

NNER Setting Annual Report 2007-2008

Setting Name: Georgia Center for Educational Renewal at Georgia Southern University

Setting Contacts: Cindi Chance, Dean
Stephanie Kenney, Associate Dean
Dianne Bath, GCER Interim Director

Setting Tripartite Representatives:

Jody Woodrum, Assistant Superintendent, Bulloch County Schools
Eileen Bayens, Principal, Bulloch County Schools
Caren Town, Professor, Literature, College of Liberal Arts &
Social Sciences
Pat Parsons, Director of Academic Education, College of
Education

Highlights of and Gaps/Challenges in Progress Toward:

Findings across the setting related to the NNER equity self-study:

(Please see self-study documents)

Highlights:

- In responding to the self-study questions we found that we have pieces of most issues addressed; however, we do not have a systematic, comprehensive plan and continuous evaluation process to guarantee that we are systematically addressing equity practices across stakeholders and issues. As outlined in the “plan” sections of our self-study, our first step is to develop a plan. Within that plan, the first step is a needs assessment (survey and focus groups) that invites all stakeholders to voice their current beliefs and activities around each equity practice. In 2007-08 the Tripartite Council developed a survey to be administered to university, community, and PK-12 schools. We gained approval to administer the survey and began an initial use of the survey with student teachers and graduate students. We will continue to administer the survey, compile data, and analyze the results during the 2008-09 school year with a focus on development of a plan of action based on results.

Challenges/Gaps:

- Since we have not yet completed our needs assessment with all groups, we do not know the scope of our gaps. The largest challenge we currently have is the personnel and time to conduct this work.

Engaging the community to advance educational renewal:

Highlights:

- Partnering for Portal, our Developing Networks initiative, began to meet on a more regular basis and focus on the work that is an outgrowth of Partnering for Portal. This project focuses on developing a network to build the needed infrastructure to (a) support the learning of all students in Portal and (b) attract new families to the Portal area. A local church and Portal Elementary continue to work together to provide after-school tutoring at the church. During the school term there are about 40 students who attend and during the summer this increases to around 60 students. This community supported afterschool program has been able to obtain computers from multiple sources, restore/upgrade them and place them in the homes of students enabling students to access the computer driven tutorial programs at home. A grant was written through the university to obtain literacy materials for the center (award results pending). Infrastructure work continues through the Mayor's office. The city of Portal has been able to obtain grants for sidewalks and sewer system. Sidewalks have been completed, sewer project money has been garnered, and project is pending engineering approval. An early Partnering for Portal effort to bring affordable private housing to Portal has resulted in two housing developments in which homes are being built. A restaurant has now opened in Portal. A new high school is being planned as the final land access was done and site surveys completed. The Partnering for Portal group has begun a more in-depth planning process by beginning to formalize goals and timelines. These will be completed in the fall of 2008. Finally, groundwork continues for the development of a Portal area Boys and Girls Club.
- The Professional Development District work continued. Year 2006-07 was the final funding year for the FIPSE Grant that supported the work of the PDD. The evaluation had shown positive results in student achievement with a narrowing of the achievement gap and improved pass rate on the Georgia High School Graduation Test for Screven County High School. A positive change in teachers' perceptions of students' abilities to learn, and in their own competencies to teach at-risk students. University faculty became more aware of and involved in partnerships with P-12 schools. As an extension of the PDD model, we have established a new partnership with our First District RESA, the educational service agency for our region. We will partner with RESA and the 14 school districts in this region to very prescriptively address the staffing needs (recruiting and retaining) in these rural schools. This new initiative is driven by our belief that all schools should have equal opportunity to attract and retain our teacher candidates.
- Partner School and Professional Development School work is on-going and expanding. The College of Education has a long established partnership with fourteen area P-12 schools. This will be expanded to include an additional sixteen schools committed to field placements and school-university collaboration. Faculty members representing three program areas are working with identified

partner schools to move them to professional development schools. This work is in the early stages and will be structured using what was learned from our FIPSE Professional Development District work. The work will be guided by the Partnership Council, a standing committee within the College of Education.

- International Learning Community (ILC) work continued. Working with our U.K. partners, St. Benedicts, and its Head Christopher Reynolds, Dean Chance engaged one U.K./U.S. industry, JCB, to support the ILC's work of simultaneous teaching and learning renewal with U.K. and U.S. universities and the partner schools. Chris Reynolds has agreed to sponsor eight (8) of our partner high schools iNet membership. The International Study Opportunity (ISO) continued during this year. Eleven Georgia Southern teacher candidates participated in a month long student teaching experience in partner schools in Sheffield, England. In addition, they were guest in classes on the campus of Sheffield Hallam University. We expanded the ISO experience by hosting six Sheffield Hallam teacher candidates at Georgia Southern for a four week experience in Georgia Southern partner schools. As well as observing and teaching in partner schools they participated in classes on campus.
- The College of Education's National Youth At-Risk Conference joined with NNER to broaden their High-Flying Schools awards to recognize at-risk schools who not only made significant gains on test scores but who were at the same time involved in curriculum and activities that focused on democratic practices in schools and communities. At the Youth At Risk Conference in the spring of 2008, an international conference hosted by GSU, a poster session was held on the League of Democratic Schools to bring more awareness to this work. A recent outgrowth of our NYARC/NNER collaboration is that our Tripartite has assumed the responsibility of facilitating the High Flying Schools Awards process, including advertising, selection, and facilitating activities at the Youth At Risk Conference.

Next Steps: We will continue these projects while developing a comprehensive Umbrella Plan for systematic implementation and evaluation of our Equity Practices and the Moral Dimensions. (Please see self-study documents)

Challenges/Gaps:

- As we revitalize our school/university partnerships, we will add the community focuses to that work. We now have two models to help us: Partnering for Portal and the PDD. We are still challenged to have community members on the tripartite. How and who to select that would represent such a large community without by default isolating others.
- The perennial challenge is resources (personnel, time, and money).

Current local initiatives that advance the Agenda for Education in a Democracy in addition to what is described in the two areas listed above:

Highlights:

- Tripartite members decided to expand the group by inviting key people to the conversations with a goal of having a larger impact in the various settings. People were targeted who had shown interest in the work and personally invited by a member to attend. Meetings were scheduled at a regular time and place with the atmosphere being more casual – local coffee shop. Each meeting began with a discussion of a reading related to the Agenda. A report was given of the progress of the various initiatives. The group had grown from three or four to around 12. This expansion has added more depth and breadth to the work.
- We began to develop our first LODS site at Stilson Elementary School. The principal and two teachers received training. Our COE and A&S Tripartite members began meeting with Stilson faculty to look at needs, possibilities and resources.
- The Eastern Region held its first meeting at the University of Miami at Oxford, Ohio. GSU sent a team of folks to this first meeting. The highlight of the meeting was touring a school that practiced democratic process with faculty, students, and parents.
- A second LODS site was established at the Bulloch County Performance Learning Center. The Coordinator of the program attended the Eastern Region meeting.
- We continued LTPS training, with one Middle School Principal receiving training in the second cohort. We nominated 2 more principals and two teachers for the final cohort. The goal with our Bulloch County cohorts is to have a principal and an aspiring principal trained across feeder schools (elementary, middle and high). We believe this will help establish our Moral Dimensions/Democracy work in the schools.
- At our June 2007 Tripartite planning meeting we decided to divide our work and each member agreed to focus on a particular aspect of the work, such as LSDS initiatives and LTPS selection and follow-up.
- We sent two of our Tripartite members to the Summer Symposium to receive in-depth training in the NNER work.
- GSU submitted its Education Leadership Program for state review and approval and received approval with no revisions. One of only 5 schools approved on the first submission round in the state. The influence of the NNER work has led to development of three courses related to the agenda. At the masters degree level a course entitled “Developing the Democracy Centered School Leader” and at the specialist degree level will be “Mobilizing Communities in Democracy-centered Schools” and “Leading School Renewal”. As the program is implemented the new goal is “deep development” of the knowledge and skills of the leaders in the program.

Next Steps:

- Add the Educational Leadership faculty and their principal cohort to our work. This will be facilitated by adding a faculty member from this program to our Partnership Council.
- Maintain involvement of LTPS principals/aspiring principals. This will be done by adding these individuals to our Partnership Council.
- Next steps for the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) and the College of Science and Technology (COST) include creating a database of activities, grants, research, and more informal connections between Arts and Sciences faculty (and their various departments) and the public schools. We also plan to survey our partner schools' teachers and administrators to find out just what kinds of collaborative programs they would like to see in their schools. Once we have a clear sense of what is already being done in the way of partnerships (and what schools would like to see in the future), we can better assess what our new directions should be.

Challenges:

- Getting principal-aspiring principal teams trained and keeping them stable in a school setting is an ongoing challenge.
- The challenge for the A&S arm of the Tripartite is (and has always been) getting A&S faculty involved in the collaborative process. Work in the public schools is often not considered in promotion and tenure decisions, and money (for stipends and course releases) is rarely available. We have a few dedicated people in both the arts and sciences, but they end up having to do the lion's share of the work. In addition, schools often seem reluctant to take on collaborative projects that may (they believe) distract students and teachers from their curricula and interfere with preparation for standardized exams.