CICEP | INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY 2016

IEP CATEGORY • TALENT

State Employees Credit Union Partnership East
According to Alisa Chapman, Vice President for Academic and University Programs at UNC General Administration, North Carolina will need 11,000 new teachers annually through 2020. The need is critical in eastern NC (based on the NC DPI Teacher Vacancy report and monthly meetings between ECU and the 43 school systems in the east). Combined, UNC-GA institutions produce approximately 3,500 teachers per year—7,500 short of predicted need. Contributing to the shortfall is a 27.6% decline in enrollment in teacher education programs since 2010 across UNC system institutions. Schools are hiring educators from out of state to fill classrooms. Yet, teachers who are trained outside of NC have lower classroom achievement scores than those prepared in NC.

The East Carolina University (ECU) College of Education (COE) continues to emphasize teacher recruitment and retention. That work is paying off – the program has experienced the second lowest decline in in the System. One strategy to address the teacher shortage in hard to staff rural counties in eastern North Carolina is SECU Partnership East (SECU-PE). SECU-PE provides access to high quality teacher education degrees for students several hours away from the university. The partnership engages 43 school systems, 20 community colleges, 1 Air Force Base, ECU and $2.28 million from the State Employees Credit Union Foundation.

The majority of SECU-PE students are working adults who need alternatives to the traditional fouryear college experience. Students attain a four-year degree from ECU by completing the first two years of the program at any of the partnering community colleges then taking distance-education (DE) courses at ECU. SECU-PE actively recruits teacher assistants and school system employees (bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others). Students graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education, middle grades education, or special education.

Impact on Individuals, Communities, and the State

SECU-PE was designed to create a professional teacher pipeline for classrooms in the eastern part of NC. It is an accessible distance education option that allows students “to overcome the tyranny of distance” – a goal often noted by Provost Ron Mitchelson when discussing ECU DE offerings. Integrated practicum and internship field experiences with trained clinical teachers take place close to the student’s home. Students complete a rigorous program that incorporates the Pirate Continuum of Developing Expertise to ensure that they are well-versed in research based strategies that positively impact student achievement. These students are more likely to return to their home communities ready to teach after graduation.

Through 2015 more than 40% of SECU-PE students and public school employees. The success stories of these students demonstrate the power of the “grow our own” model. For example, Kathy Smith began as a bus driver and teacher assistant in the Pamlico County Schools, obtained her degree through SECU-PE, and now teaches in that county. Angela Battle served as a custodian and...
a teacher assistant for Wilson County Schools before graduating from SECU-PE and being hired as a teacher at Elm City Elementary in Wilson County. In Craven County, Jennifer Taylor-Sabdo, a teacher assistant, knew she wanted to be a teacher. Her husband, Bob Sabdo, a military contractor and former marine sergeant, was active within the community coaching youth baseball and football. Both enrolled and graduated from SECU-PE and serve as educators within Craven County Schools.

Achieving the dream of becoming a teacher is possible because enrolled students are able to continue working to support their families while obtaining their degree in a supportive environment. Teacher assistants graduating from the program have substantially boosted their income by two to three times.

Research comparing SECU-PE student performance to the performance of on-campus students on a nationally recognized assessment of educator competency indicate that SECU-PE students perform slightly better (85% vs 82%) than on-campus students in several areas of the assessment. Alana Zambone, Associate Dean, ECU COE, noted “…when you contextualize it the fact that these students are performing better at all is amazing given their other commitments as bus drivers or teacher assistants, being adult learners, having families, and often working other part-time jobs.”

The partnership’s “virtual connection” has provided graduates who are teaching in public schools as from Cherokee County in the west and Carteret County in the east. The 711 graduates of the partnership are teaching in 65 different public school systems across North Carolina. So far 91% of program graduates are teaching in eastern North Carolina – a clear demonstration of the ECU mission to serve its region. Graduates are part of a learning network that relies on technology to keep alumni and students connected to the COE.

University Role

The COE strives to insure that SECU-PE graduates are of the highest quality. SECU-PE is comprised of 4 consortia housed at 4 community colleges: Coastal, North Central, South Central, and Virtual. A university employee is housed at each one of the consortiums. The role of these individuals is to recruit prospective students, facilitate successful transition to ECU, and advise current students within the model. The COE funds the community college based university employee and the operational budgets for each hub site. The College received national recognition for the development, refinement, and research of the Pirate Continuum of Developing Expertise innovations, the first in the state and one of few teacher education programs nationally to pursue the Transformative Initiative accreditation pathway.
Barriers and Challenges

The seamless transition from community college to university via a distance education setting required collaboration with academic departments and student support services. Negotiation with school system and community college partners was critical to gaining access to potential students and for providing those students support as they work through their coursework at the community college and through distance education at ECU. Marketing the opportunity to school system employees and community college students had to happen so that students throughout the region could learn about ECU-PE. These barriers were overcome with intentional efforts at building relationships with our partners so that they could help us refer students to our program, as well as support them while enrolled.