

Chapter 24

Project EXCEL: A Teacher Education Partnership for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

Annette Deborah Miles

University of the District of Columbia, USA

Ebony Terrell Shockley

University of Maryland – College Park, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the initial findings of Project EXCEL, a collaborative partnership that explores how institutions of higher education (IHEs) can better serve surrounding communities and schools seeking to enhance and diversify the teacher education population. The possibilities for teachers, teacher candidates, and partnerships in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and the surrounding metropolitan areas show the next steps for Project EXCEL. The findings serve as an opportunity for other IHEs to consider for partnerships and recruitment.

RATIONALE

National data show that there is a shortage of teachers in the United States (Bristol, 2015; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016), particularly in mathematics and science, English as a Second Language/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and special education (Sutchter et al., 2016). The Learning Policy Institute noted, “Forty-eight states plus the District of Columbia have identified shortages of teachers in special education and related services: Half of all schools and 90% of high-poverty schools are struggling to find qualified special education teachers” (Sutchter et al., 2016, p. 1). Beyond a teacher shortage in specific content areas and in the District of Columbia, in 2014, the percentage of inexperienced teach-

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ers in high-minority schools was 25.39% (Sutcher et al., 2016). Thus, there is a critical need to finding ways to encourage teachers to earn certification in these disciplines and to inspire teachers to teach in the communities in and near the District of Columbia.

These data from the Learning Policy Institute, are broken down by state, and also are applicable to those institutions of higher education (IHEs) that are located in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV), particularly the eight IHEs of American University, Catholic University, Galaudet University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, Howard University, Trinity University, and the University of the District of Columbia, that are within 25 miles of the District of Columbia as well as for some of the IHEs that are in the University System of Maryland, including Bowie State University and the University of Maryland College Park, and for schools in Virginia, which include George Mason University and Marymount University. According to Census Reporter (2017), the language groups spoken by residents of Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia include English (72.5%), Spanish (15.6%), Indo-European (5%), Asian/Islander (4.3%), and other (2.8%). Given the diversity among residents of the District of Columbia and surrounding areas, it is important to ensure multicultural communication and partnership building.

GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Project EXCEL (EXCEptional Learners) is a partnership between researchers and teacher educators at two institutions, the University of the District of Columbia and the University of Maryland College Park. These two schools, although in separate states, are only 10 miles apart. Although they may attract different students, based on their location, history, and programs, their surrounding communities can aid in populating both schools' teacher preparation programs, particularly in terms of a pipeline from and into diverse communities. The surrounding neighborhoods represent one of the most diverse areas in the DMV. The rectangular-shaped District of Columbia borders Maryland on the northeast and southeast and is across the Potomac River from Virginia on the northwest and southwest borders. In this region, there is a multitude of opportunities for IHEs to have an impact on schools, families, the community, organizations, and businesses in the surrounding area. Commuters who live or work in the DMV collaborate with schools in their work communities when their businesses have existing partnerships with the aforementioned IHEs, and universities in the DMV may be positioned to join existing partnerships with IHEs and begin new ones to align with some of the outreach and service-oriented missions of those businesses. Other IHEs in close proximity may want to consider engaging in such collaborative efforts.

Of the two public land-grant institutions in Project EXCEL, one is a historically black colleges and universities (HBCU), and the other is a predominantly white institution (PWI). According to the Association of Public Land-Grant Institutions (n.d.), land-grant institutions are designated by Congress or the state legislature to serve working-class students under the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994 (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). The goal of the Morrill Act of 1862 was to provide educational opportunities that reflected the current society's needs, and, as such, programs were developed in the areas of agricultural and technical education. The Morrill Act of 1890 came with funding and endowments for educational opportunities. Although land-grant institutions received these funds, those schools with race-based admissions were not eligible. The states that were eligible for the endowments included those with separate campuses for Black students. As a result, at that time, many of the existing HBCUs emerged, using the funds from the Morrill Acts.

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