Educational Partnership Addresses Regional Problems Creatively

Kay Hyatt
College of Education & Human Development, University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the History Commons

Repository Citation
https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications/1926
Educational Partnership Addresses Regional Problems Creatively

ORONO, Maine – An enterprising project to address Maine's teacher shortage and provide an alternative certification process is off and running in mid-coast schools through a partnership with the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development. The innovative work of the regional collaboration is also catching the attention of other districts struggling to find, certify and keep qualified teachers.

The Mid-Coast Superintendents' Association Partnership, representing approximately 17 school districts from Searsport to Bath, will share information about its new transition-to-teaching pilot with another educational collaborative during a March 27 meeting at UMaine. Coordinators and participants in the Mid-Coast Academy for New and In-Place Educators (The Maine Project) will provide an overview and details of its process with members of the Penobscot River Educational Partnership, a university/public school Professional Development Network.

PREP: PDN, a four-year-old partnership is also coming up with creative ways to improve teaching and learning. It consists of UMaine, spearheaded by the College of Education and Human Development, and school districts in Brewer, Bucksport, Old Town, SAD 22 (Hampden, Newburgh, Winterport), Union 87 (Orono, Veazie), Union 90 (Alton, Bradley, Greenbush, Milford), Union 91 (Orland, Orrington), and the Indian Island School.

Established in August of 2000, the Mid-Coast Partnership has has evolved into an action-oriented collaboration. The Partnership is co-chaired by Mark Keegan, superintendent of Union 49 (Boothbay Harbor area) and Susan LaPlante, superintendent of Union 69 (Appleton/Hope/Lincolnville).

The Mid-Coast Partnership spent over a year developing the alternative initial certification pilot, which could be a prototype for other Maine school systems that have employed conditionally certified teachers out of necessity, as well as for other states. The pilot cohort group could also serve as a model to accommodate people in other career or academic fields who aspire to be teachers.

The program is designed to provide intensive training in pedagogy, classroom management and other areas targeted by Maine's Initial Teacher Certification Performance Standards, and the sophisticated portfolio and assessment certification process developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The Maine standards, adopted in 1997, address what a beginning teacher needs to know and be able to do, but support to help conditionally certified teachers meet the standards is limited, MAINE Project coordinators say. The goal of
the MAINE Project is to develop competent, knowledgeable professionals who will remain in the classroom for many years.

The MAINE Project also designed to address major factors contributing to the high rate of new teachers leaving the profession. Nationally, the attrition rate for new teachers after the first year is 20 percent, which rises to between 30 to 50 percent after the first five years, according to Lisa Damian-Marvin, one of two MAINE Project coordinators. Isolation and lack of encouragement or help are among primary reasons that promising new teachers leave the field, she said.

Damian-Marvin and co-facilitator Jane Williams are on leave from their teaching jobs to coordinate the two-year alternative certification project. Damian-Marvin teaches chemistry and physics at Georges Valley High School in Thomaston, and Williams is a first grade teacher at Boothbay Regional Elementary School in Boothbay Harbor. They are piloting the professional standards-and performance-based project with 10 conditionally certified teachers and their mentor teachers from schools in Appleton, Waldoboro, St. George, Boothbay Harbor, Searsmont, Thomaston, Lincolnville and Wiscasset.

More and more Maine schools, unable to find licensed teachers, are hiring individuals without teaching degrees or certification, but who are well-versed and experienced in their subject, such as professionals changing careers. These people are hired under conditional certification and are required by the Maine Department of Education to complete specified education coursework in order to receive provisional, or initial, certification.

Finding the required courses, commuting to classes that sometimes do not address the most pressing classroom needs and concerns of a conditionally certified teacher, plus learning the ropes and trying to be a good teacher can be horrendous and discouraging, said Damian-Marvin. She recalls her own experience, coming to teaching with a master's degree in chemistry, but without teacher certification. She achieved that difficult balancing act and went on to become one of 23 Maine teachers certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. In addition to coordinating the overall program, Damian-Marvin and Williams teach a standards-focused class for the conditional teachers on Monday night.

"The goal is to give them information to use in their classroom," says Damian-Marvin. "This is the best way to certify teachers."

The initiative represents a paradigm change in the traditional degree-based certification process. Teacher candidates bear the responsibility of showing that they have met the rigorous performance-based standards, instead of being validated by a degree in Education.

“Alternative certification is a stretch for the University of Maine and others that have owned and valued Teacher Education programs. But there is no way we could stand by and see this need and not get involved to make it the best standards- and performance-based alternative possible,” says Robert Cobb, dean of the UMaine College of Education and Human Development.

School systems active in the Mid-Coast Partnership include the areas of Appleton, Bath, Belfast, Boothbay Harbor, Camden, Damariscotta, Hope, Isleboro, Lincolnville, Rockland, Searsport, Thomaston, Vinalhaven, Waldoboro, Wiscasset and West Bath.

Media Notes:

Wednesday, March 27 meeting schedule:
Time | Activity
--- | ---
10:30 a.m. | Presentation and discussion session, led by Project coordinators, mentor teachers and conditionally certified teachers in the alternative program (204 Shibles Hall)
12:30 p.m | lunch and informal presentations (204 Shibles Hall)
3:30-5:00 p.m. | Reception, Project presentation and small group school/university discussions (Wells Conference Center, Main Dining Room)

Among Partnership Media Contacts:

Lisa Damian-Marvin, Project coordinator, (207) 380-7880
Jane Williams, Project coordinator, (207) 380-7887
Superintendent Mark Keegan, Partnership co-chair, (207) 633-2874
Superintendent Susan LaPlante, Partnership co-chair, (207) 763-3818
Superintendent William Doughty, SAD 40 (Waldoboro), Project headquarters (207) 832-2100
UMaine Dean Robert Cobb, (207) 581-2441

Released: March 22, 2002
Contact: Kay Hyatt, (207) 581-2761

This is an official publication of The University of Maine
~ A Member of the University of Maine System ~
If you have questions about this website, please contact the Webmaster.