
MASS COALITION COURIER

'Working Together to Prepare Quality Teachers for Our Urban Schools'

Volume 1, Issue 7

Summer 2001

Soaring to New Heights with the Massachusetts Coalition

By: Dennis Shirley, Coalition Director

Like jazz musicians shifting from the disciplined order of a classical composition to the explosive freedom of group improvisation, the evolving culture of the Massachusetts Coalition is a dynamic “work-in-progress.” As the Coalition prepares for its second Summer Institute, on June 28th and 29th, we can take pride in all that we have accomplished thus far and at the same time take advantage of the Institute to make midcourse corrections and chart out bold new directions for our seven school and university partnerships. Those of you who have done some of the “heavy lifting” for the Coalition thus far know well how many obstacles we face: not only do we need to overcome the structural impediments to sustained collaboration between schools, communities, and higher education institutions, but we also are challenged by our different institutional cultures. Whatever the challenges partnerships entail, we know that are far better off in relationship than we will be if we retreat to the disconnection that all too often has characterized the relationships between our diverse stakeholders. I hope that you will enjoy the stories of this issue of the Courier, which describe the real impact that the Coalition is having through its work with student teachers—and I also hope to see you at the Summer Institute in Sturbridge!



Panelists at the UMass Boston Teacher Education/Title II Meeting ponder the specific characteristics of the urban context.

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Field Notes...

Folks are busy wrapping up the school year, but the work of the Coalition partnerships continues. This month I’ve been meeting with the State Department of Education and other educators across the state to develop a set of guidelines for the pre-service performance assessments which will become part of the state’s new teacher licensing requirements.

I was also invited to the graduation of the teaching interns in the Lesley/ Dever Program. As I sat in the audience I was brought to tears as I watched students in K-5 shower their student teachers with poetry, songs, origami cranes, personal messages, flowers and other gifts. I was reminded of the tremendous impact each one of us makes on the lives of the children we teach.

I also attended a UMass Boston Partnership meeting which included most of the faculty and the Dean of the Graduate College of Education, Clara Jennings, in addition to representatives from the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, a community organization partner of UMass Boston and administrators from Dorchester High School, the Condon School, and the Harbor School. The topic of the meeting: what do we need to know about urban schools and how does this impact our teacher preparation programs. After a vigorous discussion by the panel and audience participants, small groups formed to consider the importance for teacher education. Suggestions from the groups included preparing teachers as agents of social change and preparing teachers to develop multiple pathways to the curriculum.

And the month is not over yet. The Summer Institute looks to be particularly engaging with Michele Foster, author of *Black Teachers on Teaching*, and Ronald Ferguson, researcher on student achievement gaps. I’ll report in September. Have a great summer, Darlene

Student Teaching Through UMass Boston

By: Shauna Bernier

Student teaching is an experience like no other. It is exasperating and hopeful, daunting and empowering, and at times, a seemingly impossible feat to accomplish. Teaching itself is all of these things, but learning to do that job in a 14 -week time-span in somebody else's classroom while trying to financially support yourself through some other means is nothing short of exhausting. I am having the time of my life.

I began my student teaching experience in January feeling fairly confident. I had two years of previous teaching experience and I already knew the children and the teacher I was about to join mid-year. This would be a piece of cake! Now, with the end of my experience only a few weeks away, I can not believe I ever assumed I knew anything about teaching. I have learned more about classroom management, designing curriculum, and collaborating with parents and other teachers in the last few months than I ever imagined. My students are wonderfully challenging and I am fortunate enough to be working with a cooperative teacher that has given me the freedom and power to experiment and take over her class. I feel supported in everything I do, which is a great feeling for any professional.

My experience has been a conglomeration of highs and lows. My most gratifying moments come when I realize that I have actually taught the children something. Occasionally, I will overhear a student talking or a parent will tell me that their child took some morsel of knowledge from my class and applied it to some other situation in life. This is when I realize that these children have actually internalized something I have helped them learn and made it their own. This is an indescribable feeling. The most challenging parts of the student teaching experience stem from having to fumble your way through another teacher's classroom. It is not easy to have someone see you make so many mistakes or be so imperfect so often. Also, every teacher has his/her own way of doing things, and to try to fit into someone else's mold while trying to develop your own style is like trying to be two different people at the same time. Nonetheless, the feedback I receive from my cooperating teacher is invaluable. The sense of pride I feel when I see my students grow and succeed far outweighs any of the frustrations of the job.

My student teaching experience has helped prepare me for what I expect to be the toughest year of my life thus far - my first year of teaching. I have a few more tools in my toolbox to help me help my students, and more confidence than I did before I started student teaching. I expect next year to be completely overwhelming as I try to fit into my new school community, develop curriculum from scratch, and realize that I am responsible for 25 developing spirits and minds. But that is why I am a teacher.

Evaluation of the Student Teaching Experience

By: Theresa Madison, Terri Cojohn, Joan Dineen
Boston College

(Dineen presents the study at the May conference.)



After finishing the fall practicum we spent an additional semester at Brighton High School studying the full practicum experience and providing peer support for the current student teachers. We conducted formal and informal interviews and we learned that student teachers need five very important things:

PREPARATION – We found that student teachers need more preparation and should have a linked practicum and pre-practicum experience in the same school. They could learn school specific tasks such as disciplinary procedures and correct forms use.

RESPECT – Student teachers must learn how to “be real” with their students. It is a difficult concept but essential for educators. It involves being oneself, having the students’ best interests at heart and conveying sincere intentions. It is also important to learn students’ language and recognize and respond to conflict in the classroom.

SUPPORT – Support can come in many shapes and forms but student teachers must often go out and find it. Not only should they meet fellow students but they should participate in as many faculty meetings as possible. Teachers are willing to lend a hand but must feel comfortable in giving feedback. As a contributing member of the group student teachers will build more open and supporting relationships.

ROOM FOR MISTAKES – Student teachers must embrace their mistakes for all that can be learned from them. We suggest developing a culture of “second chances” as student teachers are not the only ones learning new things every day. With this attitude student teachers will not suffocate in their own failings but will move ahead with goals of improvement.

SENSE OF HUMOR – Student teachers should get together with colleagues outside of the classroom to vent, to listen and to laugh. It’s important not to be afraid of letting students see some of our weaknesses, we all have them – and we have access to theirs.



Spotlight on... The May Conference

Our May Conference, *Engaging Parents and Community in Schools and Teacher Education*, was by many accounts a great success. Over 50 participants came to Boston College on a Saturday to learn more about why parent and community engagement is important to teacher preparation and school success and how to make these collaborations productive.

Keynote speaker, Steve Constantino, also received high marks for his humorous look at turning around a low-performing school through work with parents and community. In addition to his work as a high school principal Steve is president of Family Friendly Schools.

The conference evaluations also showed us we still have a long way to go to meet the needs of all of our participants. Comments ranged from too many topics to not enough time for discussion and participation.

We've taken your suggestions into account. You'll see some differences in the way we've structured the summer institute and future cross-site events.

TEACHER EDUCATION: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

An important conference for administrators, faculty and staff of Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Colleges of Education and K-12 Schools

October 26, 2001

College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, Massachusetts

Keynote Speakers:

Dr. Sally Frost Mason, Dean,
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences,
University of Kansas

Dr. Kati Haycock, Executive Director,
The Education Trust

Dr. Rob Baird, President, The National Faculty

Breakout Sessions:

Reward Systems for Collaborative Work
Sharing Teaching Practices Across K-16
Redesigning Courses for Teacher Candidates
Preparing for Collaboration

Sponsors:

The Massachusetts
Professional Development School Network
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Teacher Quality and Student Achievement

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Calendar of Events

Coalition-Wide Conferences
June 28-29 - Summer Institute

Steering Committee Meetings
July 24 - Clark University

The *Courier* is on hiatus
July and August.
See you in September with a report on
the Summer Institute!

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