

The MidValley Consortium for Teacher Education: Its History and Structure

The clinical faculty program of the MidValley Consortium began as a pilot project of James Madison University through the leadership of Dr. Henry C. Bowers. In the spring of 1988, twenty-one cooperating teachers from the Augusta County, Harrisonburg City, and Rockingham County Schools participated in the original training sessions. From this beginning effort to train Clinical Faculty has evolved a program with the stated goal of improving the quality of field experiences for students preparing to become teachers.

During 1988-89, the first full year of operation, an additional 35 teachers participated in the training. In addition, the Consortium expanded its membership to include six school divisions and four teacher education institutions in the Shenandoah Valley. The local school divisions are: Augusta, Rockingham, and Shenandoah Counties; and Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Waynesboro City Schools. Bridgewater College, Eastern Mennonite University, James Madison University, and Mary Baldwin College are the participating teacher education institutions. The membership remained the same until 2005, when Page County joined the Consortium.

A Consortium Steering Committee of college/university faculty and administrators and public school classroom teachers makes policy decisions. An *ad hoc* committee of school division central office administrators meets annually to advise the Steering Committee.

The MidValley Consortium for Teacher Education has experienced a very successful twenty-three year partnership. During the first nine years, the Consortium trained and provided "refresher workshops" for 418 Clinical Faculty who supervise area student teachers.

Then, in 1997-98, the Consortium received one of two clinical faculty grants awarded by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). The funded project required Clinical Faculty to recommit to the program for a three-year term of appointment, participate in training to use a new performance assessment process for supervising and evaluating student teachers, accept one student teacher per year, and attend two of the annual refresher workshops during their term of appointment. This project resulted in a cadre of 327 "recommitted" Clinical Faculty trained in a performance assessment process that incorporates research and professional literature related to the Virginia Standards of Learning, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Classroom Performance Assessments (Pathwise).

Through the 1997-98 SCHEV grant the Consortium also prepared a cadre of 22 highly qualified Clinical Faculty Trainers, who teamed with the Consortium Steering Committee to train the other Clinical Faculty in the new performance assessment process. The

Clinical Faculty Trainers developed strong leadership skills and the ability to serve as effective mentors for their Clinical Faculty colleagues.

The Consortium continues to train approximately 100 Clinical Faculty each year, and we now have over 700 active trained teachers. The skills taught in Clinical Faculty training are essentially the same skills as those needed to mentor beginning teachers. Many of our Clinical Faculty do indeed serve as mentors to beginning teachers in their own school divisions.