

# Wyoming School-University Partnership

*Implementing statewide, collaborative, and simultaneous improvement of teacher education and the renewal of schools.*

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## **Benefits of Membership in the Wyoming School-University Partnership**

To develop this document, a task force was formed, which included the following individuals:

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Executive Summary: This document, developed by a task force, provides information on the mission, vision, and history of the Wyoming School-University Partnership and outlines six benefits of membership in the Partnership, including opportunities for conversation and collaboration; transition support; student teaching placements; professional development; equity work; and advocacy. The document ends with suggestions for obtaining additional information about the Partnership.

The task force met in October, 2020, to discuss the benefits that have been provided in the past through membership in the Wyoming School-University Partnership, as well as those that have the potential to emerge in the future. This document represents a summation of those ideas. It is the hope of the task force members that this document will be useful in clarifying what benefits membership in the WSUP can provide for current and potential member institutions, and also provoke ideas for future projects.

### **Section I: What is the Wyoming School-University Partnership?**

Section I provides a short overview of the Wyoming School-University Partnership, including its

- History and connection with NNER;
- Membership; and
- Mission and vision.

The [Wyoming School-University Partnership](#) (WSUP) founded in 1986, is one of the original settings of the [National Network for Educational Renewal](#) (NNER). Guided by NNER's foundational beliefs, the WSUP promotes close cooperation among its member organizations. The WSUP is made up of organizations engaged in education in the state of Wyoming, including school districts, individual community colleges and the Wyoming Community College Commission, UW's College of Education, UW's College of Arts & Sciences, the Wyoming Department of Education, the Wyoming Professional Teaching Standards Board, the Wyoming Education Association, and the Wyoming Association of School Personnel Administrators. These organizations, and the individuals within them, collaborate to achieve educational goals that cannot be achieved alone. The vision of the WSUP is continuous and collaborative engagement in a process of ongoing renewal among Wyoming educational partners. Member organizations work together to ensure that students at all levels reach their full learning potential and that educators are prepared to provide high quality education.

### **Section II: What are the benefits of institutional membership in the WSUP?**

Section II addresses 6 benefits of membership in the WSUP, including opportunities for

- Conversation and collaboration;

- Transition support;
- Student teaching placements;
- Professional development;
- Equity work; and
- Advocacy.

*Benefit 1: The WSUP provides an inclusive setting for conversation and collaboration among educational institutions and organizations, as well as the individuals who belong to them.*

One of the key benefits for individuals representing institutional members, and for the institutional members as a whole, are the multiple opportunities provided by the WSUP to gather together on a regular basis to discuss issues related to education, and to seek solutions to educational problems for Wyoming. This is a long-standing tradition of the WSUP, and one that will continue into the future. Quarterly WSUP Governing Board meetings represent the only time when all of the educational entities in Wyoming are present at one table, from K-20. Thus, the WSUP provides an opportunity for conversations among entities that are influencing decisions at different levels for education in Wyoming.

The Governing Board meetings provide opportunities for all member organizations to find out about ongoing projects and professional development that may be occurring within any part of the membership. For example, when the University of Wyoming debuted the [Malcolm Wallop K12 Curriculum Project Social Studies course](#), WSUP members received a briefing about this project.

WSUP Governing Board meetings also regularly include a grounding discussion, which is focused on a short common reading designed to provide entry into a particular educational issue or problem. Discussion of the reading allows WSUP Governing Board members to examine those issues from a variety of perspectives, including the perspectives of participants from K12, community college, university, and educational agencies or organizations. One example of the power of these collaborative discussions is the unfolding of the need for more special education teachers in Wyoming and the difficulties school districts were experiencing in hiring special education teachers. After this discussion, UW’s College of Education developed a new BA program in Elementary and Special Education, to assist in meeting this need. Similarly, the WSUP provided annual opportunities for discipline-specific collaboration related to issues of transition from high school to post-secondary education; this work also emerged from a discussion at a WSUP Governing Board meeting.

*Benefit 2: The WSUP supports difficult transitions from high school to college, and from community colleges to universities.*

Under the direction of WSUP Director Kleinsasser, the WSUP held transition meetings by subject area for K12, community college, and university teachers for many years. The results of this work include important relationship-building across institutions, as well as support documents for students and teachers on the differences between high school and post-secondary instruction. Building on this past transition work, the WSUP is poised to provide support for in-service and preservice teacher development, in K12, community college, and university settings, to prepare instructors at all levels for the important task of understanding difficult student transitions and meeting students’ needs in those transitions.

For example, prompted by the disruptions of the pandemic, UW’s Dean of Students surveyed Wyoming high school graduates who were entering UW for their freshman year in Fall of 2020, to determine what they saw as gaps in their readiness for college and to make referrals for students to appropriate resources based on those gaps. As we move into the future, transition could be a focus for members of the WSUP, potentially examining both problems students experience as they transition from high school into community colleges and from community colleges to UW. If we are knowledgeable about these problems, educators at all levels can be prepared to support students.

In an effort to support the transition of high school students into educator preparation, the Trustees Education Initiative and the College of Education has been engaged with Wyoming high schools and community colleges to implement the [Teacher Cadet curriculum](#). Designed for high school students to get concurrent credit and to engage with important ideas

about education as a career, there are currently eight high schools and two community colleges in the Teacher Cadet pilot. In the future, the pilot will be expanded to include more Wyoming high schools and community colleges. In these courses, high school students get exposure to teaching as a career while obtaining college credit and advancing on the Perkins program of study. Some future plans might include focusing our Teacher Cadet work on agriculture education and career/technical education, with the idea of improving the flow of students into those teacher education programs.

*Benefit 3: Placement and supervision of College of Education student teachers is tied to membership in the WSUP.*

In 2017, the members of the WSUP Governing Board agreed that only Wyoming school districts that are members of the WSUP will be eligible to be chosen by College of Education preservice teachers as a placement site for student teaching. Annual membership by a school district in the WSUP qualifies a district to be included on the placement preference list for student teaching applications for the current fiscal year (assuming membership is paid by September). By paying membership dues for one fiscal year, the district agrees to host student teachers during the semesters appropriate for any student teaching applications made during that year. Approval for individual student teachers to be placed in a particular district will always be a decision made by the district.

The collaborative nature of placement and supervision of College of Education student teachers is designed to provide benefits to not only the preservice teachers, but also to mentor teachers, K12 students, and the schools and communities in which this mentoring happens. By joining the WSUP, school districts commit to providing a school community that is striving towards awareness of the role of public schools in a democracy, providing a community of caring, operating with a relational approach to student teaching, providing a standard of excellence, and abiding by current student teaching policies. All members of the WSUP are engaged in the process, including the selection of mentor teachers, screening of potential preservice teachers, professional development for mentor teachers, support for student and mentor teachers, review of data and ongoing improvement, and layers of support offered by the University of Wyoming.

More information about the benefits of hosting student teachers, as well as policies and practices related to the student teaching experience, can be found on the WSUP website at this link: <http://www.uwyo.edu/wsup/files/docs/wsup-benefits-policy-and-practices-for-student-teaching-support.pdf>

In the future, the WSUP would like to further engage our community college members in applied, clinical experiences in schools, such as required practicum and student teaching. It is notable that all of the Wyoming community colleges have two-year education programs, at a minimum. Education students in all of these programs are required to complete observation hours, which requires close relationships between school districts and community colleges. The WSUP could provide support for the relationship between community college education faculty and school districts, with positive outcomes for all involved. In addition, the WSUP might engage community college faculty and administrators with the process of determining supervision responsibilities and carrying out those responsibilities for student teaching and practicum experiences.

*Benefit 4: The WSUP provides a central hub for professional development at all levels, by all member institutions.*

The WSUP is poised to solidify and expand its ability to serve as a centralized hub for professional development needs for all members of the Partnership. This service would involve developing a clear understanding of professional development opportunities and needs within each of the member institutions, and attempting to match existing expertise with those needs. Attention would also need to be paid to the preferred modality of the provision of professional development. Through the centralized nature of the Partnership, connections across member institutions would potentially allow for ongoing support at a relatively low cost.

For example, UW's [Wallop K12 Curriculum Project](#) provides content area and pedagogical expertise for social studies instruction, created by UW and Wyoming community college faculty members, that is useful in secondary and post-secondary educational settings. Similarly, the College of Education's Literacy Research Center and Clinic is currently developing online modules to support school principals who are seeking improvement in literacy instruction.

Moving forward, the WSUP can assist in matching expressed needs for instructor professional development with existing

expertise, wherever it is located across the member institutions of the Partnership. Tying opportunities for professional development into the capacity of the member institutions of the WSUP will provide the benefit of close alignment with institutional members' specific needs, and flexibility that would provide a finer attunement to contextual aspects. The nature of the Partnership has potential to ensure that high-quality professional development can be offered at low cost to member institutions. Topics for potential professional development needed included the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process, effective leadership, and the development of strong systems of support across K12 and postsecondary institutions. In addition, the WSUP can be engaged in meeting needs for ongoing professional development in Wyoming's post-secondary institutions by supporting connections across centers for teaching and learning that reside in those individual institutions.

*Benefit 5: The WSUP supports its members in improving efforts toward educational equity.*

One of the hallmarks of the [National Network for Educational Renewal \(NNER\)](#), which is the founding organization for the WSUP, is a focus on equity, as stated in the NNER Foundational Beliefs:

By embracing our 1) *shared responsibility* to schools, 2) working toward *equal access* to high quality learning for all students, and 3) teaching from a place that *loves and challenges* students, we find what inspires us most— 4) **educating and preparing students to fully engage** as considerate and critical citizens who know their value and capacity to make a profound impact in this world.

With this focus on equity and educating students to participate in a democracy, the WSUP is actively supporting all institutional members to engage in work toward educational equity.

For example, the WSUP has been instrumental in supporting the work of Fremont County School District #6 with its [Voices from the Field conference and the capstone project](#). This critical project is designed to provide students with critical insight into potential futures for themselves through internships, research, and focused engagement. In the coming years the hope is that this can be something that all of our partners participate in by engaging high school students, guidance counselors, and principals with community college and UW faculty, business and industry representatives, and more.

Future projects might include statewide support for K12 and post-secondary institutions updating policy and practice related to Title 9, issues with equity around online teaching and food insecurity, flexibility in the face of budget reductions, and mentoring for K12 administrators. Because of its broad membership and focus on equity, the WSUP has potential to positively impact education in Wyoming on these and other issues.

*Benefit 6: The WSUP provides an opportunity to present a united front for advocacy and policy issues related to education.*

The education-focused institutional and organizational membership of the WSUP means that the Partnership will be impacted, in some way, by changes in educational policies and funding decisions. As a result, the WSUP has the potential to address those policies collectively. Instead of facing potential changes as individual institutions or segments of the educational landscape, WSUP members can advocate collectively for each other.

Although this hasn't been the practice of the WSUP in the past, it makes sense that the organization would collectively advocate for quality and coherency, providing legislators a clear vision of a P-20 system that is meshed together and can be funded in a coherent way.

### **Section III: How can I get more information about the WSUP?**

Information about the Wyoming School-University Partnership can be found at our website, <http://www.uwyo.edu/wsup/> or by contacting the Director of the Partnership, Dr. Leslie Rush, by email: [lrush@uwyo.edu](mailto:lrush@uwyo.edu). The Partnership phone

number is 307.766.3274.