



Best Practices Case Study

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Editor's note: The Confidence in Kansas Public Education Task Force sponsors the Friends of Education Awards. To recognize exemplary partner development, Kansas Partners in Education sponsors the Partner Activity award category. Each nominee is a business, company, or agency that has provided an on-going partner activity over an extended period of time (minimum of three years), by means of volunteer time, services, finances or other types of support, in amount that exceeds typical collaboration from a private or public institution. This case study provides information about a 2010 Partner Activity nominee and is an educational service to KSPE members, their organizations, and prospective partners.

Bethel College: Newton Schools Partner

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By nature, small communities that have an institution of higher education located in their midst enjoy a better quality of life and economic well-being than communities without. This is nowhere truer than in Newton, Kansas.

Bethel College was founded in 1888, just a few years after the Newton area made the transition from rough and rowdy cow town, to calmer, quieter residential community. This change was facilitated by the in-migration of a large Mennonite re-settlement. The Mennonites brought a strong work ethic, a mission to serve others, a desire for peaceful conflict resolution, and a passion for education to the region. Along with strong public schools, Mennonites founded Hesston College and Bethel College in Harvey County.

In 2010, the Newton Public School district celebrated its 125th high school commencement ceremony, commemorating 125 years of pursuing the mission of "Preparing students for success in a changing world." In 2012, Bethel will follow suit, celebrating the college's 125th anniversary as well. Even though one is a public school district and the other a private college, the seam that binds them is nearly invisible. Newton USD 373 sends more students to Bethel College than any other public school district and a significant number of USD 373 staff are Bethel College grads. These overlapping relationships can be credited with creating a partnership that serves both organizations well.

Teaching candidates from Bethel provide valuable after-school tutoring for students in our schools. Bethel students from various programs serve as mentors in after school programs and through the Big Brothers & Big Sisters “Bigs in Schools” program. Bethel College education majors are some of the highest caliber student teachers in our schools. Bethel students who are not yet ready to assume student teaching assignments are still able to acquire first-hand knowledge of the classroom through class observation arrangements.

The Newton/Bethel partnership recently reached a higher level through a new class offered this past fall, which was team-taught by four Newton Public School teachers at Northridge Elementary. The four teachers (three of whom also happen to be Bethel grads) created a “Teaching Expressive Arts” class for the Bethel College education program curriculum, by which Bethel students observed and participated in Northridge classrooms.

The new class promotes integrated learning, combining the expressive arts of dance, music, and fine art with traditional studies of math, reading, science and social studies. This highly successful approach focuses on teaching through integrated, hands-on expressive activities so that students learn in ways that are fun and intuitive.

The program offers a win-win-win scenario: Northridge students benefit from the low adult-student ratio and individual attention; the teaching students benefit from participating in a real classroom setting. They appreciate the opportunity to put teaching theories into practice, as opposed to trying to learn them in a college lecture hall; and Northridge teachers benefit from the extra help the Bethel students bring to their classroom and the increased collaboration among the elementary school’s own staff. This is just one of the ways Bethel College and Newton Public Schools are continuing to grow and expand partnership activities that benefit both organizations and the students they serve.

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