

## **NCTAF Brief: Strategies for Collaborative (PK-16) Assessment of Teacher Candidates During Teacher Preparation**

### **Perspectives from the Milwaukee Partnership Academy**

Marleen C. Pugach, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Mary Diez, Alverno College  
Christine Anderson, Milwaukee Partnership Academy

Institutions of higher education in Milwaukee that prepare teachers all have longstanding relationships with the Milwaukee Public Schools. They work directly with principals and cooperating teachers, they provide preparation for cooperating teachers to participate in the assessment of candidates, they have strong relationships with specific schools where teacher candidates are placed both for early field experiences and student teaching. What these relationships have not done before, however, is to function as part of a coordinated system of reform. As a P-16 Council, the Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA) has provided the locus for *system-to-system* reform, allowing the local IHEs to marshal resources together to better serve the children and youth of Milwaukee (Pugach, Post, Anderson, Lehmann, & Donder, in press). As partners in system-to-system reform, we have staked out a direction and made serious progress toward our joint goal of collaborative assessment of teacher candidates. However, we do not claim to offer absolute answers. This is a work in progress.

### **The Milwaukee Partnership as the Context for Collaborative Assessment**

The MPA is an urban P-16 council made up of three inter-related groups that form its governing structure: (1) the Executive Partners, (2) the Partners, which include broad wide community constituencies, and (3) the Implementation Team, which is the action arm of the MPA. These three groups interact on a regular basis. The partnership's

priorities are set by the Executive Partners and are carried out by the MPA's Executive Director.

The ten Executive Partners include leaders of several major organizations within the community. They meet monthly to discuss the MPA's progress and to make decisions regarding the policies and priorities of the partnership. They also each make a financial contribution to the MPA's operating budget. Executive Partners include: (1) the Superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools; (2) the Executive Director of the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (the local teachers' union); (3) the President of the MPS Board of School Directors; (4) the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; (5) the President of the Milwaukee Area Technical College; (6) the President of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce, the local chamber of commerce; (7) the Chair of the Education Committee of the Greater Milwaukee Committee, a group of business leaders; (8) the President of the Private Industry Council; (9) the Mayor of the City of Milwaukee; and (10) the President the Helen Bader Foundation, a local foundation with historical ties to the education community.

These leaders command attention, control resources and hold power in their organizations and in the community. Their presence is fundamental to the joint commitment to institutionalize, stabilize, and sustain the partnership and thus, provide stability to education reform in Milwaukee's urban schools. The visible participation of high-level leaders provides credibility to the importance of the MPA. The culture of the partnership has created the expectation that the leaders of these organizations are present

at each meeting themselves, with no substitutes, to work together on the goal of improving education in the community.

In setting the priorities that advance the overall mission of the partnership, which is to ensure that every child is on grade level in reading, writing and mathematics, the Executive Partners help create a common understanding regarding the alignment of resources and efforts. The priorities provide a consistent, ongoing focus to the MPA's activities as a way of counteracting the typical cycle in urban schools, namely, generating and then discarding new, often unrelated initiatives before they have a chance to work. The current priorities of the MPA are: (1) district wide implementation of comprehensive literacy and mathematics frameworks; (2) tutoring and family literacy; (3) teacher and principal quality, with an emphasis on coaching and embedded professional development; and (4) research, assessment, and evaluation.

The balance of the Partners do not have financial responsibilities to the MPA, but are actively engaged with various aspects of education throughout the community and the state. They include, for example, the Milwaukee Public Museum, the Milwaukee County Zoo, the Milwaukee Public Library, the YMCA, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. These partners participate on priority workgroups and attend quarterly meetings of the full partnership.

The Implementation Team meets on a bi-weekly basis to do the "heavy lifting" of the MPA to create the structures and processes that enable the implementation of the priorities. Four workgroups, one for each priority, provide the opportunity for wide input from multiple partners and other stakeholders who wish to contribute directly to the work

of the partnership. Additional workgroups are being added as specific tasks and challenges become essential to the goals and growth of the partnership. For example, a new workgroup to increase the alignment of community cultural institutions and other partners, such as the museums, zoo, library, etc., will be established beginning in September 2005.

A second contextual consideration in the state of Wisconsin is new legislation, PI34, which converts teacher preparation to a standards-based model. This legislation charges each IHE individually to conform to the ten Wisconsin Teacher Standards (patterned after the national INTASC standards). To make this work meaningful and authentic within the specific context of Milwaukee, and to advance the goal of meeting the needs of the students in Milwaukee, we are attempting to meet our individual responsibilities as charged by PI34 through the shared work of the MPA. PI34 is consistent both with the MPA's belief that professional development is the lynchpin for transforming teaching and learning and with the structures it has created to develop the conditions for adults to engage in high quality learning activities across all learning organizations.

### **On the Road to Transformation**

How are we building a common context for assessing teacher candidates? First, the MPA provides the structure for developing a common language of instruction and assessment. In terms of instruction, this includes concepts like school-based Learning Teams, teacher leadership, literacy coaches, mathematics teacher leaders, and Characteristics of a High Performing Urban Classroom, all crafted by the MPA Implementation Team and its priority workgroups. In terms of assessment, the district

has implemented Learning Targets and has an ongoing commitment to developing Classroom Assessments Based on Standards (CABS). Several school teams have participated in the Southeastern Wisconsin Assessment Collaborative (SEWAC), a year-long professional development opportunity focused on building capacity in the learning teams to use formative classroom assessment effectively and a new project beginning this fall will provide intensive support for low-performing, low value-added schools with work on classroom assessment to support learning. For teacher candidates who complete early field experiences and student teaching in MPS, each of these new terms, which represent new practices in teaching and learning, are beginning to show up in end-of-semester assessments and portfolios.

Next, and unprecedented in our community, the deans of the six local IHEs that prepare teachers are organized in a group called the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Deans of Education (MMADE). This group, which is co-chaired by the dean of the public university and a dean from one of the private universities, meets monthly during the academic year to develop a shared agenda related to teacher preparation and professional development; to engage in continuous discussion with the Executive Director of the MPA; to make connections with other IHE faculty and administrators whose work can support, in a more cohesive fashion, the goals of the MPA; to offer agenda items for the MPA's Implementation Team and workgroups; and to provide direct support to the MPA (for example, the MMADE has funded the publication of the newsletter for the MPA). This structure has enabled IHE deans to begin a process of trust-building and trust-maintaining that did not exist at this level before.

In addition, representatives of several of the local IHEs are members of the Implementation Team and the priority workgroups. Participation on the workgroups is voluntary and every IHE has the opportunity to be represented. Further, the recent restructuring of the MPA calls for two permanent seats on the Implementation Team from among the five private colleges and universities in Milwaukee in addition to the seat held by the public university. Participation at these levels provides the opportunity for ongoing input into, and shared knowledge about, the operation, goals and activities of the MPA.

There has also been an effort to align external grant writing and other proposed research with the priorities of the MPA. Should faculty at IHEs, or external parties as well, wish to submit grants connected to the MPA (and receive letters of support from the MPA), the proposal is presented to the Implementation Team to ensure alignment and reduce redundancy. If faculty preparing grants proposals are not involved with the MPA, MPA approval is contingent on some level of direct involvement. This is not an effort to dissuade faculty from conducting any particular kind of research, but rather to better align research that is or could be more directly related to the priorities of the MPA's work.

Perhaps most important, the MPA has created consistent, reliable forums for communication and dialogue across the education community. Rather than operating independently, which has been the status quo (as is the case in most communities), the goal is to better align our work across all IHEs—and in fact across all institutions and organizations in Milwaukee—to better serve the goal of improving the quality of teaching and learning for the children and youth of Milwaukee. These new structures for communication allow for the possibility of a growing critical mass of stakeholders who

see the “big picture” and begin to think in terms of aligning efforts and resources. This level of shared dialogue also challenges IHEs to reconsider their engagement with, and relationship to, the community as they carry out their work on a regular basis (Pugach, Post, & Thurman, in press).

### **Next Steps, New Challenges**

To achieve collaborative assessment of teacher candidates during their initial preparation, it will be critical for the process of trust-building across institutions, alignment of efforts and resources, and active joint engagement to continue. Progress is incremental whether we work alone or together, but the possibility of achieving the priorities is much greater working together, as part of a partnership. In other words, it will be essential to sustain the dynamic process represented by the work of the MPA.

Several specific future directions naturally emerge from the progress to date. For example, the focus on formative assessment being implemented in the district’s classrooms could lead us to a common understanding of assessment frameworks as applied to teacher candidate performance. The focus on teacher leadership should enable us to begin dialogue about how cooperating teachers (who should be teacher leaders) are identified and selected, and whether all schools are good places in which to learn to teach. This might lead to a broader dialogue among IHEs regarding how to align the resources associated with field experience and student teaching to contribute more directly to improving the quality of teaching and learning. We are not advocating the PDS model specifically, but rather a view of learning to teach that is embedded in a system wide, rather than an individual school, view of reform. Such discussions also converge with current MPA deliberations on whether to implement differentiated

compensation for teachers. The decision to move to a model of differentiated compensation has not been made yet. But if such a system were to evolve in the future, where might those who are identified as leaders in preparing new teachers fall in a differentiated compensation plan, if at all?

Our joint work does not mean that we expect, or wish, all IHEs to do their work in the same manner. The goal is not to have all local teacher preparation programs look alike, but instead to honor a common framework and address common problems in a productive way. This certainly could lead to a common research agenda that would inform our institutions and the district, and may lead to adopting some common measures—all desirable goals. But we are not interested in, for example, developing common evaluation forms for student teaching across all local IHEs. Rather, our goal is that each institution will do the work of preparing teachers using the common frameworks that are being established—while still relying on its own unique institutional commitments, character, strengths and priorities.

## **References**

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