

Kansas State University and the Public Schools in Kansas have an opportunity to become Leaders in the Partnership Movement.

# Public School-University Partnerships: Existing Ground, Common Ground, or New Ground?

by Gerald D. Bailey  
Kansas State University

The College of Education at Kansas State University has been involved in some form of partnership with Kansas public schools during the last twenty years. In the last decade, however, dramatic changes in society have caused a core of university personnel and local superintendents\* to rethink partnerships that have existed in Kansas. This core group of educators, made up of university and public school superintendents, believe that it is time to reexamine the role and function of partnerships in order to increase the quality of public education. In brief, public schools and universities are more influential and effective when working as partners rather than functioning as independent agents in public education.

## Formal and Informal Partnerships

Historically, public school-university partnerships in Kansas and at Kansas State University could be classified as formal and informal (See Figure 1).

While the entries of formal and informal partnerships in Figure 1 are incomplete, they stand as evidence that Kansas public school personnel and College of Education (COE) faculty at Kansas State University have been reaching out to one another.

Formal partnerships at KSU have a long historical tradition. The cooperation between KSU-COE and the public

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**Dr. Gerald D. Bailey is Professor of Educational Administration at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.**

schools for the placement of student teachers may be one of the oldest forms of a public school-university partnership. The physical housing of professional organizations (e.g., Phi Delta Kappa, Kansas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, and Council for Public Education) on the KSU-COE campus are more recent examples of partnerships. Documentation concerning informal partnerships between COE professors and public school staff is more difficult to obtain. Interviews with faculty and public school staff clearly point out that these partnerships have existed in the past, exist today, and will likely continue to exist in the future. While the formal partnerships are sanctioned and supported by both partners, it is interesting to note that informal partnerships exist without formal sanction and support by either the university or public schools. Like flowers in a garden, informal partnerships sprout and flourish in a flower bed made up of immediate needs, interests, and compatible professional personalities. Both informal and formal partnerships seem to have been beneficial to COE faculty and public school personnel. Ironically, the breadth and depth of the benefits have never truly been studied in a systematic fashion by the public schools or the university.

Figure 1  
Illustrative Forms of Formal and Informal Partnerships

Formal	Informal
Placement of Student Teachers	
Kansas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development	Professors and public school staff cooperate to conduct research.
Council for Public School Improvement	Professors and public school cooperate to develop curriculum materials.
Phi Delta Kappa	
Field-Based Graduate Courses	

## Cooperation vs. Collaboration

Surface observation reveals that these informal and formal partnerships have two distinct partnership characteristics: (1) cooperation and (2) collaboration. Hord (1986) has suggested that collaboration and cooperation partnerships are distinctly different. The New England Program in Teacher Education (1973) offered these two definitions:

**Cooperation**—two individuals or organizations reach some mutual agreement but their work together does not progress beyond this level.

**Collaboration**—development of the model of joint planning, joint implementation, and joint evaluation between individuals or organizations.

Hoyt (1978a and 1978b) has suggested these definitions:

**Collaboration** is a term that implies the parties involved shared responsibility and authority for basic policy decision making. . . .

**Cooperation**, on the other hand, is a term that assumes two or more parties, each with separate and autonomous programs, agree to work together in making all such programs more successful.

Using these definitions as a frame of reference, one can conclude that most of the informal and formal public school partnerships at KSU have been cooperation partnerships and that there have been few collaborative partnerships. This is not to imply that the cooperation partnerships are less valuable than collaboration partnerships. Both forms of partnerships have their value but serve distinctly different purposes.

### Forces Impacting on the Nature of Partnerships

There are a number of local, state, and national forces that have impacted on the nature and evolution of public school-university partnerships in Kansas and Kansas State University. They can be categorized into the following areas: (1) access to information, (2) leadership, (3) research, (4) societal pressure, (5) fewer resources, and (6) administrator and teacher training.

**Access to information.** Print and nonprint materials (e.g., magazines, books, videotape, etc.) published by professional organizations and independent educational agencies are providing current information more quickly and efficiently to the public schools. In the past, the public schools depended on the university to synthesize and present this information through courses, consulting, and conferences. Today, public schools have informational sources dealing with current educational practices and research. Thus, the university or universities in a collective sense are not seen as the "holders of information." This development has made the public schools less dependent on the university. However, this phenomenon has set the stage for a new kind of relationship between the public schools and university.

**Leadership.** In the last decade, the public schools have adopted a proactive posture to educational change. Responding to societal demands for improved education, public school leaders have assumed an aggressive and assertive role in organizational change (e.g., school improvement). Kansas State University as well as other universities have found themselves assuming a more reactive role in response to that pressure. University restrictions such as traditional course delivery systems, limited on-site contact with practitioners, inadequate finances, and limited access to those same print and nonprint information available to public school personnel account for the university reactive posture. For these and other speculative reasons, the impetus for dynamic school leadership has moved from the university and out into the public schools.

**Research.** In the 1980s, the type of research which has had the greatest impact on change in the public schools is applied research as opposed to basic research. In contrast, Kansas State University as well as other leading universities has traditionally focused on basic research. The nature of basic research that is having the greatest impact on the structure and nature of public education is qualitative research with a focus on school improvement. University-directed research (basic research) is no longer the dominating force directing educational change. As a consequence, many universities are trying to find balance in their research agendas which include basic and applied research. This shift or refocusing of research emphasis has provided new opportunities for public school-university partnerships.

**Societal Scrutiny of Public Education.** Public education has been pressed by demands of greater accountability leading to greater student achievement. Public schools have tried to be responsive to these demands. Higher education, while feeling some of these same demands, has not responded as quickly. While this societal scrutiny has forced the public schools into a course of action, higher education has not acted with the same sense of urgency. The

end result is that the public schools have assumed more leadership with universities following public school lead.

**Fewer Resources.** Saddled with limited finances, universities have encountered troubled times. Less national and state financial resources have pressured universities to do more with less. This phenomenon has placed great stress upon leadership within the university which has led to increased need for significant public school-university relationships.

**Higher Education Curriculum/Administrator and Teacher Training.** Training programs such as the one at Kansas State University have had difficulty keeping pace with the changes and demands found in the education profession. Bound by tradition, guided by an aging faculty, minimum staff retooling programs, and low salaries leading to low faculty morale have contributed to teacher and administrator training programs ambling along without being connected to the changes and demands found in the public schools. This "disconnectedness" has not allowed higher education to train professionals for dealing with change and providing skills for acquiring new knowledge—skills greatly needed for a progressive public education system for the 1990s.

The above list of forces are only a few of the many factors that have impacted on public school-university partnerships in Kansas. The College of Education at Kansas State University finds itself in a dilemma. On one hand, it can boast about a record of partnership achievements; yet, these partnerships are *not* of the scope and nature that are needed to shape and mold public education for the 1990s and 21st century. In sum, the public school-university partnerships at Kansas State University are a mixture of informal and formal partnerships based more on cooperation rather than collaboration, and they are tethered by a myriad of factors which prevent them from being innovative and creative in nature.

### Current Public School—KSU—COE Partnerships

Recent discussion and experiments between a core of public school superintendents and KSU educational administration faculty have stimulated new thinking about public school-university partnerships. The article found in this issue of *Educational Considerations* entitled "A Working Partnership: Training Administrators in a Cooperative Field-Based Model" is illustrative of the new form of partnerships being attempted by selected public schools and Kansas State University. In addition, the article in this edition of *Educational Considerations* dealing with the Council for Public School Improvement also illustrates how the department of educational administration at Kansas State University is attempting to enter into a new style of partnership. This new style of partnership is much closer to Hoyt's (1978a and 1978b) definition of collaboration. Kansas State University is attempting to modify its own training program to meet the administrator and training needs of Kansas school districts.

A third illustration is the KSU-COE and USD 383 program called the USD 383/KSU Instructional Leadership Cadre Program. This program focuses on training future instructional leaders for leadership positions at the building level in the Manhattan school district. The program focuses on training leaders for the classroom as well as leaders or teachers of other teachers. Based on the tenets of the effective teacher and school improvement research, KSU faculty representatives have entered into a new kind of "collaborative" arrangement with public school personnel. Joint planning of program content, joint teaching of that content, and

joint evaluation of participants' competence relating to that content have earmarked the program.

The KSU-COE Instructional Leadership Cadre Program stands as evidence that the college of education and the public schools have begun to reformulate their thinking about partnerships that truly impact on the lives of administrators, teachers, and students.

### The Care and Feeding of Partnerships

The core group of educational administration and public school superintendents focusing on partnerships have come to recognize that *effective and efficient public school-university partnerships are based on solid relationships between the existing parties*. Respect, admiration, cooperation, collaboration, flexibility, and understanding of respective cultures are all necessary ingredients for successful partnerships. A second major realization has been that *Kansas State University and its public school partners know very little about the nature of partnerships*. As a consequence, the care and feeding of partnerships has become critically important. A simple resolution has been to employ multiple strategies in an attempt to refine public school-university thinking about partnerships. There have been five major strategies which have been initiated to enhance our knowledge about partnerships as well as our activity in partnerships:

#### 1. Develop and publish educational materials related to the theme of Partnerships.

This issue of *Educational Considerations* represents one of the first attempts to develop and publish educational material dealing with partnerships. Other educational materials related to partnerships are planned for general dissemination to both public school and university personnel. Through this strategy, we hope to explore the whole arena of partnerships through the written medium.

#### 2. Develop a course on Partnerships to study Partnerships.

One of the creative approaches to finding out more about partnerships has been to create an academic environment where partnerships can be studied. In the Summer of 1988, a course was created in the department of educational administration which had as its focus partnerships with a specific emphasis of collaborative research between university and public school personnel. This course had the following characteristics:

*Team Planning*—jointly determined syllabi (goals and competencies) by a university faculty member and public school superintendent.

*Team Teaching*—jointly taught concepts.

*Team Evaluation*—joint evaluation by team teachers.

By attempting to model a form of partnership, the team leaders helped the class explore questions concerning what constitutes partnerships. Equally important, the goal of the course was to empower public school personnel to explore collaborative research partnerships with faculty at Kansas State University. While it is too early to determine the total impact of this course on the public school-university partnerships, several new collaborative partnerships are under negotiation as a result of this course.

#### 3. Develop innovative collaborative/partnership programs.

A major strategy has been to concentrate our energies on collaboration activities as opposed to cooperation activities within existing or new partnerships (e.g., USD 501/KSU Leadership Academy II Program and the USD 383-KSU-COE Instructional Leadership Cadre Program). Existing partnership programs and other partnership programs currently undergoing development have strong characteris-

tics of joint responsibility and authority. The department of educational administration at KSU has made a concerted effort to "collaborate" rather than solicit "cooperate" with public school personnel in these programs.

#### 4. Encourage graduate students to study and research the concept of partnerships.

In existing courses and program requirements, every attempt is being made by educational administration faculty to encourage students to read and conduct applied research in the area of partnerships within the largest context of organizational design and organizational theory. If the training of administrators focuses on partnerships, we hope to train public school leaders who are better partners while learning more about partnerships for ourselves.

#### 5. Identify and empower practitioners who serve as partners with the university.

The department of educational administration has sought to recruit 20 practitioners (e.g., superintendents and instructional leaders) as educational partners. These educators are called *Educational Administration Associates* and have been invited to become partners or fellow workers of university faculty in the training of educational administrators in the doctoral program at Kansas State University. By inviting existing administrators to assist in our graduate programs, we hope to learn more about partnerships and needs of practitioners in the field.

### Existing Ground, Common Ground, or New Ground

Core group partnership discussions between KSU-COE faculty and public school personnel reveal that universities and public schools do not know much about the other's culture (the way business is conducted). If the public schools and universities are to make a significant impact on the structure and nature of public education, a continuous dialogue must occur which focuses on the issue of culture as seen through the lens of existing ground, common ground, or new ground for partnerships.

Existing ground is where we have been in the past. That is to say, where universities and public schools have largely operated independently of one another with limited cooperation. Common ground is that area where both parties can find issues, activities, or programs where it is in their best interest to form partnerships to accomplish tasks. Common ground is where many universities and public schools will find themselves in the 1990s. New ground, however, is where the public schools and university have never been before. That is, new ground is that area where the public schools and university form a new kind of partnership with a collective vision employing different strategies to solve complex educational problems and educational related problems which are not known to the partners at the present time. *It is a partnership where the public schools work in the university culture and the university faculty work in the public schools—they work actively and comfortably in each other's culture without fear of encroachment or jealousy.*

Goodlad (1988) has called for a symbiotic public school-university partnership where there is association of close union of two dissimilar organisms—yet the intimate living other of dissimilar organisms in a mutually beneficial relationship. New ground calls for more than symbiotic relationship; it calls for a metamorphosis where public schools and universities change their physical form to become partners in their quest to improve public education. The College of Education at Kansas State University and the public schools have an opportunity to undergo a metamorphosis and to become leaders in the field of partnerships. The choice of metamorphosis where public schools and the university change their physical structure and become a different but unified organization will not be without hazard or

hard work. Moreover, it becomes a matter of choice—being a leader in the movement of public school–university partnerships or being a follower.

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