



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
URBAN SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

Spotlight on National Institute Activities

The Spotlight Series highlights activities and accomplishments in the National Institute's five partner sites. New editions will be published twice a year.

BOSTON

CHICAGO

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WASHINGTON D.C.

FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE:

In addition to highlighting the recent activities of our partner districts, this Spotlight includes a brief discussion with Dr. James Patton about supporting students and faculty of color in colleges of education. Dr. Patton is a widely recognized scholar, author, presenter, and a member of the National Institute's Leadership Team. This issue also summarizes the work done last year at the Urban Scholars Summer Institute, and the ongoing teacher inquiry occurring in Denver Public Schools.

LEADERSHIP FOR URBAN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES:

*A Conversation with James Patton
on Supporting Students and Faculty of Color in Colleges of Education*



Over the last four years, all of us at the National Institute for Urban School Improvement have had the opportunity to participate in numerous discussions about the different elements of inclusive educational reform and how to achieve them. The various meetings have included different groups of people: teachers, administrators, parents, students, researchers, and academics. They have focused on different topics: school climate and student behavior, race and disability, inclusion, family-school linkages, systemic change, community involvement, high stakes testing, and standards-based reform. However, almost always in these meetings – regardless of the group, the setting, or the topic – the conversation eventually comes around to the preparation of future teachers and administrators as central to any enduring solutions. Perhaps it is just common sense: education is a labor-intensive activity. Changing how we go about that activity in our cities' schools will require that all of those who choose to do the labor are better prepared to implement the changes. Any initiative such as ours, that wants to be part of the effort to improve

urban education, must address the changes that need to occur in our colleges of education as well.

One aspect of this general area of the personnel preparation, especially for urban schools, is the support and preparation of people of color for leadership positions at both the school and district levels. Recently, we had a chance to talk with Dr. James Patton about some of his reflections on this issue. In particular, we sought Dr. Patton's reflections on how to think about the interconnections among race, urban education reform, and the preparation of leaders for tomorrow's schools. Since 1987,

Our colleges and universities, and especially schools of education within those institutions, need to construct an infrastructure that is inviting to cultural groups that are marginalized in the dominant culture.

Dr. Patton has been part of the faculty and administration in the School of Education at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. He is widely known both nationally and internationally for the incisive and thoughtful approach he brings to his writing and presentations on issues such as race and culture in curriculum and instruction. We are delighted to have Dr. Patton as a member of the National Institute's Leadership Team. What follows is simply a summary of the highlights from our conversation.

(LEADERSHIP, Continued on page 2)

INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

Good for Kids, Families & Communities



Office of Special
Education Programs

(LEADERSHIP, Continued from page 1)

JAMES PATTON, THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

1. THE CALLING OF LEADERSHIP

As an African American who grew up in the culture of the Black Church, it is probably only natural that Patton speaks of leadership in terms of finding one's "calling." Taking the root meaning of 'vocation' seriously, discovering what one is called by God to do with one's life, is a tradition that Patton grew up with. He sees his own upbringing as illustrative of how this effort to find one's calling in life is still relevant even for our more secular age. Early on, Patton learned that he was expected to combine a sense of individual purpose, but with both a familial and cultural sense of duty and obligation. What does this have to do with urban schools? For Patton, the connection is clear: "Well, as a leader you want to go where the greatest challenge is; the greatest need." He is quick to add that this should not suggest that our cities and their schools are the worst places one can find. Rather cities have become the laboratory of reform, with urban schools as one of the key institutional settings that structure the experiments. It is in our urban schools where the first indicators of both the best and the worst in our educational system come to light.

Patton believes that the urban environment and tradition create its own future leaders. For many people of color, the urban experience is part of their heritage, their background. The city is a setting they are both familiar and

comfortable with. When this is combined with a calling to go where the greatest need exists, our nation's schools should be a natural draw for people of color as they answer their calling for a career of leadership.

2. LEADERSHIP AND COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

Preparing people of color for leadership positions in our urban schools and districts is critical. However, such preparation must occur in a context of cultural competence where students deciding on their careers find colleges of education that are welcoming and inclusive. Our colleges and universities, and especially schools of education within those institutions, need to construct an infrastructure that is inviting to cultural groups that are marginalized in the dominant culture. When asked what the signs would be that such openness and cultural awareness existed, Patton is quick to offer examples.

You begin with the mission statement of the university. It needs to be in the message from the President and others that this institution is committed to having a diverse faculty and creating an awareness of systems and cultures that reflect different backgrounds, different assumptions. Most importantly, we must avoid giving students of color that sense of otherness where you feel like a stranger in a setting. Are there people who look and talk like them in valued positions at the university? Are there programs in ethnic studies? Does every faculty search committee have at least one member who is a cultural advocate: someone who is an aggressive, plainspoken, consistent, and clear proponent of cultural diversity? Are there full professors and endowed chairs that focus on issues of multiculturalism? Even though these elements go beyond the College of Education, they are still crucial parts of the atmosphere of welcome and openness that we must strive to create.

3. THE ROLE OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUs)

This atmosphere of openness and familiarity in nurturing students of color as future leaders

We must avoid giving students of color that sense of otherness where you feel like a stranger in a setting

quickly brings the discussion to the role of colleges and universities that have traditionally educated generations of African American men and women. What is their continuing role in preparation of teachers and administrators and is there a tension between the HBCUs and the large state universities that are now integrated, but still predominantly white? For Dr. Patton, there is a tension here that must be recognized while building on the strengths of both settings. On the one hand, there is usually a stronger sense of comfort and familiarity at HBCUs for both African American students and faculty. There is a greater likelihood that the people in your classes share at least some of your cultural experiences and assumptions. For Black faculty, there is much less likelihood of experiencing this sense of otherness that often persists at predominantly white universities. On the other hand, if we want to influence the quality of teaching going on in our urban schools, then we need to ask where the majority of those teachers (of whatever race and ethnicity) are going to be trained. In that way, the sense of duty and obligation can come into play once again. It becomes important for a generation of faculty of color to assume positions of leadership in predominantly white colleges and universities, and especially in the Colleges of Education within those institutions.

For Dr. Patton, there is room for both settings. There needs to be a balance between recognizing both the past and future contributions of HCBUs, while also pushing for the expansion of faculty of color at large research universities with influential Colleges of Education.

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URBAN SCHOLARS SUMMER INSTITUTE 2000

Last summer, the National Institute for Urban School Improvement, in collaboration with Dr. Leroy Irvin (Kofi) and the 100 Black Men of America, convened a Summer Institute entitled “Urban Scholars Summer Program: Changing Minds-Changing Lives” from August 13th to 19th on the campus of Clark-Atlanta University. Twenty-three doctoral students from both special and general education programs, who shared a commitment to improving the educational outcomes of African American children, enrolled in the Summer Institute. The mission of the Urban Scholars Summer Program was threefold:

1. To create a unified effort and common purpose to work toward social justice for every student in urban schools, creating equity and excellence in schools constructed on democratic principles.

2. To positively influence the impact of doctoral participants as change agents in their varied fields of educational and community revitalization.

3. To provide a forum and an opportunity for the voices of African-American scholars to influence the discourse on coming to scale in American schools.

At the close of the Summer Institute, one of the participants wrote in her reflections:

“What can one say when, in their estimation, they have been to the mountaintop? In twenty-six years of being an educator, I have never participated in such an in-depth, intense training about my people—African Americans or as we learned, Africans. I really can’t tell you what I expected but I certainly was the beneficiary of more than I ever

dreamed. I was at times overwhelmed with the gravity and seriousness of our racial relationships from the 1400’s to this present moment. Where do I begin? How do I approach this reflection piece?”

What occurred during the week of the Urban Scholars Summer Institute that had such a powerful influence on the participants? The Summer Institute was purposefully designed to incorporate the scholarly standards of traditional college/university course work, but to also very directly “touch the spirit” of the summer scholars through a curriculum designed to connect them with African thought and culture and the wisdom of their ancestors in order to impact their thinking and their ability to be effective change agents in urban schools.

A superb Summer Institute faculty guided the week of profound learning and provided participants with opportunities to experience new ways of thinking to impact the learning, growth, and development of students in urban schools and the teachers who teach them. The Summer Institute faculty included: Dr. Asa Hilliard, Georgia State University; Dr. Jacob Carruthers, Northeastern Illinois University; Dr. Wade Nobles, San Francisco State University; Dr. Vera Nobles, San Francisco State University; Dr. Oscar Joseph, University of Colorado at Denver; Dr. Pauline Bynoe, Medgar Evers College; Dr. Alfredo Artiles, Peabody College at Vanderbilt University; Dr. Gwen Benson, Georgia Professional Standards Commission; Dr. Elizabeth Kozleski, Dr. Ingrid Draper, and Dr. Dianne Ferguson, The National Institute for Urban School Improvement; Dr. Jean van Keulen, San Francisco State University; Dr. Kimwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, noted author, lecturer, and head of Library Services at the S.C.H.O.C.; and Dr. Rebecca Reeves, noted educator and author.

The Summer Institute participants were a group of exciting, informed, committed scholars with varied experiences in urban schools, but with the common goal of immersing themselves for

the week in learning more about African thought and culture and the ways in which their new learning would impact their work and their lives. The participants shared experiences during the week together at Clark-Atlanta University including outstanding presentations by the selected staff, opportunities for discussion, and reflection on applying their new learning to current educational challenges in urban schools. These experiences, combined

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with the superb caliber of the participating scholars and their thirst for knowledge, created a strong synergy among the participants. The National Institute will continue to maintain the special connections forged between Summer Institute

presenters, participants, members of the National Institute’s Leadership Team, and other members of the growing network of organizations and scholars committed to the improvement of urban schools.

The success of this unique and innovative program would not have been possible without the commitment and efforts of many individuals. We especially extend thanks to Dr. Anne Smith, Project Officer of the National Institute for Urban School Improvement, who believed in the value of the program and who diligently sought the needed supplemental funding from the U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; Carolyn Moore, National Institute staff at the University of Colorado at Denver, who was the primary contact for the participants, handled participant travel and lodging logistics, and managed the assembly of the extensive curriculum materials and program binder; and Dr. Elizabeth Kozleski, Director of the National Institute, who encouraged and supported the development and implementation of the program as an integral part of the National Institute’s goals to improve educational outcomes for urban students.

ON-GOING TEACHER INQUIRY IN *DENVER*

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he National Institute for Urban School Improvement strongly supports and encourages on-going teacher inquiry as one strategy to help improve instruction for all students.

Research about school improvement from a myriad of sources, including many of the comprehensive school reform models, investigations into best practices, and the work of thousands of teachers, supports this strategy. We know that many of the opportunities necessary to improve the life chances and educational outcomes for students, particularly those in urban schools, ultimately are provided by teachers. It is often through focused inquiry and collaboration with other professionals that changes in practice leading to these opportunities occur.

The National Institute encourages practitioners in its five districts to conduct practice-based inquiry as an integral part of their work. In some cases, this focused inquiry is supported through mini-grants that provide a variety of resources to practitioners who are willing to try this approach. Currently, four teams of practitioners in Denver, Colorado and four teams in El Paso, Texas have received funding for a broad range of work. This issue of the *Spotlight on National Institute Activities* will focus primarily on the Denver inquiry, and a future issue will highlight the work in El Paso.

KEPNER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Two National Institute supported inquiry projects are underway at Kepner Middle School in Denver. The first inquiry project focuses on the alignment of practitioners' personal beliefs, professional beliefs, and "best practices." The inquiry team is composed of a 6th grade teacher, a gifted/talented teacher, the media specialist, and a school counselor. These professionals originally proposed to examine "best practices" in their school and determine how these practices impacted student achievement. After an initial meeting, however, the group realized

that some of the underpinnings of what they called best practices were really individuals' belief systems about instruction and learning. The group had met previously as a study group and read the book "Who Moved My Cheese?" by Spencer Johnson. Their reflections about change revealed that change is related to belief systems and this seemed a likely place to start the conversation. This inquiry team hopes to better refine and articulate their own belief systems and to find out how their beliefs influence the practices that they utilize in their classrooms.



The other inquiry group at Kepner consists of a trio of administrators. They are looking at how literacy is integrated into the elective classes for their middle school students. Though part of what is driving this inquiry stems from the state of Colorado's high-stakes accountability program, the administrators also believe strongly in the middle school philosophy, which supports integration of literacy across the curriculum. Periodically, some of the school's elective staff join the inquiry team to help the administrators think about their role in supporting literacy. In addition, the team intends to invite other middle school administrators to join their conversations, so that a broader range of possibilities is explored.

CENTENNIAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

At Centennial Elementary, a team of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade teachers chose to focus on their students' perceptions of their classroom climate and their teachers' perception of them as

learners. This inquiry grew out of a building-wide project to support risk-taking by students in their classrooms. Student responses on a survey that the National Institute adapted from *Class Maps*¹ provide some of the data for the inquiry team. But the teachers also are using their own observations of students and the input of their colleagues to think about their classroom climate. These data sources provide important information for the teachers. More important are the decisions that the teachers make individually and as a group to improve their students' comfort levels for risk-taking.

MCGLONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The inquiry project at McGlone Elementary brings together a team of general educators and gifted/talented teachers to explore how a differentiated curriculum provides a better learning vehicle for all students. The school has a center program for students identified as highly gifted, and the team of teachers is hoping to identify those aspects of the differentiated curriculum that are most strategic and can be utilized by

other special and general educators in the building. The inquiry is also designed to inform each member of the team about their own instruction and beliefs about instruction.

The use of inquiry is new for these teams of Denver practitioners, yet their willingness to make time for this work will yield important outcomes.

Future issues of the *Spotlight on National Institute Activities* will update readers about these Denver projects, as well as the inquiry work in other sites. For more information about the Denver inquiry, please contact Trish Boland at (303) 556-3990 or email her at patricia_boland@ceo.cudenver.edu.

¹ Zucker, S., Brehm, K., & Doll, B. (2000, April). *Class maps: Making mentally healthy classrooms promotes academic success*. A paper presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists. New Orleans, LA.

SPOTLIGHT ON *BOSTON*

The work of the National Institute for Urban School Improvement in Boston Public Schools (BPS) has been designed to support the district's comprehensive education reform plan adopted in July of 1996. The plan, Focus on Children, has served as the framework for the work of the district related to their mission of "...welcoming the children of this city into the Boston Public Schools, where effective teaching and learning prepare all of our students to achieve at high levels, and where the entire community works together to focus on children." The National Institute has provided assistance to the district in meeting their priorities of improving student achievement, closing the achievement gap, improving practice through school-wide professional development, and focusing on service. This has been accomplished through the Leadership Strand for Instructional

Leadership Teams (ILT) from 11 of the district's schools. The Leadership strands have been designed to both increase the knowledge and skills of ILT members related to effective instructional practices for all students, including those with disabilities, and to increase their skills individually and as team members and leaders within their buildings. The sessions' speakers have focused on topics including differentiated instruction and the comprehensive review of student literacy work, while at the same time emphasizing effective teaming and the role of leadership teams in the dissemination of instructional practices within a school.

BPS is presently working on the second plan for comprehensive school reform, Focus on Children II, and the National Institute looks forward to assisting the district with this effort.

SPOTLIGHT ON *CHICAGO*

DISTRICT LEVEL

The work accomplished in Chicago Public Schools this past quarter includes work at both the district and school level. The design team met and planned for the November 15, 2000

Principals' Academy. This was the first of three workshops for principals designed to address the need for inclusive learning communities and a systemic approach to change.

In addition, staff development with administrators and the central office staff was planned for the year. The topic chosen was differentiated instruction and the audience is expected to be principals, regional liaisons, and regional Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) teams.

This staff development will be addressing several issues, but will mostly provide professional development to regional liaisons who typically have a high incidence background so they can assist schools in changing their practices.

SCHOOL LEVEL

Chris Salisbury, National Institute site liaison, met with Mike Klonsky at a Small Schools Workshop where they planned for the November 15th Academy. Klonsky presented information for the principals on "Leadership and Change from Within." Salisbury presented information on what inclusive practices look like and how principals fit into the process of building-wide change. Principals left the academy with concrete information for completing their Year 1 Education Connection LRE application. Thirty-one schools will be involved with the academies this year. These are the schools that will be working in the first year of the Education Connection LRE initiative.

A second Principals' Academy was hosted by Chicago Public Schools and the National Institute on January 24, 2001 at the University Hyatt in Chicago. This academy focused on inquiry as a school-wide change strategy. Participants engaged in using their data to start the change process.

SPOTLIGHT ON *EL PASO*

Our work during the 2000-2001 school year in the Socorro Independent School District, El Paso, Texas has continued through various Leadership Academies and retreats.

DISTRICT LEVEL

Socorro ISD is growing rapidly and this school year opened two new schools. Next year, it will open two more. One of the initiatives to meet the growing needs in the district is to provide academies for assistant principals to prepare them for a principalship. The district has a vested interest in preparing their future principals and providing them with opportunities to discuss issues that are of interest and concern for their own schools. In February, the National Institute facilitated a retreat for Socorro's Assistant Principals' Academy, where aspiring principals were introduced to the work of the National Institute. Participants engaged in activities about communication systems in their buildings, the role of Building Leadership Teams, and defining inclusive school communities. Of particular interest was a very rich discussion on the meaning of inclusion. Participants talked about the role of the principal in creating and sustaining inclusive school communities. Overall, it was a dynamic and extremely productive retreat.

SCHOOL LEVEL

Schools met to determine what their focus would be for the year. The topics identified for Leadership Academies include:

September 2000

Dialogues Among Feeder Patterns: Building Leadership Teams met to discuss and assess services to students in each school and begin to address problems students have as they transition from elementary to middle and middle to high school.

November 2000/ January 2001

Focusing on Differentiated Instruction: Teachers discussed and planned strategies to use in their classrooms. In January, teachers planned to implement one strategy in their

SPOTLIGHT ON WASHINGTON D.C.

On January 24, 2001 the National Institute for Urban School Improvement, in collaboration with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), held a Leadership Academy at the Logan Center. Building Leadership Teams from Anacostia Senior High, Bancroft Elementary, Cardozo Senior High, Fletcher-Johnson Educational Center, Hyde Elementary, Nalle Elementary, J.O. Wilson Elementary, Gage-Eckington Elementary, Kramer Middle, Birney Elementary, and representatives from DCPS central office were present.

The topic for the January 24th academy was "Thinking Systemically about Special Education Referrals." Academy participants discussed and participated in activities related to the following:

- Using district and school data to identify trends related to special education referrals. Both Anne Gaye, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, and Dr. Duvon Winbourne, Executive Director of the Division of Educational Accountability, presented DCPS data to participants for their review and analysis.
- Identifying the systemic structures that contribute to the high volume of special education referrals (i.e., lack of training for teaching assistants and professional development opportunities for teachers, suspected abuse of children and parents, poor instruction).

- Examining our collective and individual mental models as they relate to special education referrals. We can accomplish this by asking questions such as: How are we, as a faculty, thinking about the students with disabilities in our school? How am I, as a teacher, thinking about the needs of children with disabilities in my classroom?

Academy participants were provided a packet of information, which contained a variety of readings and tools about systems thinking and the reduction of special education referrals. The purpose of this packet is to assist each Building Leadership Team in prompting further discussion about reducing special education referrals at their individual schools.

Academy evaluation results indicated that most Leadership Academy participants found systemic thinking in relation to special education referrals to be "useful" or "very useful." Many participants plan to bring the systemic perspective to their schools through activities such as training staff members in special education, developing interventions, educating parents about the Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT) process, and becoming more aware of how data can be used to both analyze problems and contribute to solutions.



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(EL PASO, *Continued from page 5*)

classrooms and bring student work from that experience to use during the Academy.

March 2001

Looking at Student Work: Roseanne Fulton from the Denver Public School District helped teachers look at student work and how to use those strategies in their classrooms.

May 2001

Reflective Practice and Sustainability: Building Leadership Teams will meet to reflect on their progress, on where they want to be, and on creating infrastructures for sustainability.

TEACHER INQUIRY GRANTS

Four schools in Socorro ISD are conducting inquiry projects through Teacher Inquiry Grants provided by the National Institute. The four schools participating are Benito Martinez Elementary, Helen Ball Elementary, Rojas Elementary, and Montwood High. Each of the schools has developed a particular focus of inquiry in one of the following areas: Differentiated Instruction, Literacy Development, and Science Instruction with accommodations and modifications for including all students.

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