Research to practice: Undergraduate research initiative
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The purpose of this presentation is to share the implementation process and insights gained on the creation of a pilot study using year-long field placements for six Georgia Southern University student-teachers in the SPED program while embedding action research requirements essential to edTPA.
Field-based experience is perceived by early career teachers to be the most valuable experience within teacher preparation programs (Guyton & McIntyre, 2010; James, Etheride, & Lyles, 2011). While some feel this experience is critical to their preparation rarely are preservice teachers using these experiences to conduct valuable research to support them in their development.
Group Research

We were interested in exploring the dynamics of increased student teaching placement time over a two semester period in one school rather than using multiple field placement opportunities.

Additionally, we sought to embed coaching to increase student awareness of conducting research in classrooms and using research to address SIPS.
Design of Research Initiative

• Collaboration between university and school partners

• Agreement from the local school district to match School Improvement Plans to research data

• Use of undergrad students to collect and analyze data to address match between classroom data and district data
Purpose of Research Initiative

• School district asked for support in connecting each school’s SIP with classroom practice
  – Disconnect between classroom teacher and goals of SIP
  – Lack of knowledge between classroom teacher and SIP
• Teacher education faculty was interested in increasing teacher candidates’ investment in school climate to improve reflective outcomes.
Selection of Cohort

• Senior undergrad special ed majors
• Interview protocol with faculty
• Student recruitment for project was enhanced by incentive to remain in same school for one school year, rather than varied placements
Pilot Model

• Six teacher candidates paired with six clinical supervisors in 4 schools
• Teacher candidates worked collaboratively to create descriptive “school story” of each school with attention to SIP.
School Stories and Data Collection

The rationale for using feeder schools came from the intent to recognize shared community concerns, and gain trust within the schooling community.

This benefitted the pre-service teachers by allowing them access to data to compare trends between the schools and students within the same community.
Developing Research Opportunity

- Year Long Experience
- School Improvement Plans
- edTPA
Pilot Findings

This analysis showed trends of increasing passing rates, writing across the curriculum, and improving specific math skills.

edTPA scores revealed that SPED teacher candidates exhibited advanced ability to respond to questions regarding community and school culture.
Intended Outcomes

• Teacher candidates collaborated together to complete project across schools
  – Comparative data among and between schools
  – Design instruction based on practices supported by the SIP

• In-service teachers made connections in research to practice based on K-12 student achievement
Unintended Outcomes

• In-service teachers report more understanding of SIP and connection to classroom practice
• In-service teachers ask for technology training based on specific needs in each classroom
• Teacher candidates viewed as part of the community
• Teacher candidates’ improved reflection on connection to school, “big picture” improvements across schools.
Fall 2014 Full Implementation

• All special education teacher candidates are required to complete research component as part of curriculum.

• Work in peer pairs matched to year-long field placement with practica and student teaching.

• Submission to regional and national conferences.
Implications

The knowledge gained in their student teaching semesters prepared them to ask critical questions about the communities they currently teach.

Additionally this opportunity created a greater awareness of how the SIP and data collection in the classroom are associated.

These teachers are more equip to support their school in collaboration in developing future SIP documents and end of school year reports.