

Superintendents and principals need a location and time for professional development. EXERT and TEAM 21 are examples of cooperative school/business/university partnerships which have provided new ways to meet these needs.

EXERT and TEAM 21: Partnerships for Professional Development

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Introduction

The educational reform movement and research on school and district effectiveness have heightened interest in educational administration and leadership. A growing body of evidence shows that superintendents and principals do influence student achievement and school improvement efforts. For example, Murphy et al. (1985) found that a sample of instructionally effective California districts shared common characteristics. Superintendents control many of these characteristics: a focus on productivity, improvement, and problem solving; a long-term view of change; and a focus of time and energy on internal operations. The key role of the superintendent and central office staff in successful school improvement efforts also is well-documented (e.g., Fullan, 1982; Huberman & Crandall, 1982). Similarly, the effective schools research has generated a consensus about the characteristics of such schools, one of which is strong administrative leadership (Clark, Lotto & Astuto, 1984).

Consequently, suggestions for improving preservice and inservice training of administrators abound. The National Governors Association called for revisions in the selection and training of administrators and for the provision of inservice training to practicing administrators (1986). To provide inservice, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education Subcommittee on the Preparation of School Administrators recently recommended that universities establish collaborative professional development programs with schools and other agencies. The committee also recommended that schools establish professional de-

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velopment programs for professors. The programs should focus on local needs and involve faculty with school professionals in problem solving (Shibles, 1988).

Reform legislation in Texas provided an opportunity for the University of North Texas Department of Educational Administration and Supervision to develop such collaborative arrangements. House Bill 72, passed in the summer of 1984, required all public school administrators to complete state-approved training in three areas: management skills, instructional leadership, and teacher appraisal. The department established collaborative relationships with superintendents, ten school districts, and leading private sector firms to provide professional development that satisfies the state requirements, draws from the expertise of the private sector, and meets the needs of administrators and their school districts. These programs and the process of developing them are the focus of this article.

EXERT

In the fall of 1984, three University of North Texas (UNT) faculty members developed the Executive Educators' Round Table (EXERT) to meet the professional development needs of a special category of administrator—superintendents in large urban and suburban school systems. These superintendents are knowledgeable and sophisticated. Active in professional associations, they attend national conferences and read widely, know the educational experts, and understand the current issues in education and administration. They pose a dilemma for program developers, since the traditional inservice activities likely to be implemented by H.B. 72 requirements fail to meet their actual training needs. To identify those needs, the UNT coordinators formed a steering committee of eight Dallas-Fort Worth area superintendents, the Dean of the College of Education, and the Chancellor to develop a customized training program for large district superintendents that also meets anticipated state requirements for training in management skills and practices.

The superintendents felt that they already knew what the educational experts could tell them. They wanted access to expertise from the private sector and other government agencies, and they preferred the opportunity to interact with leaders in business and government. They felt they could learn from the best thinkers in other fields, and they hoped to familiarize non-educators with educational issues.

The round table format facilitated this interaction. Each round table session included a formal presentation of approximately one hour followed by an exchange of ideas among the superintendents and the invited expert. Limiting membership in the program to 20 superintendents assured ample opportunity for exchange of ideas. The first program offered in the spring of 1985 provided a three-credit-hour doctoral level seminar. UNT coordinators mediated between the university bureaucracy and the participants, handling admissions, registration, parking, and other participant requirements.

The 17 presenters included executives from American Airlines and IBM, a former cabinet member, several media experts, a U.S. representative and several nationally known commentators. Topics featured **Managing Personnel; Managing Politics; Labor Relations: Is Education Different?; Marketing Strategies; Economic Trends and Public Schools; and Designing Effective Instructional Programs.**

Participants completed a brief evaluation form after each program and discussed the programs with the coordinators. They valued the opportunity to interact with leaders in other fields and found the presentations applicable to ed-

ucation. They especially liked the collegial, off-the-record setting where they could discuss common concerns among themselves and with outside experts.

EXERT was expanded for the 1985-86 school year as a result of the positive response to the first year's programs. The expanded format provided programs for central office administrators in the large districts and programs for superintendents in medium and small school systems. EXERT I programs in instructional leadership for large district superintendents and central office staff, and EXERTs II and III for medium and small districts were scheduled back-to-back to use the same speakers for both groups while keeping the job-alike settings.

Other EXERT programs were developed. Following a 1985 needs assessment to determine the market for a program meeting the newly issued guidelines for instructional leadership training, an EXERT in this area was offered. As a result, two superintendents requested instructional leadership programs for their district administrators.

While EXERT received many accolades for its successful design, several problems developed. In the absence of state guidelines, EXERT leaders attempted to first meet the needs of participants. Although program planners communicated with state agency officials, EXERT's content did not correspond precisely to state mandates for instructional leadership training. In one case, participants who had completed an EXERT program had to complete additional training (provided through the program) before the state would approve the program. As the program was revised to meet state guidelines, it drifted from the needs of the original participants. The emphasis shifted from interaction with leaders in business and government to more traditional educational content. As the content and format no longer met their needs, the enthusiasm of the original superintendents waned. By meeting the needs and demands of a larger audience, EXERT began to lose commitment from the original clientele.

Time demands made on the EXERT coordinators created additional problems since faculty received no course load reduction or secretarial assistance for the labor-intensive project. During one semester, five different EXERT programs operated and in some cases utilized the same speakers. The work load and change of focus contributed to a suspension of EXERT in 1986.

However, EXERT's success led to the development of a second project described below. Superintendent feedback showed a continuing need for innovative professional development, and preliminary information from the state indicated that new guidelines for training in management skills would be more flexible than those for instructional leadership training. The EXERT experience of trying to meet a broad array of training needs with limited resources suggested a more focused program and an effort to seek external funding to support some of the staff time required.

TEAM 21

In the summer of 1987, three faculty members began working with superintendents from the ten largest school districts in Tarrant County, Texas, to develop a collaborative professional development program. The county includes the city of Fort Worth and surrounding suburbs, smaller cities, and rural areas. The program would focus on superintendents with follow-up training for other administrators to be developed as a part of the initial project sessions. With many districts experiencing rapid growth fueled by the same set of private and government projects, a county focus and collaborative efforts among districts became especially appropriate.

The project was named "TEAM 21 (Teaming Educational Administrators With Expert Managers for the Twenty-First Century)." The name emphasized the anticipated relationship with private sector leaders and focused on the near future (as several superintendents noted, this year's first graders would be graduating in the year 2000).

Strategic Planning

In discussing their professional development concerns, the superintendents shared their interest in strategic planning and even suggested that the strategic planning process should be used to develop the training program itself. Two districts provided staff members certified as planners through the AASA National Academy for School Executives Certification Program for Strategic Planning to lead the initial planning session. Nine superintendents and a deputy superintendent, a representative from the regional Educational Service Center (one of 20 intermediate areas in the state), the chair of the educational administration department, and three faculty members participated in a productive workshop that both exposed the group to strategic planning and produced a document structuring the program.

Beliefs and Mission. The TEAM 21 strategic plan began with a statement of five beliefs all members of the group shared. The beliefs expressed conviction that high quality leadership and management training can produce improvements in the management of resources and student achievement. The mission statement followed from those beliefs:

The TEAM 21 mission provides a unique professional growth program to meet the leadership/management needs of the largest Tarrant County school districts. Key leaders will identify their training needs and then develop a program using successful models from the private sector and leading school districts for their professional development."

Internal analysis. Having agreed upon the mission, the group focused on an internal analysis of TEAM 21 and identified its strengths and weaknesses. Strengths included: a non-threatening setting for sharing concerns; the broad base of expertise and resources in the ten districts and the metropolitan area; involvement of school systems, private enterprise and the university; the close personal relationship among the participants; training tailored to the superintendent's needs; the opportunity to take a proactive role in shaping change; the focus beyond immediate, day-to-day concerns; and, building public confidence in school leadership.

Some weaknesses such as the lack of formal structure, needs assessment, and evaluation plan, could be remedied by further planning. The limitation of lack of funding would be addressed by seeking funds from various private sources. Other limitations needing further attention during the project included the time constraints on participants and their diverse interests.

External analysis. The group's external analysis considered economic, social, political, technological, and demographic impact on their districts. They expressed a need to know how to incorporate new technologies in instructional and management settings, how to predict and manage changes brought about by new technologies, and how to find the funds to pay for the changes. Economic and financial concerns included questions concerning the costs of educating special populations, pressures for increased salaries, decreases in state funding for many of the dis-

tricts, and the need for alternative funding sources to the property tax. Social concerns included changes in family lifestyle, a maturing population, cultural changes accompanying the increase in the area's Hispanic population, medical problems, and increased efforts of special interest groups to impact schools. However, continued growth in the school-age population would continue to be the major social condition confronting them. Political changes affecting the district included increasing state centralization, changing roles for school boards and a new state finance plan.

Strategies. Having identified beliefs, mission and organizational structure and reviewed external constraints and opportunities, the group identified strategies and activities for TEAM 21. They favored a thematic approach centered around "people skills," finance skills, and instructional skills. Their priorities were: managing power structures in a centralized state system; creative financing; using a broader base of knowledge on how to read people and communicate with them; improved communications with non-parents; managing resources appropriately; and future studies. They retained the positive elements from EXERT—the involvement with leaders from business, industry and government, and the collegial superintendent relationship. The group charged the university representatives with developing an operational plan and evaluation strategy.

Value of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning proved to be an effective technique to provide a structure for superintendents to consider common factors that would impact the future of all of their districts and to help them identify training activities to meet these needs. The process engendered enthusiasm and commitment for TEAM 21 and created a common vision of the project. It gave the coordinators a clear understanding of what content and activities had highest priority for the group. It also provided evidence of the superintendents' support for the program that would strengthen their case as representatives sought external funding.

The planning session left some important issues unanswered. The major issue involved the question of how the pilot program would extend beyond the ten superintendents to improve their districts and other districts in the county. The group also failed to develop consensus on how the skills and knowledge acquired in the program would be initially applied to district management.

Collaboration with the Private Sector

The coordinators initiated contact with a local foundation and after the director expressed interest, developed and submitted a proposal. The proposal cited several changes in Tarrant County that would confront school systems by the year 2000 including an increase in the number of Hispanic students—a group traditionally not served effectively by public schools. The proposal offered a program consisting of the three themes identified in the strategic planning process: **finance skills**—using existing funds more efficiently and identifying new sources of funds; **people skills**—innovative ways of communicating, motivating, and managing human resources, particularly in organizations with significant Hispanic membership; and **instructional skills**—planning effective schools of the future and providing new arrangements for schools in multicultural settings. Instructional strategies would emphasize opportunities for face-to-face interaction among administrators, their private sector counterparts, and nationally recognized authorities in the content areas. Administrators would par-

ticipate in conferences, shadow private sector executives, take part in feedback sessions to share the lessons acquired during shadowing, and group visits to exemplary schools of the future and schools successfully serving minority students.

At the suggestion of the foundation's director, three superintendents and the TEAM 21 faculty coordinators met with representatives of three major firms in the county. These executives learned that the project did not want their money, but instead wanted access to the best thinking occurring in the private sector. Mechanisms to get that access included having superintendents shadow top executives, observe effective practices, utilize executives as speakers and seminar leaders, and use managers to consult with districts on specific problems.

The meeting showed that a basis for collaboration with business does exist. The private sector managers found the project interesting, offered some useful suggestions, and felt their organizations would participate. The discussion showed them that they shared common problems with educational administrators. They were surprised to discover the complexities of school administration and to learn that school administrators engage in planning and decision making activities similar to those of the private sector. The managers also described the private sector's concerns about education. Their concerns addressed the skill levels and attitudes of many job applicants and as well as the impact of technology on the workforce. Large firms would be willing to help in school improvement efforts, not only to assure a competent labor pool, but to enhance their ability to recruit executives to the Fort Worth area.

They offered additional suggestions, such as forming teams of specialists from business and industry for short term assistance in specified problem areas, using retired executives to work with districts on a long-term basis, and admitting school administrators to their firms' executive training programs. They doubted the utility of shadowing.

With this encouragement, the coordinators met again with the ten superintendents. They presented a list of activities and asked them to rate their interest in each area. Participants were most interested in making site visits to businesses to review specific programs, forming school district/business task force to help districts solve specific problems, and participating in corporate executive training sessions. The program was revised to reflect these priorities.

At this meeting, the superintendents also identified leading private firms in their districts and agreed to initiate contacts to secure statements of support for TEAM 21. By the end of the 1987-88 school year, thirteen of the largest private businesses in the area indicated support of the program and willingness to provide some form of non-financial support.

With documentation of the willingness of the private sector to participate in the program, the coordinators returned to the foundation. At the director's request, they reduced the scope of the project from four years to two and added an evaluation of the project's effect on district changes, financial savings, and impact on the districts' 179,000 students.

The final program found in TEAM 21 has several strengths. It meets the needs of the participating superintendents by providing a tailor-made development program that qualifies under state training guidelines. It continues the successful EXERT elements of learning from private sector leadership while maintaining a collegial atmosphere of cooperation between university faculty and district superintendents.

Conclusions

Planning and implementing EXERT and TEAM 21 provide several lessons in the development of collaborative relationships among universities, school systems, and the private sector for the improvement of administrator training. The most important lesson is that superintendents and business executives are supportive of such enterprises. Superintendents spent many hours in EXERT and TEAM 21 meetings and discussions, despite the press of more immediate demands on their attention. Business executives also contributed their time and pledged resources despite the economic downturn in Texas.

Secondly, university workload policies and practices do not encourage such enterprises. Typically, there is no reduction in teaching loads for the extensive planning, meeting, and proposal writing required to develop and implement collaborative relationships. If universities are to pursue such arrangements on a larger scale, workload policies and practices must be changed.

A third lesson is that large urban and suburban school districts bring considerable expertise to the relationship. The planning expertise and experience and the knowledge of trends and development in education and management were essential to the TEAM 21 effort. Collaborative arrangements can thus enhance the professional development of university faculty as well as that of school administrators.

Fourth, strategic planning is an effective tool in developing cooperative programs between school districts and universities. The fact that leaders who make the final decisions in their districts could work effectively together in developing a cooperative program illustrates the strengths of this process.

Two aspects of the collaborative process are noteworthy. The involvement of the private sector enhances the credibility of educational administration. The public perceives that business has expertise that educators lack, and public confidence in educational institutions is enhanced when cooperative arrangements are visible.

EXERT and TEAM 21 also showed that superintendents like to share with administrators in similar situations,

and they have few vehicles for such exchanges. Collaborative relationships such as TEAM 21 provide that vehicle. Daniel Duke contends that: "Administrators complain that they are so heavily involved in reacting to circumstances that they have no time left for reflection. Meeting the needs of others is so compelling and immediate that school leaders have little opportunity to chart their own course of action" (Duke, 1987). TEAM 21 gives a county-wide group of superintendents the opportunity to reflect and to begin to chart a course through cooperative school/business/university partnerships.

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