

Urban renewal

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ASU Insight

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Transforming education



MICHAEL COOPER PHOTO

Nycole Miller (center), a student-teacher at Udall Elementary School in Phoenix, guides 8-year-olds Stephanie Bustamante and Anthony Villela as they solve a math problem together.

Student-teacher placements fill void in high-need school districts

By Joan M. Sherwood

Each time Nycole Miller delivers a lesson to the third-grade class she's assigned to at Udall Elementary School in Phoenix, it becomes more and more apparent that teaching is her dream career.

"Miss Miller is almost a teacher, but not quite yet," she reminds the students.

But this detail is insignificant to the children. They watch Miller's every move as she introduces the day's math lesson. Each student is handed a colorful restaurant menu and asked to pair up with a partner.

She moves about the classroom, encouraging and congratulating each pair as they enthusiastically work a problem that challenges them to determine the correct change they would receive back after paying for the burrito they've just enjoyed at the restaurant.

The lesson continues as the students use the restaurant menu to solve similar problems Miller has prepared for them on a worksheet. Mariachi music

plays in the background, creating a real-world feeling of being in a restaurant and using computation skills to correctly pay a tab.

"I am eager to become a teacher and make a difference in my students' lives," says Miller, a Nogales, Ariz., native.

She will complete her student-teaching semester and graduate from ASU in December with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, with a concentration in multilingual-multicultural education.

Miller is one of 33 pre-service teachers from ASU's Tempe campus to receive an Alpha Partnership Scholarship this fall. The annual scholarship program was created to assist College of Education seniors who choose to complete their student-teaching requirements within a high-need school served by ASU's Office of University-School Partnerships.

The Alpha Partnership began taking shape in the fall of 2003 in collaboration with state Senator Richard Miranda (D-District 13), the Tolleson and

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ASU initiative targets Arizona high school completion rates

Plan could help boost college entry rates

By Joan M. Sherwood

The consequences of dropping out of high school can be devastating. Youths who do not complete high school are far more likely to end up unemployed, in prison or living in poverty.

Yet, about 3,000 high school students nationally make the choice to drop out each day.

While the cumulative effects are felt in all student populations, the rate in which African-American and Hispanic students are dropping out has reached epidemic proportions. The crisis is particularly pronounced in southwestern states such as Arizona, where only about 62 percent of Hispanic students who enter high school as freshmen graduate four years later.

"There is no greater educational loss than a student who drops out before graduation," says Eugene E. Garcia, vice president for university-school partnerships and dean of ASU's College of Education.

"Arizona is ranked an alarming 46th out of the 50 states in terms of its high school completion rate. The implications of this crisis are far-reaching and devastating to the students, their communities and the economic vitality of our state and nation."

Garcia is leading a team of researchers, practitioners and top-level administrators, appointed by ASU President Michael Crow, in establishing a High School Completion Initiative. The goal is to concentrate university resources, expertise and capabilities to support and enhance pre-K-12 education to ultimately raise the number of Arizona students completing high school and transitioning to college.

The President's Pre-K-12 Engagement Council first convened last winter to begin studying how ASU can best coordinate its service-learning and research activities, to substantively support and improve

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School offers model for success

Often a student's home environment and socio-economic circumstances are the greatest predictors of his or her academic achievement. But, many schools have demonstrated that an individual student's circumstances do not have to determine the future.

Cibola High School, located in southern Arizona within the Yuma Union High School District, serves nearly 2,500 students, of which 74 percent are Latino/a. Many of those students are recent arrivals from Mexico, and 56 percent of them receive free or reduced price lunch. Yet the school consistently outperforms schools with similar demographics and compares favorably to those serving more advantaged communities.

At the close of the 2003 - 2004 academic year, Cibola graduated 80.5 percent of the students who enrolled as freshmen in 2000. Forty-two percent of those students went on to four-year colleges or universities, while 47 percent enrolled in community colleges and 5 percent entered a trade school.

Of the other 19.5 percent from that freshman class, 514 still are enrolled, 20 percent joined the military and 3 percent received GEDs. Just 7.7

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Learner-Centered Leadership supports rising school leaders

By Joan M. Sherwood

The role of a school principal in today's society is constantly evolving. Effective school leaders must manage the day-to-day operations of a community of hundreds - and, in many cases, more than a thousand - occupants, in addition to playing a key role in the improved performance of all students.

Leadership, collaboration, cooperation and inspiration must be lived, not just talked about, by those who serve in school leadership positions. This is the impetus for creating ASU's Learner-Centered Leadership program.

"The motivation for developing the project was simple," says Arnold Danzig, an associate professor of educational leadership and policy studies and director of the LCL program. "Schools need help. Teachers need help. Parents need help. This project was developed to create a learning environment in which children and adults flourish, the knowledge of experienced educators is valued - and where there are opportunities to reflect on that experience."

Since its inception in the fall of 2002, the federally sponsored Learner-Centered Leadership program has provided a continuous ladder

for advancement from teacher to administrative leader in four high-needs school districts, including the Phoenix Union High School District and the Alhambra, Creighton and Roosevelt elementary school districts.

The program provides preparation, certification and ongoing professional development for aspiring, rising and experienced school administrators to ensure a steady flow of qualified, quality school administrators, Danzig says. Guided by ASU's Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and the Southwest Center for Educational Equity and Language Diversity, the project draws from university research and theory, as well as the applied expertise of practicing administrators from the four participating school districts.

Significant program accomplishments include the establishment of a cohort of 27 aspiring school administrators, selected by their respective school districts to participate in LCL. These participants completed their master's and administrative certification in December 2004, and are moving into administrative positions in the public schools. A second cohort of prospec-

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MICHAEL COOPER PHOTO

Classroom visits are an integral part of Susan Lugo's daily activities as principal at Loma Linda Elementary School. On a recent visit Lugo talks with Geneva Acosta, 5, as the kindergartener practices reading aloud.

Placement program benefits districts, student teachers

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Phoenix Union High School districts and their surrounding elementary feeder school districts in central Phoenix and the west Valley. The partnership currently provides a comprehensive menu of programs and resources for educators, schools and families, and the list is expanding as additional linkages are established.

Alpha is the first of several university-school partnerships that will be established by ASU throughout the state within the next three to five years.

School districts participating in the Alpha Partnership include Cartwright, Fowler, Isaac, Murphy, and Phoenix Elementary school districts; and the Phoenix and Tolleson union high school districts.

"Through my studies at ASU, I've not only learned how to teach, but also about the disparities in education and about the obstacles that many students in urban and rural schools have to overcome," Miller says. "I feel I have the drive, compassion, skills and knowledge necessary to make cultural connections with these students and help them to succeed."

Udall Principal Monica Torres believes just as strongly in Miller's unique abilities to help the children at her school learn and grow. Torres already has offered Miller a full-time teaching position that will begin in January, once she graduates and becomes certified.

"The Alpha Partnership Scholarship program has helped us fill positions with qualified individuals who have been mentored by our master teachers, share our philosophy and are a good fit for our school," Torres says.

Since initiating the Alpha Scholarship program for student-teacher candidates at the start of the 2004 – 2005 academic year, Alpha Partnership schools have seen a 115 percent increase in student-teacher placements over the previous academic year. By this spring, the districts are expected to have a 129 percent increase in pre-service teachers completing their student-teaching requirements in their schools. Other incentive programs such as the Rodel Student Teacher Scholarship also have helped increase the number of student-teacher candidates choosing to student-teach within high-need schools in the Phoenix area.

"Some people will have you believe that there is no longer a teacher shortage," says Robert Donofrio, executive director of the Alpha Partnership. "But when it comes to districts with high poverty and minority students like those in the urban Alpha districts, a shortage still exists. By placing student-teachers in these districts, we overcome the myths that these schools are not run well; student behavior is out of control; the schools are not safe; and there are not high-quality master teachers to place the student-teachers with, from whom they can learn and master their craft."

"Once they get placed in these schools, they overcome the myths, like the schools, get plenty of support and end up signing contracts."

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Families find support in Leaps and Bounds

By Joan M. Sherwood

Many simple, everyday occurrences provide excellent opportunities to enhance a child's development. ASU's Leaps and Bounds Program provides parent education workshops designed to give children the best possible start in life.

The program is administered by ASU's Office of Youth Preparation in partnership with the College of Education's Early Childhood Education program, Office of University-School Partnerships and the New Directions Institute for Infant Brain Development.

Leaps and Bounds launched in February 2004 as a pilot in the Isaac Elementary School District. It features a workshop series titled "The World as a Classroom" for parents and families of children ages 3 – 5. The workshops demonstrate effective learning activities that can be conducted by all family members using things that are familiar in a child's world.

"The Leaps and Bounds Program embraces the philosophy that parents are their children's first and most important teachers," says Marilyn LaCount, director of the Office of Youth Preparation.

The program urges parents and other family members not to underestimate the value of even 15 minutes of quality time spent with their children. Through a series of four workshops, parents are



ASU's Leaps and Bounds program emphasizes early learning activities with items that are familiar in a child's world.

taught strategies for teaching and talking with their children about their surroundings. Children are encouraged to name what they see in the house, as they ride in the car and as they shop in stores, making learning through daily activities accessible to families who may not have access to popular and expensive educational toys or activities.

Rosario Guzman was among the first parents to participate in the Leaps and Bounds program when it was offered in 2004 as a pilot project in the Isaac School District.

"When I first enrolled in the program,

I thought the most important part of it would be what my children would learn," Guzman says. "But, as it turns out, what was most important were the things I learned I could do to help prepare my children for school."

Since the program's debut in 2004, Leaps and Bounds has been offered at 16 schools and community sites across the Valley, including high-need schools involved with the Office of University-School Partnerships' Alpha Partnership.

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Program offers resources for administrators

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Administrators from other Phoenix metropolitan school districts began a master's and administrative certification program in January 2005.

LCL also works with 35 rising administrators who are implementing action plans that focus on improved student learning.

"Through LCL, these administrators are receiving personalized, one-on-one mentoring around the action plans they have designed," Danzig says.

Additionally, 30 experienced and accomplished administrators are sharing their knowledge and expertise in cooperation with the LCL program through mentoring, workshops and labs, plus co-teaching opportunities with ASU faculty in the College of Education's certification program for school administrators. Six school district liaisons work with the university and school districts as facilitators and planners of program activities.

Nearly one-third of the participants in the LCL program have been promoted or hired to an administrative position in the three years since the project started.

"This result speaks to the complementary ways in which the university and school districts are working to select, prepare and provide professional development for school leaders," Danzig says.

In light of the program's extraordinary success, LCL was among the recipients of ASU's 2004 – 2005 President's Medal for Social Embeddedness. The award recognizes

teams within the university that develop and implement programs or projects that embed ASU into the communities it serves.

"One of the things that interested me most about the Learner-Centered Leadership program was the invaluable opportunity it provided to network with other principals in and outside my district," says Susan Lugo, principal of Loma Linda Elementary School in the Creighton Elementary School District. "I met great people and administrators from schools around the Valley that I feel very comfortable picking up the phone and calling to discuss strategies for addressing a problem at my school."

Lugo joined the program in 2002 as a mentee, participating fully in a wide array of LCL workshops and courses that were offered in the evenings and weekends for novice administrators.

"We were asked to write action plans for our schools, and mine focused on raising student achievement, particularly for those students who were English language learners," Lugo says.

"We received helpful feedback on our action plans from other principals and the professors from ASU," says Lugo, whose school has moved from the state's "underperforming" classification to the "performing plus" arena in the five years since she became principal. "I always left those sessions learning something new that I could use at my school."

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High School Completion Initiative targets Arizona's graduation rates

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the state's public education system on a large scale.

"Of all the big-ticket items we might address, this is the biggest," Garcia says. "ASU researchers already have begun identifying school-level practices occurring in Arizona that substantiate the research on high-performing secondary schools – and that contribute directly to student success. Since organizing this fall, the High School Completion Initiative Team has moved ahead with plans to appoint a full-time director and reach full operation by 2006."

The initiative is supported by all four ASU campuses through a coordinated and collaborative effort not only to raise the state's high school completion rate, but also to significantly increase college readiness and attendance among all Arizona youths.

In 2003, the Center for the Future of Arizona – a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headed by ASU President Emeritus Lattie Coor and Sybil Francis, a national public policy expert – established an initiative aimed at tackling the problems that have kept Arizona's dropout rate one of the highest in the nation.

"The Center for the Future of Arizona is leading a coalition of business, academic and public policy organizations in establishing an ambitious and achievable goal for improving Arizona's high school graduation rate," Garcia says. "The High School Completion Initiative supports the center's proposed goal to increase Arizona's graduation rate by 10 percent by 2012."

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Cibola High School shows model for beating odds

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percent of the students from that class are classified as status unknown or as dropouts.

A research team led by ASU professor emerita Ursula Casanova began studying Cibola two years ago, collecting data through observations and interviews to explain the school's success against the odds – and provide a model for others.

In the course of her research, Casanova identified the school's first principal, John Walk, as a key to Cibola's success.

"He upheld high expectations for all students and was supported by a heavily involved counseling team led by ASU alumnus Jim Sullivan," says Casanova, who has been appointed to ASU's High School Completion Initiative Team.



Pride and performance are common at Cibola High School in Yuma, a result, in part, of student support and tough goals.

Cibola's committed teachers have continued to deliver a rigorous curriculum and the necessary supplemental support to ensure success.

"In the words of one student, 'It's difficult to fail here,'" says Casanova.

"We will take what we know from the experiences at Cibola and other high-performing schools

around Arizona and the United States, and launch a research, development and demonstration effort that will directly enhance high school completion and college-going," says ASU College of Education Dean Eugene E. Garcia.

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