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Brief

Building Strong Institutional Partnerships to Support Recruitment and Retention Efforts

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“Hi. We have a student teacher that needs a placement for the spring. It would be great to place them at your school. Can you help me find a mentor teacher?”



“Good morning. We are struggling to find a high school biology teacher. Do you have any graduates looking for a job?”

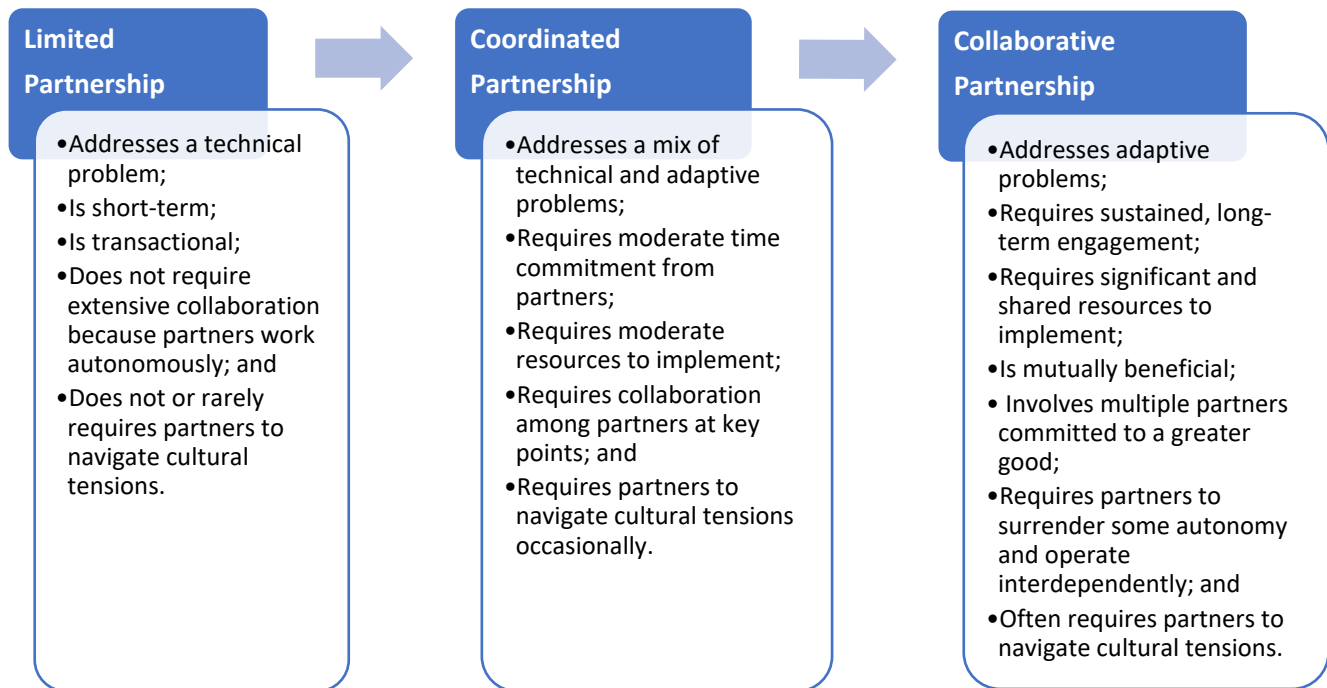
How many times have you received or sent these messages?

These types of conversations highlight the interconnectedness of multiple aspects of the educator pipeline: attracting candidates to the profession, preparing candidates, helping candidates become certified, and hiring educators. Conversations like the ones above are common, but they are often transactional; one organization seeks something from the other. To truly impact the teacher pipeline, educator preparation programs, institutes of higher education, and school districts need to work together.

So, what do strategic and collaborative partnerships look like?

Partnership Types

Hora and Millar (2011) defined three types of partnerships: limited, coordinated, and collaborative.





Partnership Scenarios

Review the scenarios below. Which is an example of a limited partnership? A coordinated partnership? A collaborative partnership?

Scenario 1: A local educator preparation program seeks to place a student teacher in your district. You meet with the university supervisor and teacher candidate and help coordinate a placement. You collaborate with the university a few times to evaluate the candidate's performance, but are not involved in the design of how the educator is prepared.

Scenario 2: You have an upcoming job fair. You email a flyer to educator preparation programs, volunteer programs, and community organizations and ask them to help spread the word. Similarly, when these organizations have events, you share that information within the district.

Scenario 3: Your district and a local university co-design an educator preparation program to address a current district workforce shortage. You work collaboratively to design the candidate experience, select assessments of candidate practice, and ensure coherence between coursework and field experiences. You are part of the admissions process. You regularly meet with the educator preparation program to review data and talk about changes needed to improve candidate preparation. At times, the two organizations clash in terms of preferred working styles, values, or approaches, requiring in-depth conversations to mitigate challenges.

Answer key: 1=coordinated, 2=limited, 3=collaborative

Think about the organizations with which you partner on educator recruitment. Are they limited, coordinated, or collaborative? Where do you want to be?

When you reflect on the relationships you have with vendors, community organizations, and local institutions, you can probably think of specific examples of limited partnerships and coordinated partnerships. However, when considering how to address the challenges around educator recruitment and retention, teacher shortages, and diversifying the workforce, collaborative partnerships generally hold the most promise. Collaborative partnerships move beyond transactional interactions to tackle substantive adaptive problems. They are challenging to implement and require significant, intentional efforts to design, implement, and sustain the partnership.

Leveraging Strategic Institutional Partnerships to Diversify the Workforce

According to Motamedi and Stevens (2018), districts that are successful in recruiting teachers of color often develop strategic institutional relationships with local and national educator preparation programs. Institutions might include historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, Tribal colleges, and those that enroll a diverse student body. It can also be helpful to develop a strategic partnership with an alternative teacher preparation program, since many of these programs are more likely to prepare teachers who reflect the student bodies they will serve. In their investigation of partnerships and school districts supporting the induction of teachers of color, Williams and Skinner (cited in Gist et al., 2021) find key features of partnerships include collaboration related to the identification, recruitment, and hiring of teachers as well as supporting prospective educators through academic advising and financial resources.



Questions and Resources for Reflection and Discussion

Summer is the perfect time to reflect on your institutional partnerships. First, think about from where you accept student teachers and residents. Also think about organizations you work closely with to recruit educators. These are your partners in this work—but are your partnerships intentionally designed?

Below are key reflection questions to help you think about a partnership you have with a local educator preparation program, institute of higher education, or other community organization.

- What is the goal of the partnership? If you asked your partner, would they say the same thing?
- Have you identified, defined, and codified the role and ownership of your work with the partner?
- How would you characterize your current relationship with the partner?
- How often do you meet with your partner? Are conversations regular and substantive?
- When there is a disagreement in strategy, approach, working style, or culture, how do you navigate the conversation?
- How have you sought to understand and navigate differing organizational structures?

Want to go deeper? Use one of the rubrics below to self-assess your partnership with another organization. It can be helpful to engage in this assessment with your partner organization. Then, identify next steps for strengthening the institutional partnership over time.

- [*Self-Assessment: District-Teacher Preparation Partnerships*](#) – This assessment focuses on partnerships between districts and teacher preparation programs. It is broken into 10 statements organized across three stages of partnership development: initiative, implementation, and continuous improvement. The assessment is part of a larger toolkit, [*Partnering on Prep: A Toolkit for Building Strong District-Teacher Preparation*](#).
- [*Partnership Effectiveness Continuum*](#) – This self-assessment explores partnerships between districts and educator preparation programs, although it was designed specifically with leader preparation programs in mind. The rubric organizes indicators into six domains: partnership vision; institutional leadership; communication and collaboration; joint ownership and accountability for results; system alignment, integration and sustainability; and response to local context.
- [*Moving Towards a Collaborative Partnership: A Self-Assessment*](#) – This self-assessment is not specific to partnerships between districts and teacher preparation organizations. It focuses on the extent to which partnerships are moving toward a collaborative relationship as defined by Hora and Millar (2011). The rubric organizes indicators into four domains: programs, goals and objectives; motivations; autonomy and interdependence; and culture.



Spotlight on Para Pathway to Teacher Program

Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation (BCSC) wanted its teaching staff to better represent the students it serves, but applicant pools were not diverse enough.

At the same time, BCSC knew it had some exceptional paraprofessionals/teacher's assistants, many of whom had been with the district a long time. After working with a consultant to research innovative programs, BCSC decided to pilot a paraeducator-to-teacher preparation program. BCSC employs program participants full time with benefits—and pays for college, books, and fees. Participants work full-time while in college to attain their bachelor's degree. In return, participants are expected to teach in BCSC for 2 years after certification.

BCSC knew it could not implement this program alone; it needed to partner with a college or university. They intentionally sought a partner that would meet the district's needs and be truly invested in the work. The district looked for a partner with a respected online program that offered classes outside of the school day. Because participants wanted to pursue different content areas, the district looked for a partner that covered as many content areas as possible, including special education. Although there were several colleges closer, BCSC found the partner it was looking for in Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College (SMWC).

Nine current program participants attend SMWC and have the same advisor, which has helped create a cohesive cohort even though their majors and minors are different. BCSC also assigns each paraprofessional teacher a mentor in the building to provide support, including helping them with their coursework. Quarterly, BCSC offers half-day professional development sessions aligned to participant coursework.

Two-way communication and problem-solving have been critical to early implementation. For example, when a student was struggling with coursework, the SMWC advisor contacted the district and the student, mentor, and principal met to identify next steps. Another challenge arose when it came time to buy textbooks. Because BCSC pays for books instead of program participants, the district and SMWC had to work together to determine the best way to navigate each other's systems and processes to secure the books. A consultant supported BCSC with communications with SMWC this year, but, moving forward, the two organizations will need to work together more closely to ensure a successful collaborative partnership.

BCSC and SMWC are in the first year of implementing the Para Pathway to Teacher Licensure Program. Because participants are seeking bachelor's degrees, the pilot won't be completed until 2025. At the end of May, the two partners will meet to discuss the first year. BCSC wants to continue to get better at supporting program participants as they navigate the challenges of attending college and working full-time. "We want [our paraprofessionals] to feel supported throughout this process and that they have received wraparound support from the university and school corporation," BCSC Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Gina Pleak explained. However, given that SMWC and BCSC have already established a strong foundation for a partnership, Pleak is confident the program will continue to improve and will ultimately be successful in helping these experienced paraprofessionals become exceptional teachers.

Want to know more about the Para Pathway to Teacher Licensure Program?

- *BCSC Announces Pathway to Teacher Licensure Program:* <https://www.localnewsdigital.com/2021/06/09/bcsc-announces-pathway-to-teacher-licensure-program/>
- *BCSC to Offer Pathway to Teaching:* <https://www.therepublic.com/2021/06/10/bcsc-to-offer-pathway-to-teaching/>

References

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- Hora, M. T. & Millar, S. B. (2011). *A guide to building education partnerships: Navigating diverse cultural contexts to turn challenge into promise*. Stylus Publishing.
- Motamedi, J.G., & Stevens, D. (2018, November 6). *Human resources practices for recruiting, selecting, and retaining teachers of color*. (Washington State Vibrant Teaching Force Alliance Meeting Materials for November 6, 2018.) U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/human-resources-practices.pdf>

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