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Chief State School Officers Council

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State Plan Framework for a Statewide Service Learning Peer Consultant Network

by
Council of Chief State School Officers
for

Kellogg Peer Consultant Initiative

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State Plan Framework for a Statewide Service Learning Peer Consultant Network

Service learning is a form of experiential education that engages students in work solving real-life problems and meeting needs in the school or greater community as part of the academic curriculum. Service-learning as pedagogy, philosophy, and process brings together important elements necessary for educational and social reform.

As pedagogy, service learning is an instructional strategy that involves youth in their own learning -- students as workers responsible for their own learning and teachers as coaches and facilitators of the learning. Service learning is student learning through inquiry, analysis, and demonstration. As a philosophy, service learning changes the paradigm of how we view youth -- from the receivers of services to human resources helping to improve communities and the lives of others and within the community -- every student is capable of achieving high standards. As a process, service learning contextualizing the learning and facilitates community-wide partnerships for lifelong learning and helps to encourage the creation of a caring community of learners that collaborates to improve the school and community - effective teaching and learning strategies and community involvement in the educational process.

The challenges to changing and improving education are many. One ongoing challenge is that of helping those individuals directly responsible for change - teachers, school administrators and communities - in their work. Many states are using peer consultant or coaches to assist in carrying out educational reform initiatives at the local level. In some cases, these peer consultants work with entire school districts, in other cases they are assigned to work with individual schools or groups of teachers in school districts, usually within core content areas such as math or science. Other peer consultant models focus on specific education reform initiatives in states such as the National Science Foundation's State Systemic Initiative or the Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative. This approach to technical assistance and training has proven to be effective and an efficient use of state and local financial and human resources. Consistent with this growing practice in states is the creation of a service learning peer consultant network.

The purpose of the peer consultant network is to assist teachers, parents and administrators in understanding service learning as a teaching and learning strategy and to infuse service learning into existing educational reform initiatives. This state plan framework is intended to assist states and Cooperative Partners in developing coordinated integrated strategies to build a state infrastructure to support the network.

Recommendations for a State Plan

Coordination of the State Plan

The peer consultants' work should be coordinated, and if possible integrated, into the state's educational reform activities. For the past decade states have been engaged in various education reform efforts. However, while many individual schools have made progress through these efforts, the system as a whole has not improved. Most of the earlier reform measures were narrow in focus and merely bolstered the existing system and process. Current reforms call for more coherent or comprehensive approaches to all aspects of improving schools - from governance structures to content and pedagogy. The operating principle for today's reforms is to work systemically within schools, districts and states. Within this context of educational reform, the service learning process can be the organizing catalyst for reform in a school and school district.

Most states are engaged in several ongoing initiatives such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Middle Grade State School Policy Initiative based on the Carnegie Turning Points recommendations, the Comer Schools, Accelerated Schools, etc. Beyond these national initiatives, states are also developing new curriculum frameworks, new student assessments, science and math education, multicultural education, arts, citizenship education, and programs to assist students in making a smooth transition from school to employment. The SEA/Partner plan should include strategies for assisting the service learning peer consultants in connecting to specific state, school district, and school reforms. Service learning coordinators should work to link this project with state level reforms.

School and Districtwide Models

The SEA/Partner plan should focus on the development and support of school and districtwide models. The peer consultant network should focus on moving service learning from the isolated classroom or course experiences to systemic infusion throughout a whole school or district. States and Partners should assist peer consultants in develop school and/or districtwide models in specific areas such as Chapter 1, Safe and Drug Free Schools, school-to-work transition, multicultural education, etc .

Linkages With Other State Plans

Most states are presently developing plans for GOALS 2000, School-to-Work Opportunities and school-based Learn and Serve America. The SEA/Partner plan should include strategies for integrating and connecting the peer consultant into these plans. Each of these initiatives has a local planning process. At the local level peer consultants should be aware the these plans and if possible become a part of the planning process. States and Partners should work in toward coordinating with the planning for these initiatives at the state level.

Besides connecting to state plans for national initiatives, it very important to make connections to state funded initiatives for educational and social reform. SEAs and Partners should work together on identifying related state initiatives (programs) that provide funds to either school, communities, universities, private non-profit organizations or partnerships of two or more of these entities.

Changes in Federal Initiatives

In September 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) which reauthorizes most of the programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. IASA provides approximately \$12 billion in aid to states and localities for in the improvement of educational opportunities for all students. Many changes have been made in the ESEA programs through this new initiative. Among those changes is the inclusion of the term "service learning" or related types of activities in several programs and titles of the new bill. SEA/Partner plans should include strategies for supporting the peer consultant network through those programs.

Linkages to Other Networks

Service learning can help schools and communities achieve the goals of many educational and social programs. The SEA/Partner plan should include outreach strategies to other youth development networks that have similar goals and objectives. For example, recent research in the field of drug and alcohol abuse prevention clearly links youth participation in community service as a deterrent to high risk behavior.

Peer Consultants as Advocates

The SEA/Partner plan should include a plan for promoting the work of the peer consultants. An effective way of promoting the consultants work is to document compelling service learning stories and examples that demonstrate tangible student outcomes. These examples or models can be used in newsletters or other publications as a means of developing public support for service learning and the network. These models are especially effective when dealing with state and national legislators as well.

Types of Peer Consultants

SEAs and Partners should consider developing categories or groupings of peer consultants that are expert in specific issues, content areas or education reforms. The plan should include strategies for developing a cadre of school and district administrator peer consultants.

Communication Plans

Effective marketing of the peer consultant network should part of the general SEA/Partner plan. A joint announcement with goals, objectives and specific activities should be distributed to all schools

districts and schools as soon as peer consultants are identified. This will help to prevent any possible conflicting priorities with schools and school districts and help to identify other skilled peer consultants. Coordination of the peer consultants with the work of the State Commission's work may also be beneficial.

Key Elements

1. Goals Statement

Consider: What are goals of creating and sustaining a statewide peer consultant network? Within a context of changing and improving education for all students in your state, what are the expected academic outcomes for students? How are these outcomes connected to your states' larger education reform goals? What are other student, teacher, school and community outcomes? Does the plan have measurable goals?

2. Criteria for Selecting Peer Consultants

Consider: What are the criteria for selecting peer consultants? What are the technical assistance needs in your state? Who can best address those needs? Have peer consultants already been identified for your state? If yes, what are their qualifications? Examine the criteria for other peer consultants/coaches in your state. Are the criteria for the service learning peer consultants consistent with those for other consultants or coaches in your state?

3. Assurance for Standards of Quality and Accountability

Consider: Will there be standards for the quality of work performed by peer consultants? Will teachers, schools, and/or school districts receiving assistance from the peer consultants be asked to assess or evaluate their work? Who will oversee (monitor) the peer consultants work?

4. Identifying Resources

Consider: What are the most likely funding sources today to support the peer consultant network? What other state programs can be accesses for possible funding? (Service learning is a "strategy" or "process" that can help schools and communities achieve a multiple goals.) Is it more realistic to plan for support for the peer consultants to come from schools and/or school districts rather than from the state? (In cases schools and districts have access to more discretionary funds that states do.)

5. Costs of Sustaining a Network

Consider: What are the expected costs for supporting peer consultants in your state? What do those costs entail?

6. Youth Peer Consultants

Consider: How will the youth consultants' work be monitored? How will the youth and adult peer consultants' work be coordinated? Will there be youth/adult teams in schools or school districts? Who will be responsible for training and development for youth consultant? Will youth peer consultant network be integrated into existing state youth service learning networks?

7. Timeline

Consider: Will all 20 peer consultants begin simultaneously?

8. Concentration of Resources

Consider: In which schools, districts and communities would peer consultants make the most impact? (The impacts should be based on the goals of the plan.) How many schools and districts do you plan to serve in Year I, Year II, YEAR III?

9. Professional Development

Consider: Will there be ongoing professional development for the peer consultants? Who will conduct these activities? Will they be optional or required of peer consultants?

10. Technical Assistance for School Administrators

Consider: Sustaining a network of peer consultants to work with schools will require the support of local administrators. What provisions does the plan include for training or technical assistance service targeted at school administrators?

11. Recruitment

Consider: How will new peer consultants be recruited? Who will be responsible for recruitment? Will there be ongoing recruitment to address possible attrition?

12. Support for Peer Consultants

Consider: What type of support, i.e., meetings, communications, materials, etc. will be provided to the peer consultants? Who will be responsible for those activities? How will peer consultants be encouraged to support each others work?

13. SEA roles in Sustaining a Peer Consultant Network:

Consider: What other type of assistance and support will the SEA provide?