

Project TOP Teachers* LDE
Transition of Paraeducators to Teachers of Linguistically Diverse Education

Abstract

Project TOP Teachers* LDE is based on a longstanding successful partnership between The PAR²A Center, housed on the School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center (UCDHSC), Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD), Denver Public Schools, Adams County School District 14 and Adams 12 Five Star Schools. The project addresses the shortage of highly qualified English Language Acquisition Teachers in the targeted districts and is anchored in the research evidence that paraeducators are excellent candidates to fill teaching positions as they are highly motivated and familiar with challenging classroom environments. Because of this high degree of readiness and existing involvement in schools, they are more likely to enter and stay in teaching.

The project will provide an opportunity to 15 highly qualified paraeducators to complete their teacher licensure and become highly qualified teachers of Linguistically Diverse Education by the end of 2008. These paraeducators have been nominated by their school districts because of their outstanding abilities and promise of success as future teachers. The proposed project will meet the participants' needs for financial, academic and career supports through individualized advising and mentoring and help them achieve their goal of becoming highly qualified teachers.

Project TOP Teachers* LDE
Transition of Paraeducators to Teachers of Linguistically Diverse Education
Project Description

Project TOP Teachers LDE* proposes to provide financial, academic and career supports through individualized advising and mentoring to 15 highly qualified paraeducators from high need districts in order assist them in reaching their goal of becoming highly qualified teachers of Linguistically Diverse Education.

The project meets the following three eligibility requirements as stated in the CDHE's Title II Request for Proposal (RFP. **First**, the proposed project has established a partnership among five agencies, including The PAR²A (Paraprofessional Research and Resource) Center of the School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center (UCDHSC), Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD), Denver Public Schools, Adams County School District 14 and Adams 12 Five Star Schools. **Second**, the project will enable highly qualified paraprofessionals to obtain the education necessary to become certified and licensed teachers; **Third**, the teacher education curricula at the partner college, MSCD, is research based and focused on providing prospective teachers a thorough preparation in effective instructional practices that positively impact student academic achievement.

Need for the project. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Programs (2004) reported that 9% percent of students nationwide are Limited English Proficient (LEP) learners and are more heavily clustered in 10 states; Colorado, with its Limited English proficient (LEP) enrollment at 12%, is one of them. Over the past decade, the growth rate of this population in our state is the third highest in the country. The numbers and

percentages of LEP learners in the three partner districts, as reported by Colorado Department of Education (CDE, Fall 2006), are shown in the following table:

District	Total Pupil Population	English Language Learners (ELL)	Percentage of ELL
Denver Public Schools	72,561	22,952	31.6%
Adams County 14	6,838	3,393	49.8%
Adams Five Star Schools	37,341	5,558	14.8%

As a result of the rising numbers of LEP students and the increased accountability required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), there is an overwhelming shortage of teachers to teach English Language Learners. More recently, the literature on teacher supply and demand has shifted its focus from the shortage of new teachers to the retention of teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2003) noted that hiring unqualified and poorly prepared teachers who leave the profession quickly only exacerbates the teacher shortages. Eliminating the teacher shortage will require aggressive recruitment of talented individuals and concerted efforts towards their retention.

The proposed project draws upon the existing literature that documents the potential of paraeducators or paraprofessionals as the most potentially recruitable group of people to become effective teachers (Genzok, 1997; McGowan & Brandick, 1998; Villegas & Clewell, 1998). There are several reasons for preparing paraprofessionals to fill teaching positions. First, paraeducator positions appear to attract highly motivated individuals and because of their high degree of readiness and existing involvement in schools, they are highly likely to enter and stay in teaching (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2000) which is a potential solution to the increasing problem of teacher attrition. Second, they tend to live in the communities in which they work and are ethnically more similar to their students. They add needed diversity and community

connections to the teaching profession (Chopra, Sandoval, Aragon, Bernal, Berg & Carroll, 2004; Genzok, & Baca, 1998; Nittoli & Giloth, 1997; Rueda & DeNeve 1999; Smith, 2000). Third, their work experience is mostly in fields where there are teacher shortages such as education for the LEP students and special education (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). Fourth, they are rated more highly by principals than other first year teachers (Clewell & Villegas, 2001). Fifth, once they enter the teaching profession they are more willing to take positions in urban schools and more likely to remain in the profession for more than three years (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

The shift to retention mentioned in the preceding section creates a stronger argument for focusing on transition of paraprofessionals into teaching positions. The project also recognizes that placing highly qualified teachers with students is one of the most important actions schools can take to improve achievement levels for LEP students. Our partner, the Metropolitan State College of Denver ensures the quality of training for project participants through its rigorous research-based curriculum that is aligned with state certification requirements and English language proficiency standards.

Project Participants: The 15 project participants are paraeducators who are currently serving LEP students in partner high-need school districts and are currently enrolled in the teacher preparation program at the Metro State College of Denver. **Nine** of the participants are from Denver Public Schools, **one** from Adams County School District 14 and **five** from Adams 12 Five Star Schools. These participants were originally supported by a project funded from August 2001- July 2007 by the Office of English Language Acquisition of the U.S. Department of Education. These paraeducators are within one year of completing teacher licensure. Because they continued to work as paraeducators while attending college part-time, managed family

demands, and completed both elementary and linguistically different licensure requirements, their program length has exceeded the term of the grant funding. Considering the financial, work and family conditions of these candidates; we are concerned that in the absence of project services, they may not be able to complete their program. This would be a colossal loss of effort and resources that have already been expended. Through *Project Top Teachers*LDE*, we want to provide project services to the participants for one more year to achieve their goal of becoming highly qualified teachers for the targeted school district.

Project Objectives

Objective 1: Advise, Support and Monitor Program Participants

Partner responsibility: Project Director (PAR²A Center) and faculty advisors at the teacher education program and arts and sciences of Metropolitan State College Denver (MSCD).

Activities to be completed from October 2007 through December 2008:

1. Meet each participant once each semester to review progress toward licensure
2. Conduct observations of each program participant (once by the project director and once by the external evaluator) to ensure their application of skills on the job, and to enhance the support provided in districts
3. Monitor completion of PLACE/Praxis testing as necessary for teacher licensure
4. Assist program participants with the student teaching application process
5. Maintain ongoing contact with participants via email on a weekly basis
6. Monitor participant progress towards teacher licensure

Objective 2: Coordinate individual participant program plans

Partner responsibility: Project Director (PAR²A Center) and faculty advisors at the teacher education program of MSCD.

Activities to be completed between Fall 2007 and Fall 2008:

1. Maintain working relationships with key arts and sciences and education faculty
2. Plan and hold meetings of all college lead persons to coordinate the program
3. Ensure that participants meet with both advisors each semester.
4. Establish payment procedures for each college partner

Objective 3: Coordinate with the partner districts with regards to mentorship and induction of the project participants

Partner responsibility: Project Director (PAR²A Center) and the partner school districts

Activities:

1. Identify mentor teachers who exemplify quality teaching by December 1, 2007
2. Mentors to provide coaching to the project participants from January to December 2008; this investment provides successful induction for the project participants and increases the likelihood of those mentor teachers remaining in the district and serving as a resource for future novice teachers

Objective 4: Manage, Monitor and Evaluate Program

Partner Responsibility: Project Director (PAR²A Center), Project Evaluator

Activities to be carried out from October 2007 through December 2007:

1. Establish a reporting system that assures timely completion of all related activities
2. Monitor expenditure of funds relative to the completion of program activities
3. Write a formal progress report for CCHE within 60 days of completion of project year

Nature of Faculty Involvement

Two academic advisors who are faculty members at Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD) will work closely with the participants. One of the faculty members advises

them on general studies and teacher education requirements and the other faculty member in arts and sciences advises them on their major. We have established close working relationships with faculty members at MSCD. We communicate with them regularly by phone, email, and in partnership meetings to get program updates, monitor participant progress, and clarify grant requirements. (See letter of support from MSCD in Appendix B).

The Project Director, Ritu Chopra is the executive director of the PAR²A Center which is a part of the School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) of the University of Colorado/Denver. Chopra also holds research faculty position at the SEHD and currently teaches a graduate level course for the BUENO Center of the School of Education at the University of Colorado/Boulder. For the last 11 years she has successfully coordinated and directed professional/career development and research projects for paraprofessionals and teachers in special education and linguistically diverse education. Chopra was the project director of a math training project funded by CDHE in 2005 and is currently a project director of another CDHE funded training project, Denver Math Training (See Vita in appendix A).

Evaluation and Networking

The evaluation addresses all four objectives. We collect data every semester, and assure timely completion of all data collection, data entry, and data analysis activities. Dr. Estella Amanza de Schonewise, the external evaluator, will assure a fair and thorough examination of data. Her qualifications are summarized in Appendix A.

Evaluation Objective 1: Document progress toward objectives.

We will maintain a database with personal information on each participant including: progress reviews, observations, PLACE/Praxis testing, student teaching application, starting and completion dates. We will maintain and report program milestones on a database that we have

created and used for all our career ladder projects at the center. We will document our work with the MSCD through meeting agendas, participant contact information, and records of payment.

All data will be included in the final report on project outcomes compiled for CDHE.

Evaluation Objective 2: Determine teaching quality and project services.

In September 2008, participants will complete a participant survey evaluating teaching quality and project services. This survey will be conducted via email using Zoomerang which is an internet-based service that allows the researcher to design customized questionnaires and administer them online. Results are compiled and analyzed by the External Evaluator.

Evaluation Objective 3: Determine effectiveness of training.

The Project Director and the External Evaluator will conduct classroom observations to examine the quality of skills gained by teacher candidates. The field notes taken during observations will be analyzed by comparing the data to research-based effective practices.

Evaluation Objective 4: Evaluate the Effectiveness of Alleviating Personnel Shortages

After graduation, we will maintain contact with alumni and ELA Directors of the targeted school districts who will complete retention surveys to determine if the TOP Teacher*LDE participants a) took positions that the district previously had difficulty filling; b) plan to remain in the field; and c) increase the districts' percentage of highly qualified teachers.