



**CENTER TO CLOSE  
THE OPPORTUNITY GAP**  
Identifying Best Practices to Ensure Student  
Achievement in California's K-12 Schools

**CSU** The California State University

## **Spotlight on Schools**

### **Paddison Elementary School-Little Lake City School District**

#### **A Mutually Beneficial Partnership: Little Lake City School District and CSU Long Beach**

School and university partnerships have long been a hallmark of teacher preparation. It has become increasingly evident that for these partnerships to be effective in preparing teacher these partnerships need to be mutually beneficial---meaning a collaborative, shared responsibility for the preparation and ongoing development of teachers. Partnerships with local districts facilitate the construction, implementation, effectiveness, and institutionalization of teacher preparation programs, especially when aligning systems for educating preservice teachers and in-service teachers to use HLPs (Brownell et al., 2019). Developing these shared visions for effective teaching, however, is complex and partnerships are essential. HLPs can actually be used to facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships, benefiting both the university and the schools/district.

The teacher preparation program at CSU Long Beach is a dual certificate program where candidates earned both general and special education certifications in a 2-year, clinically-based program. The school district-university partnership was developed early on in the creation of the dual credential teacher educator pathway. While the university had a prior relationship with the district, support by the CEEDAR Center (<https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu>) fueled the work of the partnership and provided a space for engaging in critical conversations and collaboration. The district agreed to host cohorts of teacher candidates for the 2-year program by providing them both elementary education and special education mentor teachers, as well as providing the university classroom space on a school campus for university coursework to be taught. Both the university and school district identified key personnel in

order to sustain ongoing communication and manage the logistics of the program and practice-based opportunities.

The district and university saw preparing future teachers as a joint effort, and the district was committed to hiring program graduates who were certified in both elementary and special education. Faculty in the teacher educator program worked collaboratively with district leaders and mentor teachers to create practice opportunities that would prepare candidates but also support the schools and students. The school district had been implementing reading interventions for several years, but were beginning math interventions and wanted this to be a focus. The partnership decided to develop a practice-based opportunity that focused on academic Tier 2 and 3 interventions. This practice-based opportunity would allow for multiple opportunities to practice delivering interventions as the candidates would first practice the intervention with reading content and then practice again with math.

The practice opportunity provided the teacher candidates the opportunity to practice several high leverage practices in real contexts with K-5 students, and benefitted the schools in the district by providing struggling students with additional support through intervention. In essence, the practice opportunity provided an “approximation of practice” (Grossman, 2009) that allowed candidates to engage in practices that were similar to what they would be doing as a classroom teacher in the district.

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) have become a common framework for structuring instruction and instructional supports in schools. MTSS models require teachers to be prepared to support ALL students, including those who need interventions and/or students with disabilities. Typically, MTSS models involve three tiers of instruction: Tier 1 or universal supports, Tier 2 or strategic supports, and Tier 3 or intensive supports (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). MTSS models assume that universals supports, i.e., the reading or math curriculum, may not be enough support for all students to be successful and some students will need additional, strategic supports; a few students, in turn, will need even more intensive supports (including special education). Over the last two decades, a fairly robust literature related to effective reading interventions (e.g., Gersten et al., 2009a; Wanzek et al., 2015) and math interventions (e.g., Gersten et al., 2009b; Powell et al., 2019) has developed. While the content of the

intervention varies, i.e., reading comprehension, math computation, the instructional model is similar. That is, explicit, systematic instruction has demonstrated to be an effective instructional delivery model for struggling students and students with disabilities (Archer & Hughes, 2011). This particular practice opportunity was centered around the HLP of explicit instruction and also included additional HLPs related to assessment and collaboration.

During their university coursework, the teacher candidates were taught evidence-based practices to support student learning in Tier 2 and 3 interventions. This includes progress monitoring, as well as explicit and systematic small group instruction with modeling, small/flexible grouping, corrective feedback, and the implementation of specific learning strategies. The purpose of this practice-based opportunity was to provide candidates with the opportunity to learn and implement a highly defined set of skills critical to delivering effective Tier 2 and 3 academic supports within MTSS models.

This practice opportunity, delivering Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, focuses on six different HLPs: collaboration, using assessment data to guide instruction, designing instruction to meet a specific learning goal, explicit instruction, intensive intervention, and corrective feedback. The practice opportunity required candidates to do the following: (1) collect baseline data on students identified by their teachers as requiring supplemental or intensive intervention, (2) collaborate with their peers who work at the same grade level to analyze data, identify target skill areas, and develop lesson plans, (3) implemented eight intervention sessions with a group of 2-6 students, (4) collect and analyze progress monitoring data to make adjustments to intervention.

This PBO is embedded in two courses - one course on Tier 2 and Tier 3 reading interventions and the other on Tier 2 and Tier 3 math interventions (*duration, cohesiveness*). To prepare for these courses and this specific practice opportunity, during the semester prior candidates take courses focused on Tier 1 reading instruction and Tier 1 math instruction (*scaffolding, cohesiveness*). The candidates simultaneously completed a course on assessment in which they learned how to administer curriculum-based measures and how to monitor student progress (*cohesiveness*). Easier and previously learned skills such as collaboration and designing a lesson to meet a learning goal are part of the practice opportunity, as well as

new and more complex skills such as using data to guide instruction and providing intensive intervention (*interleaving*). In the Tier 2 and 3 intervention courses, the skills needed for the practice opportunity are modeled for the candidates and candidates have the opportunity to observe mentor teachers deliver intervention (*modeling*). Additionally, candidates had the opportunity to practice with peers in the courses (*scaffolding*) and then again in the field with feedback from instructors (*scaffolding, feedback*). Faculty observed the candidates who implemented the interventions using a fidelity checklist (*feedback*). Candidates reflect on their lessons and the intervention as a whole as part of the PBO. This was done through a written assignment in which candidates wrote an analysis of the impact of the intervention for each student in the small group (*analysis*).

### **An Interview with Dr. Lorena Martinez-Vargas, Principal, Paddison Elementary School, Little Lake City School District**

#### ***Do you feel that your partnership with CSULB has been mutually beneficial? If so, how?***

Yes! I believe that Little Lake City School District's partnership with CSULB has been mutually beneficial in the area of professional development. CSULB's UDCP program gains access to healthy classroom environments in which teacher candidates observe and learn from practiced and effective teachers while they engage in research-based teaching strategies. From the school district and school site perspective, there is a benefit in opening classroom doors to teacher candidates. Adding the adult learner factor to the elementary school environments enhances the teaching and learning dynamics. As mentor teachers take on their role, teachers and administrators are positioned to take a fresh look at our practice that leads to discussion, reflection and improvement. It is an invaluable process that propels all the people involved into a cycle of continuous improvement.

#### ***How do you feel that the partnership has impacted teacher candidate learning and mentor teacher practice?***

The district-university partnership strengthens the candidate-mentor relationship. We have experienced candidate-mentor situations from other programs without the partnership. While those relationships were professional, they remained superficial. Knowing that there will be an ongoing collaboration between the university and the district engenders a deeper level of commitment. At Paddison Elementary, having the candidates on our campus for classes and in our classrooms created a familial connection. Candidates became members of our school community, became friends. As candidates completed their programs and were hired by the district, we embraced them as Little Lake colleagues.

***How has the partnership sustained?***

Our partnership has been sustained by outcomes and relationships. The partnership has been productive. Evidence of success is apparent among the candidates who emerged as qualified teachers, many hired by the district. With trust and credibility established between the two organizations, there is a genuine desire to continue the partnership and expand it where possibilities arise to further develop ourselves as professionals and develop our profession.