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Linda Holdman, Director of Field Placement
George Whalen, Principal Lake Aggasiz School
Faculty, Lake Aggasiz School

From: Barbara Combs, Associate Dean for Teacher Education

Re: Conversation with Lake Agassiz Faculty and Principal, George Whalen

On Friday, February 2, 2007, I spoke with faculty at Lake Agassiz Elementary School. For the first 10 minutes, I presented a short PowerPoint show detailing the three phases of field experiences our Teacher Candidates experience. Drawing from our handbook, I explained what was expected of Candidates and what they needed at each phase. The purpose in doing this was to set the stage for a conversation about concerns and needs related to our Teacher Candidates who spend time in Lake Agassiz classrooms. That conversation, a pleasant exchange, lasted 20 minutes. I have highlighted the results below in the form of future desired actions:

1. Teacher Candidates, whether Phase I, II, or III need to be comfortable with and ready to interact with children from day one. Teachers do not want Candidates to hover in the back of the room, but rather to introduce themselves to children and engage them in conversation (as appropriate to classroom activities going on at the time).
2. Teacher Candidates in Phase I field experiences, those completed during introductory courses, may benefit from a few specific assignments. For example, if they are to observe the teacher's lessons, might they have a list of questions with them appropriate to ask in post observation conference? There is a sense of discomfort when candidates arrive and observe but do not seem to know how to engage the students or teacher in conversations around instruction and the teaching profession. How might we help our candidates be better conversationalists and active participants in the classroom?
3. Teacher Candidates in all phases, but especially at Phases I and II, appear to need some reminders about basic issues of politeness and professionalism
 - a. It is preferred that all candidates go through an instructor and then the Director of Field Placement rather than contact a teacher or the principal directly (through e-mail, by phone, or in person) when seeking a 30 or 60 hour placement. I recognize that it is our policy to do so at UND, but students may need to be reminded that they may not seek out their own placements.

- b. When candidates arrive, it is important for them to introduce themselves (who they are, what brings them to the school) from the very beginning. More specifically, rather than walk into a classroom unannounced (here teachers mentioned music, art, and PE), candidates should introduce themselves and ask when might be a good time to visit. Just dropping in is discouraged. Principal Whalen further notes, "I would encourage the students to present themselves to all specialists and participate in the class like indicated in question #1.
 - c. The dress code of the school must be adhered to. Students are still arriving with nose and eyebrow rings and inappropriate clothing. I assured faculty that Linda Holdman and instructors are very clear to Candidates about what is and is not appropriate. In addition, Candidates sign a Statement of Understanding that outlines acceptable and non-acceptable dress. In light of lingering problems, I noted that the classroom teacher has the right to tell a Candidate directly that a nose ring or eyebrow ring must be removed and or particular clothing may not be worn if her or she wishes to complete the field experience in that classroom. I have further encouraged them to contact the Office of Field Placement or me when they have concerns about a Candidate's dress.
4. No relative of a child who attends Lake Agassiz should complete a field experience in that school. It may be possible, on rare occasions, to place a Candidate in the school if they do have a relative attending, but only in a classroom where there will be no interaction with that relative.
 5. Any lesson plan must be viewed by the classroom teacher before it gets taught. In addition, some teachers prefer that students prepare and teach their own lessons (with teacher approval as noted) rather than merely copy what the teacher has just done. I let faculty know that many Phase I Candidates may never have written or taught a lesson plan before and will need more support than Candidates further along in the program.
 6. Attention to the Grand Forks Schools calendar will help to ensure better field experiences for candidates. It was agreed that state and national testing days may not be ideal times for observation and teaching in the field. Most schools also have a building calendar of activities that would be available to students early that might help with problem dates.

In general teachers at Lake Agassiz are supportive of our program and our candidates and look forward to our continued collaboration. There were questions related to the meaning of solo teaching as relates to the student teaching assignment. After consulting with Linda Holdman, Director of Field Placement clarification of this experience is offered below in a question and answer format:

1. How does UND Teacher Education define "going solo" in the student teaching semester?
"Full time teaching" is explained the student teaching handbook (pg 72) as "Student teachers in a single sixteen-week placement should teach full time for a minimum of ten days (5 days in each of the 8 week K-12 Art, Music, and PEXS student teaching

experiences) but are encouraged to teach as many weeks as possible. The scheduling of these days should provide the student teacher with the chance to assume the teacher role on several consecutive days as well as providing time for reflection."

2. Is the teacher to be out of the room completely during this time?

We encourage cooperating teachers to visit the classroom intermittently during the beginning of the student teacher's solo teaching--to monitor progress--and then to lessen their classroom visits once they feel the student teacher is progressing on their own successfully. This is the student teacher's only opportunity to experience the full role of "teacher" and the need to have full opportunity to do so.

3. Is collaboration possible if the student teacher takes the lead in planning and instruction and the classroom teacher offers support?

This is always a possibility, but not a recommendation...because as long as the cooperating teacher is present in the room, the pupils know that the student teacher is not their "real" teacher. Only as the student teacher fills the complete role of teacher does he/she experience the transition from student teacher "with a backup in the room any time I need it"--to "teaching on my own."

4. When the cooperating teacher is unsure of a candidate's abilities to teach a particular content area isn't it realistic that the teacher would not step out of the room during that instructional time?

Again, in the beginning of the student teacher's teaching responsibilities, the cooperating teacher should monitor closely and remain in the classroom as long as there are concerns regarding the candidate's ability to teach a particular content...and the teacher/supervisor should contact the Field Placement Office if there are serious concerns. The bottom line is that the candidate must be able to demonstrate that ability by the end of the semester to teach everything their content or grade level requires.

cc: Dan Rice, Dean of the College of Education & Human Development