

PEP Talk Newsletter - November 2016

CUW Partners with Messmer Schools to Offer Urban Teaching Certificate!

Teachers in the Messmer Schools are participating this fall in their 4th of 5 courses to earn their Urban Professional Development Teaching Certificate with CUW. This current course is focused on Engaging Instructional Practices for the Urban Classroom.

This session is off to a great start. The Messmer participants enrolled in the class range from kindergarten through high school instructors. This wide range of grades offers the unique opportunity to learn and problem solve in a manner that is beneficial to all participants as we look to meet the diverse needs of all students. We are able to view multiple strengths and weaknesses, based on the teacher diversity with this session. The CUW team intentionally plans each session with the following as aspects: introducing a theme, the multiple ways the theme can be implemented, review of their current practice, offering suggestions for improvement, planning for implementation, how to get parents involved, and how to assess for effectiveness. The CUW team differentiates this process to ensure success from the lenses of elementary, middle, and high school settings. Finally, we also add the unique perspective of how a school administrator would view the processes of identified areas on which the Messmer participants are working. All of these variables have provided rich discussions, learning the appropriate resources within their school, honest and personal reflections, commitment to change, action plans, effective strategies for assessing for success, and forged intentional collaboration partnerships.

Professor Eugene Pitchford III is an Assistant Professor of Education at CUW. If you would like to learn more about the work he is doing, or to schedule a visit with a group of CUW students promoting college readiness, please email him at Eugene.pitchford@cuw.edu.

If you are interested in forging a Graduate Professional Development certification program unique to your district's needs please contact Dr. Steven Witt, steven.witt@cuw.edu.

Program Spotlight: Graduate Counseling

As the holiday season approaches, families may encounter stressful times. We may not be used to vacation time and the resulting lack of structure; the memories of family and friends who are no longer with us; the hectic atmosphere of getting ready for the holiday; or the overwhelming emotions that the holidays may bring.

As counselors, we may be working with individuals whose family is encountering a stressful time. Often a counselor may feel as though they may not have the appropriate background to help these clients or their families.

A new course is now being offered within the Graduate Counseling program. This course: Models and Methods of Family Counseling, will give the counseling student more tools to work with families during both times of joy and times of difficulty.

Dr. Jan Heinitz is the director of Graduate Counseling and Alternative Education at CUW and she can be reached at jan.heinitz@cuw.edu. If you are interested in learning more about the Counseling program (or our other Graduate Education Programs), please contact Amber Schiessl at amber.schiessl@cuw.edu

Tips for Parent-Teacher Conferences

Is your school ready for parent-teacher conferences? Within the next 30 days nearly all schools in America will host conferences with families of their students to discuss grades and student progress. While many schools are prepared for these conferences, others fail to understand that these meetings, as with all other encounters with families of students, are moments of truth. Specifically, parent -teacher conferences either help or hurt the relationship between school and home. Having conferences that work well both for teachers and parents is critical to establishing an effective relationship between the school and home. [The term “parents” includes caregivers responsible for a child in your school.] Consider these tips as your school prepares for conferences.

1. Be prepared with information about student performance. While this seems basic, there is more information that can be shared than only grades. When sharing information, avoid jargon and communicate clearly in language that those outside of the profession can easily understand.
2. Be sure that advanced information was provided about any low grades, not just a failing grade. Communication well in advance of issuing a low grade helps to inform families about a concern, allows families an opportunity to provide greater support for their child. It also helps to prevent a negative reaction from families about the grading and communication process.
3. Consider engaging students in the conferences using formats such as student-led conferencing. This model works well, especially with grades 5-8 that serve early adolescent students.
4. Provide a variety of times and dates that make it easier for parents with diverse work schedules to attend. For those who cannot attend on the scheduled dates, find another time that will work. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, find a time and communication that will work as a substitute.
5. At the elementary and middle level grades schedule conference times in advance. Note that in the process of doing this, you may learn additional important information from parents that will aid preparation for the conference.
6. Communicate what you see as a student’s positive qualities regardless of the grades being discussed. Families need to know that teachers see what’s good in their child. In addition, discuss ways that parents can assist and support learning at home.

7. Provide seating outside of the classroom for families while they wait to meet with teachers.
8. Stick with the schedule conference times. If it is 5 minutes at the high school in an arena format, or 20 minutes in a K-8 format, hold to that timeframe. If necessary, agree to meet or call to discuss matters further, if necessary.
9. During conferencing, be an active listener to a parent's concerns, interests, and needs. Being able to do this demonstrates both caring and professionalism.
10. Before ending a conference, determine the best way to communicate with parents in the future. Find a win-win solution that works both for teachers and parents.

Schools need to be invitational and on-point with the families and students that they serve. Principals need to reinforce this message with the entire staff ahead of conferences, but especially with new teachers and those new to the school. Advanced preparation will yield dividends in having parent-teacher conferences that help parents to better understand their child's performance and areas for improvement, and especially their areas of strength. When a family knows that teachers actually know and care about their child, their confidence both in the teacher and school is reinforced.

If you have tips on "what works" for successful parent-teacher conferences, please share them with Dr. Mike Dietz, [@mikedietz92](https://twitter.com/mikedietz92), michael.dietz@cuw.edu or 262-365-3947.

African-American Male Initiative Summer Institute More Than Doubles Attendance in its Second Year

This July, the Closing the Achievement Gap Consortium hosted its 2nd annual African-American Male Initiative Summer Institute on the Concordia University Wisconsin Mequon campus. African-American young men from 16 Consortium high schools attended the 3 night/4 day institute; 22 returned from the 2015 institute and 65 were new in 2016.

The young men that attended the institute spent time in classrooms learning study skills and goal-setting, and they lived in the residence halls on the CUW campus. All of the programming was facilitated by African-American men from the Consortium school districts who served as directors and mentors of the program. The institute also benefited from a partnership with AVID who had a strong presence and participation during the event. They focused on projects that culminated with a presentation for parents on the last evening of the institute. During the day, the group also traveled to places such as Baird, Milwaukee City Hall, and Miller-Coors to meet with successful African-American men in business. They were also treated to a presentation by baseball great Larry Hise, Sr. Parents were also asked to participate in activities on the first and last day of the institute.

Feedback on the 2017 institute has been overwhelmingly positive. And, the Consortium has upheld its commitment to the young men in attendance to continue working with them throughout the school year. A follow-up activity to once again unite the participants occurred on

September 24th where the group took in a Milwaukee Brewer's game and were able to re-establish all of the connections they made with fellow attendees as well as with the mentors.

Dr. Elliott Moeser is the Director of Educational Administration and Executive Director of Closing the Achievement Gap Consortium at Concordia University. He can be reached at Elliott.moeser@cuw.edu

Innovative Approach to Literacy in Local Schools

Literacy is the spine of the curriculum. Data continues to show the importance of literacy and its effects on the entire curriculum. It is being recognized that reading and writing need to be taught and emphasized much more than just in the elementary grades, and by reading teachers. Rather, as the spine of the curriculum, teachers and administrators are realizing the importance of incorporating literacy strategies in all disciplines. To that end, several Preferred Educational Partner districts have partnered with CUW to offer teachers in their schools an opportunity to participate in a #1316 license program that not only incorporates the excellence in literacy standards connected to ILA best practices, but is also customized to meet the unique needs of their district.

Menomonee Falls High School is currently in the second course of a 1316 program being taught at their school and is focused on content area high school teachers. This distinctive approach allows the School District of Menomonee Falls to address literacy with its high school content teachers specific to their curriculum while at the same time preparing reading teachers who are uniquely trained to best meet the diverse needs of all students.

In a similar way, the Racine Unified School District is also partnering with CUW to provide 1316 cohort experience for some of its teachers that again uses specific district materials and objectives to meet assessment standards in the CUW 1316 program.

By partnering together, we are finding the best way to make the strongest impact on student growth and achievement.

If you are interested in discussing ways CUW can assist your school or district in customizing professional development or license programs to fit your unique needs, please contact Dr. Steven Witt, director of Literacy and Partnerships at steven.witt@cuw.edu.

Calendar of Events:

November

- 3rd CAGC School Board Symposium (Glendale)

- 10th and 11th: WCPG Gambling Disorder Training (Mequon)
- 18th: Author Panel, The Pedagogy of Faith (Mequon)
- 19th: Messmer Urban Teaching Certificate Program (Milwaukee)

SAVE THE DATE!! 2017 CUW Literacy Institute June 15th-16th 2017 on the Mequon campus