

# Expanding collaborations to enhance teacher quality

*Project creates critical links between local schools, teacher preparation programs*

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Efforts to connect local schools and university programs that prepare teachers contribute to a “win-win” situation for districts and the communities they serve. When schools and teacher preparation programs are in close and frequent communication, new teachers graduate with the knowledge and skills that school districts find most effective for meeting schoolchildren’s needs. One model of this type of collaboration has been gaining ground in southeast Ohio.

The Southeast Ohio Teacher Development Collaborative (SEO-TDC), with support from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, started

to take shape in 2008. Its partnering schools are located in the 163 Appalachian districts affiliated with the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS). In addition to Ohio University, its university members include Marietta College, Muskingum University, University of Rio Grande and Shawnee State University.

After an extensive process to establish long-term goals, the collaborative began to take steps each year to accomplish what renowned educator **John Goodlad** called “the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and the public schools.” Renewal efforts under this model create a cyclical process in which

improvements in schools promote improvements in teacher preparation and vice versa.

## Recent progress

The objectives guiding the collaborative’s 2012 work were to:

- support the development of an aligned system of professional education preparation;
- enhance the quality of mentoring provided to pre-service and early-career teachers;
- assist pre-K-12 teachers and teacher educators in gaining greater understanding of the educational needs and assets of Appalachian Ohio.

Addressing these objectives, the SEO-TDC project generated four products for use by educators in public schools and teacher preparation programs:

- an online professional development workshop for cooperating teachers who mentor student teachers and the principals who supervise their work;
- a mentoring style assessment instrument;
- an internship evaluation instrument;
- a white paper analyzing the data collected from the two instruments and recommending best practices for program improvement in teacher preparation.



*Connecting schools with universities that prepare teachers creates a “win-win” for students and local communities.*

### **Simultaneous renewal: the clinical model**

In response to the need for quality teachers in Ohio's schools, the SEO-TDC teacher education programs are turning toward an intensive, research-based clinical model of teacher preparation. This model emphasizes learning to teach in classroom settings with the help of experienced mentor-teachers. Teacher education majors will now participate in a carefully structured internship that immerses them in the classroom, where they can observe, teach side-by-side with and receive guidance from the mentor-teacher.

### **Enhancing the quality of mentoring: the online workshop**

SEO-TDC partners developed an online workshop to help mentor-teachers improve their skills. This workshop, composed of three self-paced modules, focused on helping experienced teachers understand their mentoring styles, interact effectively with student teachers they supervise and contribute to improvements in teacher preparation. A pilot cohort participated in the workshop and provided feedback to workshop developers. A revised version of the workshop is now being offered to mentor-teachers in the region.

### **Mentoring style inventory**

The project team also developed a mentoring style inventory, a short, self-report instrument measuring the mentoring styles of mentor-teachers in four domains:

- directiveness;
- collaborativeness;
- convergence;
- openness to experimentation.

Basing items on relevant research, the team used rigorous research methods to ensure the inventory would be an accurate and consistent measure. In the future, the team will work to modify the inventory for use with other school-based supervisors, such as principals.

### **Professional internship evaluation instrument**

The collaborative also developed and

began using an instrument enabling student teachers to evaluate the quality of their student teaching — both the guided learning they received under the supervision of a mentor-teacher and the quality of the support they received from their college or university. The research team adapted some survey items from an earlier instrument, the Pre-Service Teacher Education Survey, developed by the Ohio Confederation of Teacher Education Organizations ([www.ohioteachered.org](http://www.ohioteachered.org)). The team developed other items based on suggestions from focus groups of current student teachers.

### **Future applications**

The two new instruments have immediate applicability in the pre-K-12 classrooms where prospective teachers receive their clinical preparation. Mentor-teachers can use the mentoring style inventory to assess and reflect on their mentoring styles, and teacher preparation programs can use the internship evaluation to get useful program-specific feedback from their student teachers. Stakeholders in the Appalachian region have already expressed interest in using the instruments in their programs. A more extensive report of the instrument development work can be found, along with other SEO-TDC publications, at [www.coras.org/seotdc/publications.html](http://www.coras.org/seotdc/publications.html).

### **Connecting teacher quality to the realities of teaching**

Any initiative to improve student outcomes must include pre-K-12 stakeholders in discussions that connect issues of teacher quality with the day-to-day realities of teaching. In an effort to promote such discussions and disseminate the findings of research to the broader community, SEO-TDC member institutions organized an Assets Perspective Conference focusing on the Appalachian region called The Common Core: Implications for Deep Learning and Excellent Teaching. Seventy-nine participants attended one or both days of the conference, including 27 college or university faculty members and higher education administrators, 24 pre-service teachers and 22 pre-K-12 educators.



## **RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT**

### **An in-depth look at what works in public education**

OSBA is proud to introduce a new initiative aimed at sharing the latest education-related research with school board members and administrators. The association is working with Ohio colleges, universities and education organizations to disseminate studies about what works in K-12 public education. In addition to the "Research Spotlight" section appearing in the *Journal*, OSBA will be rolling out a new page on its website to serve as a research repository for members. For more information about this initiative, contact **Bryan Bullock**, OSBA communication coordinator, at (614) 540-4000 or [bbullock@ohioschoolboards.org](mailto:bbullock@ohioschoolboards.org).

### **Next steps: implementing a coordinated approach to supporting teacher quality**

The initiatives outlined laid the groundwork for a program to improve teacher preparation in southeast Ohio. Although these efforts have taken place in a rural part of the state, their fundamental principles are applicable everywhere. Pre-K-12 schools and teacher preparation programs can create deep and enduring partnerships. Those partnerships can conduct practical research and design relevant products that will foster systemwide reform — or to use Goodlad's term, "renewal."

Existing partnerships between pre-K-12 schools and higher education institutions — partnerships like SEO-TDC — can share their work with wider audiences. Not only can what they learn help schools across Ohio, it also can help schools nationwide. ■

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