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## **Excellence in Teacher Preparation: Partners for Success**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines an innovative pre-service teacher-training program implemented at the University of South Carolina Spartanburg with a Greenville County Public School. The paper includes four components: 1) the collaboration among the public school, community support programs and the university personnel; 2) collaboration among the university professors; 3) student reports of the experiential impact after one semester; and 4) the impact of the program on students-as-teachers after graduation.

Second semester junior early childhood education majors register for a block of courses that place them at Dunbar Child Development and Family Resource Center in Greer, South Carolina. The university students' classroom is just one of many at the center that also includes seven public school 4-year-old "at risk" kindergarten classrooms, three Head Start classrooms, preschool special education classrooms, a speech and hearing clinic, infant and toddler care, GED preparation, parent education, English literacy learners and community service offices for parent educators, health and human service workers and police.

Each semester, two to four professors from the University of South Carolina Spartanburg collaborate with school administrators, teachers, parent visitors and community agencies to provide an integrated learning experience. The co-requisite courses in the block include: curriculum, assessment and classroom management, growth and development, and language development. Also included is a clinical course with four contact hours that affords students the opportunity to work directly with children and families. University professors and classroom teachers work together to provide practical experiences for students that support the theoretical base presented in class. The university professors meet often to plan, integrate and make connections among the courses and to share student observations and assessments. The experience provides a realistic foundation for the diversity of programs serving children and families in early childhood education. It also affords students a holistic overview of the complex role of "teacher".

Students start professional portfolios for performance-based assessment and keep journals to reflect on their experiences during the semester. At the conclusion of the semester students share insight on how the semester impacted their professional development. Written reflections and oral interviews have been conducted with the students at the conclusion of their degree programs to once again share insight on how the semester molded and contributed to their professional persona.