

The Principal's Residency – Part Two

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In the Fall 2010 issue of *Fulfilling Promises* we explored The Principal's Residency and how it encouraged growth for the entire MCNC community, particularly Principals. This residency provided the structure for Principals to observe and experience the successes and challenges of several established Middle Colleges. Principals are expected to reflect on their experience using the MCNC design principals as their framework. The previous part of this article explored their reflections on Teaching and Learning, Student Assessment, and Student Support.

The Power of the Site

Locating students on a college campus motivates students to higher achievement, provides models of adult behavior for students, and allows students to see themselves as college completers. Greg Brown noted that “many high school students I spoke with said, they respond positively behaviorally and academically to being with the college students in class: They act the age of the people they are around. We all are committed to working together to jointly create the program of study. In addition to discourse on specific classes, this includes areas of scheduling, college services, the continuation of our collaboration committee, growth in the role of our college liaison, and joint grant-making opportunities.” Dallas Principal, Eric Markinson saw a “striking purposefulness to students’ efforts; too, there was a level of independence and student-centered culture at these two sites that their structures seemed designed to nurture”



Michelle Brantley wrote, “Visualization is an important aspect of reaching a goal. Fortunately for Middle College students, they more than visualize themselves as college students, they experience this daily. High school graduation is not the ultimate for Middle College students; it becomes the penultimate because their immediate “ultimate” of graduating from college is more within their reach.” Mike Sinclair, Principal at Brashier in Greenville, SC noted that “At Wagner, I was impressed with the joint course taught by both a high school and college instructor. It led me to search for staff that would qualify to be an adjunct instructor at the college as well as a great fit for our school”

Democratic School Governance

Purposefully designed structures provide for everyone's voice to be heard and respected in the decision making process. Issues of teaching and learning are at the center of a dialogue among the entire school community. Participants found a variety of evidence to support the design feature encouraging democratic school governance. Eric Markinson noted that "Principal leadership fosters shared decision making by such means as apportioning funds for teams to use for curriculum and activities, and counting on personnel teams to make quality teacher hires." One principal met with a student leadership group as they debriefed the latest school meeting. A wonderful part of his experience was to hear students process the strengths and weaknesses and then assess the level of achieving each goal.

In order for any democratic governance to be successful, there must be a way to address issue of wrong action, or not following the method appropriately. Good democratic governance doesn't mean the organization always does it correctly...none can. It means there is a commitment to this and when it doesn't get fulfilled there is a correction process that's effective.

Daphne Beasley "spent the first day in awe of *Peer Review*, a process shared with me by Bret Bretstein. This is a powerful empowerment piece for any faculty. The ability to formally share in the leadership process in staff determination is crucial to buy-in and provides a constructive experience where teachers unite in their efforts to strengthen instructional techniques, contributions to the environment, and shared vision. For a concept such as this to be successful, all must share the same belief system and vision."

Professional Development The staff participates in on-going, embedded professional development that focuses on student success. Regularly scheduled, sustained professional development enables adults to model learning for students and each other. Schools become communities of reflective practice and continuous learning. "Peer Review gives teachers the opportunity to share their craft with trusted colleagues in a way that encourages growth and academic inquiry," according to participant Michelle Brantley. "Teachers also explained how the peer review process enables the community to function as real learners because the teachers become critical friends to each other, which is often the most important professional development for teachers to experience. As a part of this, we look forward to our full participation in the peer review, peer reflection process." Greg Brown realizes that "the first year is about our own reflections and sharing of these with each other. Under the guidance of MCNC we embrace this process and look forward to how it will make us a better school."

Recommendations

NCREST at Teachers' College, Columbia University, is helping the Consortium assess the efficacy of the program by using student data and surveys from students, principals, and teachers. Their feedback has helped schools make decisions about instruction, student support and professional development. This assessment further informs the work of the Consortium with regard to the design and implementation of the residencies.

Over the years, the Consortium has learned to be less prescriptive and has attempted to individualize the experience. Schools and principals are at different levels of development. Everyone comes with his or her own unique questions and concerns. Principals may be facing a challenge that they urgently need addressed. To this end, the Consortium has built in more time to address individual concerns and has tried to tailor the experience to the needs of the visiting principal. Nevertheless, the Consortium maintains that this must be balanced with the need to provide an experience that focuses on the big issues and those that emphasize the Design Principles.

One possibility is to regionalize residencies. As a cluster of schools develop in other locales, develop residencies there. Locally run residencies may be cheaper and have the advantage of dealing with similar local/state issues. Another variation would be to continue to encourage residencies or inter-visitations for counselors and teachers. At this time, two established schools have each paired with a new school to host inter-visitations by their teachers.

Another suggestion was to expand the use of Polilogue, our on-line community. While on-line discussions do not replace a residency experience, they can provide immediate feedback and an on-going connection to a like-minded community. At this time, the counselors have held an on-line discussion about the challenges facing early college programs. Another variation would be to have new Early College principals attend a residency and receive coaching the year before their sites open. This experience of visiting existing schools will allow new principals to see elements of the Early College model that make it unique and will give them a clearer picture of what they are seeking to establish at their own sites even before the school opens.

Conclusions

Although there were suggestions and ideas, all principals found the residency to be of great value. Each one had a New York “ah ha” moment. One wrote, “What was most helpful for me was seeing the personnel committee in action at International and how the school governance structure has been established there and how teachers have taken on ownership in certain roles. I enjoyed, seeing it in action. It was so nice to be able to talk to people about the portfolio because I had an idea, but to see it in action was different.” As new principals join the consortium, it is important to provide them with an opportunity to place their school within the context of other Middle Colleges that are mastering various areas within the consortium’s design.

Justin Fuentes, Challenge Early College, Houston TX, learned about, “how to hire the right people and about the relationship with the K-12 district. One of the most beneficial aspects was getting validation from the other principals”. All principals believed that seeing practices that are unique to Early College high schools in action at the schools were invaluable to developing the implementation of the model at their own sites. One participant summed up the experience. “We have a lot to do, obviously, but I believe it’s clear we have support from the Middle College National Consortium and its schools. This time in New York gave me a great sense that what we embark on is not only possible but also of huge significance to the lives of many students.”

Daphne Beasley concluded, “This was a journey that enlightened my perspective of school administration and leadership. Early College is so unique in that it allows you the freedom of exploration, innovation, and the true meaning of collaboration. Early college has established a unique vision and mission that provides many opportunities that will ultimately guide students in the full utilization of their gifts and talents”. Eric Markinson summed up the ideas of many participants. “Part of my job is to channel these winds to my school community, so they too can feel the imperative that underlies this vital work. Your presence, support, and inspiration help move me to a place where I am so alert to the needs and the possibilities of our wonderful students and families.”