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Meets all 7 Standards

Descriptive Title- Creating a Formal College-Middle Level School Partnership Network: One College's Story

Abstract

Our overall mission, as middle level education professionals, is to prepare our teaching candidates to become highly effective qualified teachers. Middle level teaching and learning must be focused on understanding early adolescents well, on becoming knowledgeable and comfortable with the content area, and on being skilled in implementing various instructional and assessment strategies.

At the college, teaching candidates must be provided the most recent educational theory, research, and best practice including the modeling of proven middle level strategies. When coupled with strong field experiences (mainly the practicum and student teaching) in highly effective middle schools using the *Turning Points 2000 Model*, together the two locations provide a seamless environment where theory and practice blend. Also, if this relationship between the college and the middle schools is collaborative and mutually beneficial (professional development delivered by the college), the schools can truly benefit from this experience.

Rhode Island College has had close collaboration and an informal partnership for the past four years primarily with one urban and two suburban middle level schools. National Board Certified Teachers from the three schools had been serving as Clinical Faculty for the middle level program and a large percentage of the teacher candidates' field placements were made in these schools. During the past year formal implementation of a pilot partnership network was begun. Formal and informal conversations among teacher candidates, professors, clinical faculty, and the schools themselves have increased and with the formalization of the process all parties realize that all benefit from this partnership.

Rhode Island College
Feinstein School of Education
and Human Development



Middle Level School Partnership Network Pilot

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Rhode Island College Middle Level Partnership Network

Overview

Our overall mission, as middle level education professionals, is to prepare our teaching candidates to become highly effective qualified teachers. Middle level teaching and learning must be focused on understanding early adolescents well, on becoming knowledgeable and comfortable with the content area, and on being skilled in implementing various instructional and assessment strategies.

At the college teaching candidates must be provided the most recent educational theory, research, and best practice including the modeling of proven middle level strategies. When coupled with strong field experiences (mainly the practicum and student teaching) in highly effective middle schools using the *Turning Points 2000 Model*, together the two locations provide a seamless environment where theory and practice blend. Also, if this relationship between the college and the middle schools is collaborative and mutually beneficial (professional development delivered by the college), the schools can truly benefit from this experience.

With this beginning close collaboration between the college and the schools, implementation of a small pilot program makes the most sense. As the pilot is implemented at each school, it behooves all involved to share learnings and concerns in trying to develop the most effective means of training Teacher Candidates and assisting schools improve. A small network composed of representatives from each middle school and the college can be the conduit for communication and the assessment of progress being made.

Information on the Pilot Network Schools

Knotty Oak and Flat River Middle Schools in Coventry and Slater Junior High in Pawtucket (two suburban and one urban) have been selected as the members of the pilot middle level school network. All three schools, which have had informal partnerships with Rhode Island College for the past three years, closely follow the *Turning Points 2000 Model*, have strong content area teachers placed on effective interdisciplinary teams, and have implemented Student Advisory programs. Overall all three house quality programs and continue to improve.

Goals of the Pilot

- Create a collaborative culture to guide the work of the network;
- Provide an enhanced pre-service experience through the integration of theory and practice with middle level partner schools; and
- Provide need-based continuous professional development for in-service teachers and principals.

KNOTTY OAK MIDDLE SCHOOL, COVENTRY	FLAT RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL, COVENTRY	SLATER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, PAWTUCKET
<p>850 students and 65 teachers Michael Convery, Principal</p> <p>High performing with a focus on the Turning Points 2000 Model</p> <p>Effective teaming and a three year advisory program</p> <p>Collaborative leadership</p> <p>Strong focus on literacy</p> <p>A number of National Board Certified Teachers and award winning principal</p> <p>Three National Board Certified Teachers serve as Clinical Faculty Members at RIC</p>	<p>590 students and 47 teachers Al Yanku, Principal</p> <p>High performing with a focus on the Turning Points 2000 Model</p> <p>Effective teaming and a third year advisory program</p> <p>Collaborative leadership</p> <p>Strong focus on literacy</p> <p>A number of National Board Certified Teachers</p> <p>One National Board Certified Teacher serves as a Clinical Faculty Member at RIC</p>	<p>700 students and 57 teachers Merry Caswell, Principal</p> <p>Low performing but improving; highest rating of all RI urban middle schools</p> <p>Effective teaming and a second year advisory program</p> <p>Collaborative leadership</p> <p>Strong focus on literacy and numeracy</p> <p>Two teachers serve as Clinical Faculty Members at RIC</p> <p>National Presidential Winner for Mathematics serves as School Site Coordinator</p>

Activities of the Network

- Create governance groups including a management team for each school (principal, school improvement chair, on-site coordinator, and RIC Partnership Director) and a steering team (management team plus teachers who serve as Clinical Faculty Members and Cooperating Teachers plus RIC students);
- Coordinate the placement of Teaching Candidates and Cooperating Teachers with the Office of Field Placements and School Partnerships;
- Determine with school improvement teams need-based, professional development needs; and
- Examine possible funding possibilities.

Role of the Director

- Spend at least one day a week working with the network or in a partnership school(s);
- Coordinate and facilitate communication of pilot program among RIC faculty, principals, teachers, and Teaching Candidates;

- Maintain close communication with middle level Teaching Candidates in the three schools;
- Deliver in-service training for teachers and principals in the schools;
- Co-plan and facilitate both school management teams and steering committees;
- Collect documentation to determine pilot project's effectiveness;
- Seek funding (grants, incentives) for continuation of pilot project; and
- Disseminate knowledge gained in a variety of forums.

Evaluation of the Impact of this Project

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of the pilot project, two evaluation sources will be used.

Teaching Candidates and teachers and administrators in the three middle schools will be administered a survey developed by the National Middle School Association. This survey focusing on the presence of characteristics of a *Turning Points 2000 Model* assesses a middle school's culture for ensuring all students create high quality work. Surveys will be administered both at the beginning of the project and at the end of the first year.

Information will also be gathered through Student-Led Conferences using a standard protocol conducted at the end of a Teaching Candidate's student teaching experience. Candidates will indicate what they have learned about middle school and their teaching (skills, knowledge, and dispositions). Pre-and post-test and comparisons will be made as well as comparisons between their middle level and either elementary or high school portion.

Implementation Schedule 2004-2005 Middle Level Network Partnership First Year of Pilot Project

May 2004

- Network partnership idea presented to Dean Wollman-Bonilla
- Dr. Niska receives a research grant to visit an exemplary middle level higher education program containing partnership schools
- Input gathered as Partnership Plan shared with ML Advisory Board at last meeting of year

June

- Visits possible school sites with Deans
- Shares plan with school district personnel and school principal

July

- Selects three schools - one urban and two suburban
- Writes Project Overview and submits to Dean's office
- Initial conversations held with principals on professional development
Dr. Niska can offer school
- Locates minimal funding for first year

September

- Visits superintendents in two participating districts
- Spends time with staff at each school
- Devises committee structure-Management Team and Steering Committee
- Selects Site Coordinators with input from principals
- Site Coordinators begin to place RIC students in field placements-
shadow study, team visits
- RIC Middle Level Students take self-assessment instrument
- Plan shared with students at RICSMA meeting and in middle level classes

October

- Provides update at first ML Advisory Board Meeting for year
- Dr. Niska visits Appalachian State University in Boone, NC
- Management team in each school meets
- Begin to share Partnership Plan with total faculties of all three schools
- Remaining Steering Committee members to be selected

November

- Faculty self-assessment instrument to be approved
- Plan continues to be shared with school staff
- Faculty self-assessment instrument to be administered to each staff
- Staff also to denote degree of involvement in project
- Dr. Niska to begin providing professional development in schools

December

- Consultancy Protocol to be conducted at second ML Advisory Meeting which will be prelude to discussion on making possible curriculum and field experience changes in middle level courses
- Work groups to study curriculum in three middle level professional courses to be formed

January 2005

- Steering Committees in each school to meet for the first time
- Committees to devise plan to place students for field experiences
- Grant and funding possibilities to be explored jointly by college and schools

February

- Update Dean to clarify next steps
- Provide update at third ML Advisory Meeting
- Steering Committee to begin placement of Teaching Candidates for student teaching experience

March

- After state testing, work groups to meet to closely examine curriculum of middle level courses, their assessments, and current field experiences

April

- First year of project evaluation to begin

May

- Report on progress of pilot to be written
- Work group progress to be cited at last ML Advisory Board Meeting
- Determine next steps

School Governance Activities

With a focus on collaborative decision-making and effective communication the following activities have been delineated for the two on-site school committee structures.

School Management Team

- Oversee the partnership
- Plan mentor training for those staff members intending to become involved
- Administer and compile staff self-surveys and teacher partnership involvement
- Determine staff professional needs
- Deal with issues of sensitive nature of pilot

School Steering Committee

- Interview Teaching Candidates considering student teaching placement
- Make decisions on Cooperating Teacher selections
- Decide upon seminar experiences for Teaching Candidates
- Hear site coordinator's report

**Governance Membership in the Three Schools
Partnership Committees
2004-2005**

Flat River Middle School, Coventry

Management Team

Al Yanku, Principal
Sandy Clunan, Site Coordinator
Maria Boulmetis and Diane Kowal, School Improvement Chairpersons
Dr. John Niska, Partnership Director and RIC Representative

Steering Committee

School Management Team Members
Mary Lou Bettez, RIC Clinical Faculty Member
A Cooperating Teacher
Two RIC Students

Knotty Oak Middle School, Coventry

Management Team

Michael Convery, Principal
Kathie Miner, Site Coordinator
Giovanna Donoyan, School Improvement Chairperson
Dr. John Niska, Partnership Director and RIC Representative

Steering Committee

School Management Team Members
Ellen Bigler, RIC Social Studies Professor
Cynthia Ballard, RIC Clinical Faculty Member
Linda Middleton, RIC Clinical Faculty Member
Constance Tundis, RIC Clinical Faculty Member
Judy Coutu, Cooperating Teacher
Chris Schayer, RIC Student

Slater Junior High School, Pawtucket

Management Team

Merry Caswell, Principal

Debbie Scarpelli, Site Coordinator

Roberta King, School Improvement Chairperson

Dr. John Niska, Partnership Director and RIC Representative

Steering Committee

School Management Team Members

Donna Christy, RIC Mathematics Professor

Cheryl Britland, RIC Clinical Faculty Member

Linda Karsulavitch, RIC Clinical Faculty Member

Jeff Toth, Cooperating Teacher

Theresa Drumm, RIC Student

Responsibilities for the School Site Coordinator

- Serve on their school's Management Team together with their Principal, School Improvement Chair(s), and the RIC Partnership Director
- Also become a member of their school's Steering Committee which interviews Teacher Candidates and then recommends student teacher placements
- Lead the coordination of the Teaching Candidates' field experiences including a shadow study, visitation with an interdisciplinary team, practicum, and student teaching
- Survey the school's teaching staff to determine degree of involvement of interest in partnership and in supervising teaching candidates
- Work with the School Improvement Chairperson and Management Team to determine what professional development the college can provide the staff
- Participate in the discussion on future funding possibilities

Middle Level Clinical Faculty Members

The following teachers and principals representing both urban and suburban middle level schools serve as Clinical Faculty Members for the middle level professional courses. They teach in teams of two. All, but one, are members of the faculties in the three middle level partnership schools.

Mary Lou Bettez

Mary Lou is the English Language Arts Coordinator at Flat River Middle School where she teaches seventh grade. She was honored as Coventry's Teacher of the Year in 1996-97 and as the runner-up to the state teacher of the year in 1999.

Cheryl Britland

Cheryl teaches English Language Arts on an eighth grade team at Slater Junior High. She is a former newspaper writer and also is a Cooperating Teacher for RIC student teachers.

Cynthia Melvin Burke

Having the distinction of being the first adjunct instructor in RIC's Middle Level Program, Cynthia is a seventh grade English teacher at Knotty Oak Middle School in Coventry. She is also Nationally Board Certified.

Merry Caswell

Merry just began her fourth year as principal at Slater Junior High School in Pawtucket, the state's middle level urban school showing the greatest improvement in student achievement. The current president of RIMLE she has been instrumental in leading her school to becoming a *Turning Points 2000 Model School*.

Sandra Clunan

Sandra is an English Language Arts teacher at Flat River Middle School and has served as a district literacy coach for the middle level. Just recently chosen Coventry's Teacher of the Year she also is a National Board Certified Teacher.

Michael Convery

Michael is serving as principal of Knotty Oak Middle in Coventry. A former mathematics teacher and Rhode Island's Assistant Principal of the Year, he also is very active with RIMLE and is its president-elect.

Linda Karsulavitch

Linda teaches English Language Arts on the Seventh Grade Gold Team at Slater Junior High. She is both a Skills Commission Standards' Trainer and Coach and is studying to becoming a National Board Certified Teacher.

Linda Middleton

Linda teaches seventh grade English Language Arts at Knotty Oak Middle School. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher and has served as a Cooperating Teacher this past year.

Alana Parenthau

With a master's degree in literacy, Alana serves as a literacy teacher at Roger Williams Middle School in Providence. A member of the RIC Middle Level Advisory Board last year she was named Teacher of the Year at her school.

Constance Tundis

Constance is a seventh grade English Language Arts teacher at Knotty Oak Middle School in Coventry where she also serves as curriculum coordinator for that department. Three years ago she qualified to become a National Board Certified Teacher.

Middle Level Advisory Board 2004-2005

Feinstein School of Education

Dr. Judith Berg, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

Professors

Dr. James Barton, Elementary Education

Dr. Ellen Bigler, Educational Studies

Dr. John Niska, Educational Studies

Dr. Susan Patterson, Educational Studies

Students

Theresa Drumm, Secondary Social Studies, Sr.

Christopher Schayer, Elementary Science, Jr.

Matthew Sciotti, Elementary English, Sr.

Tracie Killion Scotti, Secondary Mathematics, Sr.

Middle Level Administrators

Merry Caswell, Principal, Slater Junior High, Pawtucket

Michael Convery, Principal, Knotty Oak Middle School

Dr. Fran Gallo, Director of Middle Schools, Providence

Alan Yanku, Principal, Flat River Middle, Coventry

Middle Level Teachers

Mary Lou Bettez, English Language Arts Teacher, Flat River Middle School, Coventry

Joanne Mangiarelli, Science Teacher, Park View Middle School, Cranston

Kathie Miner, Social Studies Teacher, Knotty Oak Middle School, Coventry

Alana Tavares, Language Arts Literacy Teacher, Roger Williams Middle School, Providence

Jeff Toth, Science Teacher, Slater Junior High, Pawtucket

Advisory Board Minutes October 4, 2004 Beginning Third Year as Advisory Board

Attendees:

Professors	Students	Middle Level Administrators	Middle Level Teachers
Dr. Judith Berg	Theresa Drumm	Mike Convery	Mary Lou Bettez
Dr. James Barton	C J Schayer	Al Yanku	Kathy Miner
Dr. Ellen Bigler	Matt Sciotti	Bill Fasano, RIMLE	
Dr. John Niska	Tracie Killion-Scotti		
Dr. Susan Patterson			

- Meeting called to order by John at approximately 5:45.
- Unanimously, the group requested that John continue as chairperson. Mary Lou Bettez agreed to take the notes for each meeting.

Meeting dates were revisited:

- Our next meeting will be held **Monday Dec. 6th** in HM 064 3:45-5:15
 - At this meeting John and Mary Lou will prepare a consultancy protocol looking at middle level curriculum student coursework.
- Our third meeting will *change* from Feb. 28th to **Tuesday March 1st**. (HM 064 3:45-5:15)
- Our final meeting of the year will *change* from May 2 to **Tuesday May 3rd**. (HM 064 3:45-5:15)

Matt & CJ provided the group an update with the RIC Middle Level Student Association, an affiliate of the National Collegiate Organization.

Matt, the president of the association, emphasized that this association provides a much needed support for RIC teacher candidates in the middle level program. It has grown to about 50 members. He envisions that this year the association goal is to become increasingly self-supporting, with John increasingly moving his directorship to the role of advisor.

Each meeting begins at 6:30 with a half hour social. Business is conducted at 7 and panel presentations begin at 7:10. The September meeting was attended by 40 students.

CJ provided the year's schedule of panel presentations to the association:

- September 29-What I learned my first year of teaching
- Nov. 9-Integration of content areas and helpful strategies on teaming
- Dec. 1-Strategies on getting parents involved with school and team affairs
- Feb 22-What principals look for when hiring a middle level teacher (John was informed after the group broke up that this was scheduled during mid-winter break for public schools.)
- April 6-Differentiation of instruction

RIMLE Update-Bill Fasano

As a follow-up to the Middle Level Summit, the Blue Ribbon Panel reconvened to look at the state regulations. There exists concern that the regulations focus on the high school with little support for the middle level, although much of the content of the regulations was actually pulled from middle level best practice. The committee presented suggestions for amending the regulations to include the middle level to Colleen Callahan's committee.

RIMLE member reception and meeting to be held Oct 14 at the Radisson 4-7.
RIMLE Winter Conference scheduled January 29th at Knotty Oak Middle School. In November John will be presenting two sessions-one on advisory and the other on building a healthy school culture- with Sue Thompson, his collaborative researcher and trainer from the University of Missouri, at the National Middle School Annual Conference in Minneapolis.

RIC Update-John Niska

The plan, with several steps to take place, is to have the middle level endorsement classes with middle level designation. Undergrad courses shall change to 310, 320, 330...grad courses change to 510, 520, and 530. Each course number will be designated under Middle Level Curriculum and be so listed in the catalog. John will also be able to determine instructors and when classes will be offered.

NCATE

Team shall consist of educators from various parts of the country with the chair from the University of Kentucky and includes middle level educators from North Carolina and South Dakota. The RIDE team is larger and consists of educators from RI and out of the state.

Sat. Oct 23...the NCATE group will take a look at syllabi and student work.

Judith noted that this accreditation process is thorough and emphasized that accreditation is essential to the status of the college.

Team shall visit Slater and Knotty Oak or Flat River (the latter is yet to be determined.) Interview selection pool is random. These shall take place on Oct. 25 or Oct. 26th.

Research Grant

Beginning this Friday, as part of his research grant, John will visit Appalachian State University in North Carolina, which he describes as the “one of the best” middle level teacher ed program in the nation. Much of the current research on teacher education is coming from this college. He will be auditing classes for two days and visiting the college’s partner schools. North Carolina is a leader in middle level certification.

School Partnership Project

John provided an overview of the structure, governance, goals of the project. Description of this was presented and has been sent to the participating schools (Slater, Knotty Oak, and Flat River.) He intends to spend a total of one day per week in the three schools. He suggested that Kathie Miner, Sandy Clunan and Debbie Scarpelli, the School Site Coordinators, get together to begin to draft a faculty survey, to determine their level of interest/expertise/involvement/needs for PD in this partnership. A meeting was scheduled for this WED at Flat River at 11.

John will assist each school in coordinating the efforts between the school and RIC students, provide pd in identified areas, co-plan, collect and document data, and disseminate knowledge.

The pilot shall be evaluated perhaps using NMSA survey...data collected from student-led conferences conducted with RIC student teachers, school faculty, principals, etc.

Other

John distributed the following documents:

1. NCATE: Standards for Professional Development Schools
2. Conceptual Frameworks and RIBTS Indicators
3. Middle Level Teaching Candidate Survey
4. Habits of the Mind and Heart
5. RIC Feinstein School of Education and Human Development Professional Dispositions and Related Behaviors
6. FNED 307, 351-Course Goals and Objectives
7. Middle Level Program Enrollment 2001-2004 –data and statistics of enrollment

Some discussion occurred regarding the benefits of requiring middle level student teachers’ practicum experience with the same teacher and group of students with whom they will be student teaching. This is beginning to happen with those seeking their secondary endorsement, but needs to be duplicated for those in elementary. Most agreed that this would benefit all stakeholders.

Meeting adjourned at 5:10.