Developing Personnel Preparation Program Partnerships: The Minnesota Story
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Personnel Improvement Center Awards Services to Minnesota

Each year, the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education accepts applications for technical assistance in developing and implementing preparation program partnership (PPP) plans between state, local programs and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to meet local needs for special education, Part C and related services personnel. Dr. Lisa Churchill, PIC state service provider, assists states in determining both needs and resources available and then leads partnership teams in developing customized accessibility plans for those high need locales. Minnesota’s State Department of Education (MDE) was awarded PIC services for the 2011-2012 year. Dr. Churchill worked with MDE state leaders, Joan Breslin-Larson, Supervisor for Low Incidence Disabilities and Workforce Readiness and Mary Lindell, Special Education Workforce Specialist to leverage the necessary resources for developing and implementing personnel preparation program partnerships (PPPs) that would provide increased access to speech-language pathologists (SLPs), autism specialists, categorical teachers and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel from October 2011 to October 2012.

Minnesota’s Efforts

MDE goals were to: (a) collect and analyze Minnesota state data to identify local special education personnel needs and university production rates; (b) increase communication and collaboration among IHEs preparing categorical teachers, ECSE, autism specialists and SLPs across the state to address the shortage of personnel; (c) build relationships among the state education agency (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and IHEs to address urban and rural personnel needs in the state and (d) create LEA/IHE partnerships to address new autism spectrum disorder (ASD) licensure requirements.

In order to address these goals, Dr. Churchill met with a stakeholder group in December of 2011 to develop an action plan for the 2012 service year (see MN’s state action plan) where they identified the state and local needs and articulated a rationale for using existing structures (such as low-incidence regions as opposed to individual districts) in the work. These initial planning meetings were then followed up on, using bi-monthly calls and webinars to review outcomes and processes among the SEA leadership and the PIC service provider. A major component of the
collaboration involved the creation and implementation of LEA/IHE partnership plans.

Dr. Churchill describes this process as a form of ongoing monitoring and improvement that includes planning, implementation and assessment, with a focus on both the process and product. The plans provide a concrete road map for implementation of the activities and outcomes.

As the PIC completes its service year with MDE, a great deal of progress has been made in plans to address local needs for special education, Part C and related services personnel. Outcomes from the PIC work in Minnesota include the creation of an overarching IHE collaborative that includes representatives from the SLP IHE programs and the exploration of a speech-language pathologist assistant certificate program. Furthermore, Dr. Churchill describes a “collaborative spirit among regional low incidence facilitators and university faculty to form partnerships. The partners are working together to address the immediate transition process for fulfilling the new ASD competencies in an accessible and cost-effective structure. The shared responsibilities and decisions made exemplify a mutually beneficial approach for both the local regions and the universities. Overall, there has been strong SEA leadership and facilitation of the PIC work in Minnesota with visibly broad statewide impact”.

Advice for Other States:

1) Building relationships and partnerships among SEA, LEA, and IHE personnel takes time, structure and commitment. Utilization of the PIC PPP state services to facilitate this process has been beneficial for all partners.

2) Strong SEA leadership that provides commitment, time and follow-through is an asset for initiating and implementing this type of work.

3) Within your state, identify the organizational structure (district/region/consortium) and administrative individuals who are the best match to implement a partnership (collaborative) approach to problem solving local needs using university resources.

4) Write your state action plan as soon as possible and use it as a “road map” to guide your activities and reach your state’s goals. Like any road map, you may find yourself taking another path, but it is more important to modify your course or plan of action than to not have one at all.

For more information about the Minnesota Department of Education and PIC work, view a PowerPoint presentation here.
This document was written by Leila Richey, PIC communications manager. Special thanks to the following for providing the information included here:

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