse populations (cultural and economic diversity, ELL/ESL, special education, gifted, and PK-12.
11. Work cooperatively with a variety of District departments and initiatives, as is necessary to support students in their principal internship. Including, specifically providing principal interns with experience in IEP and 504 meetings; the hiring, supervision and evaluation of teachers; and working with parents, the community, the School Board (or LSC);
12. Collaborate with the District to ensure that principal interns will be prepared to succeed in the state mandated summative assessments.
13. Host a minimum of 3 seminars during the internship year which bring the principal preparation students together to create a network of support and an opportunity to share

- information about their experiences. Will collaborate with the District in the design and delivery of the seminars;
14. Share “lessons-learned” through formative or summative assessment processes, which include the following areas: conduct data analysis; lead a school improvement plan (SIP) process; participate in teacher hiring, evaluation, induction, mentoring new teachers, create a professional development plan; and show evidence of school-wide management of personnel and resources;
 15. Manage the mandated reporting requirements, participation in District evaluation processes, and provide information necessary for periodic progress reports and site visits, as needed;
 16. Collaborate with the District in the creation of a continuous quality improvement process that is informed by data collected with each cohort.

That the _____ District will:

1. Agree to work in the spirit of cooperation in establishing an environment within the District that supports the successful transition of University of _____ students into their internship, and then into new roles as principals or assistant principals;
2. Participate in the identification and selection process for principal preparation students at the University of _____. The program will admit students that both parties agree have the potential to be effective principals or assistant principals.
3. Collaborate with the University of _____ in providing appropriate internship and residency experiences, which will lead to candidates successfully securing an Illinois Principal Endorsement;
4. Support the rigorous year-long principal internship by providing guidance to the University of _____, including identifying resident placement sites;
5. Ensure that all District principals that host a principal intern meet the minimum qualification requirements set forth by the state;
6. Collaborate with the university in creating professional development and training for mentor principals that support both the needs of the school and the learning needs of the principal intern;
7. To support and/or facilitate meetings between the University Supervisor and the Mentor Principal at least four times throughout the year-long internship and maintain regular communication with University;
8. Ensure that the internship experience provides the state required exposure to diverse populations (cultural and economic diversity, ELL/ESL, special education, gifted, and PK-12.
9. To provide the principal interns with experience in participating in IEP and 504 meetings; the hiring, supervision and evaluation of teachers; and working with parents, the community, the School Board (or LSC);
10. Support the students’ successful completion of the state’s principal performance assessments;
11. Communicate with the University of _____ regarding changes to District policies that might impact principals, assistant principals and/or principal interns;
12. Host meetings designed to introduce principal interns to District departments and other school leaders;

13. Provide a comprehensive professional development program and mentoring services for all first year principals, aligned and funded with the state's New Principal Mentor Act;
14. Participate in regular principal prep program partnership meetings to ensure smooth operation of this agreement;
15. Agree to publicly support the partnership and to establish resolutions and policies are aligned with that support,
16. Work cooperatively to assist any program evaluation by sharing school profiles and relevant data available in the public domain. Additionally, test scores, grades, and attendance will be provided with full protection of the rights of the students and within the regulations of the school/district.

Agreed on this day, November 1, 2009, by

Dean, College of Education

University of _____

Superintendent

_____ District

References and Resources

Holmes Partnership, <http://www.holmespartnership.org/>

Murrell, P. (1998). *Like stone soup: The role of professional development schools in the renewal of urban schools*. Washington, D.C.: AACTE.

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2009). *The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to improve teaching and learning*. www.sreb.org

University of Illinois-Chicago, Urban Education Leadership Program,
<http://education.uic.edu/programs/>