

The time has come for universities and public schools to coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate in achieving mutual goals.

# The Council for Public School Improvement: From Coexistence to Collaboration in Professional Development Efforts

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Both universities and public schools share in the responsibility for improving the education of children through professional training and development of certified staff. Generally, this mutual purpose for the two agencies is delivered in an environment of coexistence. That is, universities provide certification courses for preservice and inservice educators; and, individual districts (within the limitations of their available resources) contract consultants, provide inservice programs, build incentives for continued education into their salary schedules, and occasionally request the delivery of a standard credit hour course from universities.

The recent spate of critical reports and reform legislation in education has created an environment in which coexistence is no longer sufficient. The time has come for uni-

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versities and public schools to coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate in achieving mutual goals. One such effort in collaboration is the Council for Public School Improvement (CPSI).

In October 1985, a meeting with area superintendents was initiated by the Dean of the College of Education at Kansas State University. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibilities of forming an umbrella organization for linking the professional development activities of public school districts and Kansas State University. Subsequent meetings resulted in the identification of the need for such an effort and the organization of the Council.

Governance of CPSI is formed at three levels. First, a member-adopted set of bylaws guides the operations and decision making of the organization. Responsibility for the active implementation of the bylaws falls to a six member superintendent Steering Committee. These six individuals are elected to staggered terms by the general membership of the organization. Also serving on the Steering Committee are two *ex officio* representatives from the College of Education and the CPSI Executive Secretary. The third level includes all member superintendents who, through their "voting and voicing," inform the direction of activities.

Membership in the Council for Public School Improvement is available to all superintendents in Kansas. As the chief executive officer of the district, the superintendent's membership represents a district commitment and entitles all professional staff to membership privileges.

Funding for the Council is based on a membership fee. This fee is tied to the student enrollment of the district. The fee formula is \$0.15 per F.T.E. with a minimum charge of \$150.00 per district and a maximum charge of \$500.00 per district. In addition, each conference session requires a participant registration fee. For the two years of CPSI operation, the registration fee has been \$20.00 which includes the session luncheon. Currently CPSI has 42 member school districts. This makes the Council the largest public school-university organization in the state. Attendance at the conferences has ranged from 96 to 200 and has included superintendents, building administrators, classroom teachers from all levels, and university faculty.

The creation of CPSI has provided an organizational framework within which both the public schools and the College of Education at Kansas State are able to pool their resources (personnel, money, time, etc.) in a mutually beneficial relationship to accomplish the mission of improving student learning through professional development. The Council for Public School Improvement has allowed the identification and facilitation of professional development for Kansas educators to move from a cottage industry approach to an effort of synergism. Rather than operating as discrete agencies in the delivery of professional development, CPSI, through its cooperation, enables each unit to experience an effect that is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

The goals of CPSI are broad, yet concise. A major goal of CPSI is to present members with programs that are on the national education agenda. By pooling financial resources, the Council is able to schedule nationally known keynote speakers to conduct training. The cost of such an activity would generally be prohibitive for any single agency.

Another goal of CPSI is to facilitate networking and exchange of ideas among member districts. Because things such as scheduling speakers, arranging for lodging, scheduling facilities and lunch for 150 to 200 persons, are taken care of by CPSI representatives from the College of Education and the University's Conference Planning Office, member districts are able to send participants to the sessions

without concern for details of conference planning. Attendees are freed from worry and may spend their time focused on the session agenda and interacting with their colleagues from across the state. Other forms of networking are provided through periodic newsletters and a membership directory.

Active participation in the Council provides the university with multiple opportunities to meet its primary mission of field service. Additionally, the scheduled activities afford university faculty low cost professional development literally in their own backyard.

Although the mailing address for CPSI is the College of Education at Kansas State University, the location of CPSI goes far beyond an address. The university provides a centralization for services needed to facilitate projects, programs, and activities of the Council. But the larger response to the question, "Where or What is the Council for Public School Improvement?" is found in the individual and group needs of the member school districts.

### **Conclusion**

While CPSI is one of many KSU-College of Education partnerships, the interest and growth of CPSI has far exceeded the original expectations of the partnership founders. CPSI has filled a void for both public school and university personnel. As a consequence, the public schools and university have forever changed because of the partnership. Recognition of the benefits to both partners has made the excitement of collaboration contagious and has caused CPSI to grow even more extensively in the last few months. The initial investment of time and energy for both parties has been extensive. However, the fruits of the labor have provided substantial dividends in terms of increased influence over education, self-image, and increased knowledge about partnerships.