

Engagement for Success:

Developing a University-RESA Partnership Using GLISI's Rising Stars Model

Overview

Innovation/Solution/Practice at a Glance

GLISI's Rising Stars Model, a performance-based school leadership preparation and/or induction program, was used as a basis for the development of a university/Regional Education Service Agency (RESA)/district partnership to prepare aspiring and developing leaders for eight school districts in Southeast Georgia. The theory of change was that the development and implementation of a successful university/district partnership would provide a vehicle to design and deliver leadership preparation that is focused on the needs of school districts as well as leadership candidates. This approach would provide for more contextually relevant content connected to the real work of school leaders, stronger field experiences, and more supportive learning conditions and structures for new and developing leaders.

Impact at a Glance

Okefenokee RESA and Valdosta State University (VSU) created a collaborative partnership to provide a pilot Ed.S. program for incumbent leaders in the Okefenokee region of Georgia. This collaborative partnership incorporated the new Georgia leadership certification requirements and met the leadership development needs of the eight participating school districts. The partnership serves as a model for the development of university-district partnerships across the State of Georgia and will offer lessons learned to assist the development of successful university/district partnerships.

The Impact Story

Background/Context

GLISI's Rising Stars Collaborative™ program began as a pilot preparatory program for teachers who aspired to become leaders in their schools. This project was designed to reinvent the way Georgia's universities and school districts select and develop new leaders through the establishment of a "Collaborative" – interested school districts who were members of their RESA, their local university leadership preparation program providers, and GLISI – to work together to prepare teachers for leadership roles as well as support new leaders during career transitions. The Rising Stars Collaborative™ would provide *customized, localized* instruction and guidance to support mastery of priority leadership skills and the opportunity to practice critical leadership tasks on the job – with coaching, feedback, and support – creating an intensive, yet safe environment for developing leaders to "learn by doing."

The Okefenokee Rising Stars Leadership Collaborative™ began in January 2006 and the first 13 candidates completed their program in December 2007. These candidates all held Georgia leadership certification; thus, no university partner was required. Based on the success of the first year, as evidenced by site visit data of successful implementation of the program's core principles, superintendent satisfaction, and performer competency, the Okefenokee RESA Superintendents committed to a second year. In 2007-2008, seven of the eight Superintendents committed to participate and tapped 18 promising candidates. These candidates were supported by 14 Leadership Performance Preparation Coaches (LPPCs) trained by GLISI. Again, these candidates all held Georgia leadership certification, thus no university partner was required. All candidates successfully completed the program.

As the superintendents in the Okefenokee Collaborative began to consider a third year of participation in Rising Stars, several identified the need to begin development of their teacher leaders who had not yet become certified and others wanted to continue to work with certified assistant principals and instructional coaches. In addition, a number of current school administrators were interested in obtaining their Ed.S. degree in a performance-based program that met the requirements of the new Georgia certification. Since the new Georgia certification requirements called for university partnerships, the RESA Director and the Board of Control questioned whether a university partnership could be developed to meet all the above needs using the Rising Stars model. The RESA Board of Control decided to make an appointment with the Educational Leadership Department Chair at Valdosta State University to discuss a pilot Ed.S. program. A pilot program would be necessary, as the requirements for admission to an Ed.S. program required candidates to pass the Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators (GACE) and the GACE would not be administered until June 2008. This proposed pilot program was scheduled to begin by January 2008. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) would have to agree to the pilot.

What Was Done?

Based on discussions with the Board of Control, the Okefenokee RESA Director, the Rising Stars Collaborative™ Director, and GLISI's Rising Stars Program Manager met to decide what was to be gained from this university partnership. The parties all agreed to:

- Create a partnership between the university, RESA, and participating school districts to develop a performance-based leadership preparation program that would meet both district and developing leaders' needs.
- Pilot an Ed.S. Leadership program prior to the new Georgia certification requirements taking effect. The pilot would allow the 14 Ed.S. candidates to be accepted into the performance-based Ed.S. prior to passing the GACE, with the understanding that the candidates would pass the GACE prior to certification being issued.
- Allow 15 Rising Stars candidates who already had certification to be permitted to participate in the classes with the 14 Ed.S. candidates. All participants would be employed in leadership positions and tapped by their superintendents to participate.
- Insure that the priority performances the superintendents wanted to have candidates demonstrate would be included in the curriculum and follow the Rising Stars model. Common district needs would be the basis for the co-construction of the curriculum map and individual

- district and candidate performances would be included on the individual candidate Performer Path Plan (Individualized Induction Plan).
- Hold classes at Okefenokee RESA one day per month during school hours. Rising Stars candidates would be released for a full day each month, as well as two days during the summer. VSU participants met the same two days during the summer and an additional three days during the summer. Ed.S. students would also be released one full day per month, but would agree to work 10 days during the summer months in leadership roles in their respective school districts. This would avoid a precedent, as these candidates would be degree-seeking on district time.
 - Allow the Okefenokee RESA Coaches trained by GLISI to coach both Rising Stars candidates as well as the Ed.S. candidates.
 - Allow expert practitioners from the Okefenokee RESA school districts to teach classes.
 - Allow all candidates to pilot GLISI's LeaderTracker™ electronic performance support system.
 - Require candidates to use the Rising Stars Action Research process, rubric, and impact statement.

Meeting all of the desired requirements of the Collaborative required some negotiation. VSU had already designed a performance-based program which had been submitted to the PSC for program approval. The university also had questions about the feasibility of utilizing the Okefenokee coaches that were trained by GLISI because they were not affiliated with the university. The RESA Director, negotiating for the superintendents, felt strongly that the program should mirror the Rising Stars principles, which met the criteria for the new certification. The RESA Director interpreted the new certification rules requiring a partnership to mean that the program would be co-constructed by the partners with the emphasis being on the needs of the candidates and the school districts – which primarily focused on student achievement. That meant that the program needed to be collaboratively developed rather than pre-designed by the university. The districts felt that they were the “customer” and thus needed the university to meet their needs.

The next step was to agree to develop a steering committee that would work through the challenging issues towards a true partnership, where there was mutual benefit for the districts, candidates, and university. The steering committee was composed of a representative from each participating school district, the Rising Stars Collaborative™ Director, the RESA Director, GLISI's Rising Stars Program Manager, the VSU Department Chair, and one faculty representative who would be one of the instructors. The Collaborative Director shared the Memorandum of Understanding that had been developed for the first two Rising Stars Collaboratives™ and asked if it could be used as a starting point for negotiation on a partnership. The committee met several times throughout the fall of 2007 to work out a Memorandum of Understanding that would be agreeable to all parties.

What Were the Results?

An agreement was reached and implemented. It included the following:

- The curriculum map was co-developed from GLISI's Mastery Maps, the Georgia Proposed Educational Leadership Performance Indicators, and VSU's Inventory of Leadership Experiences based on common superintendent-identified performances. VSU requires a number of performance-based activities and the Beginning Leader Candidate Support Team (BLCST)

worked together to customize these experiences based on district and for individual student needs. A number of these activities could be experienced through the GLISI Performance-based Modules, which required candidates to lead in real schools in real time with real teachers. The University had no issue using the Rising Stars Action Research process and actually adopted/adapted it for their use in their regular Educational Leadership program.

- VSU held the classes at Okefenokee RESA. A university instructor attended all classes and his responsibilities included planning, teaching, coaching, serving on the BLCST, and supervising both content and assessments. In addition, VSU allowed instruction in most classes to be conducted by identified expert practitioners from the school districts.
- VSU allowed both Ed.S. candidates as well as Rising Stars candidates to attend the classes. They required Ed.S. candidates to take an additional four-hour evening class each month to meet their course requirements in School Finance and School Law. Rising Stars candidates could audit the courses, but would have to pay for the School Law course because it is conducted partially online. School Finance could be audited at no cost and candidates would receive additional Professional Learning Units (PLUs). If Rising Stars chose to take the School Law class, they had to register through VSU as a non-degree-seeking student. Candidates submitted an application to the graduate school for the summer session. An advantage for Rising Stars students taking either or both of these courses would be the inclusion of required content assessed by the GACE. Rising Stars would be invited to attend any evening session, and if they attended, they would receive additional PLUs.
- VSU hired two of the Okefenokee RESA performance coaches as adjunct instructors over the three terms. In addition, their instructor was trained in GLISI's LPPC program. The University allocated funds for adjunct pay. One concern was that Rising Stars coaches would be paid slightly more than the VSU adjunct coaches, and it was agreed that the RESA would offset this cost to ensure that all coaches were paid equally.
- The university agreed to have all candidates pilot GLISI's LeaderTracker™ electronic performance support system, but also required all Ed.S. candidates to use LiveText™ as their portfolio.

What was the Impact?

Twenty-nine aspiring and developing leaders are participating in this co-constructed program this year. A successful partnership has been formed to meet the needs of districts and candidates as well as university requirements. Superintendents interviewed felt the program continued to meet the leadership progression planning needs of their districts, and candidates report that they are receiving application-based training that they can use in their current jobs as well as preparing them for future leadership roles.

Next Steps

Results will be evaluated as the program moves through its last months. A site visit is scheduled to take place in January with external evaluators conducting focus groups with candidates, coaches, superintendents, district representatives, RESA Director, and university personnel. The site visit report will be shared with all stakeholders and used for program improvement. In addition, GLISI will follow all participants for three to five years to determine whether their participation in Rising Stars reduced their time to competency and positively impacted student achievement as they moved into leadership positions. Plans are already in place to begin development of Year 4 of the Rising Stars Collaborative™ and Year 2 of the Ed.S. program with VSU.