



The Distinguished Educator Initiative

PDE Education Improvement Initiative Series

The Distinguished Educator (DE) Initiative is a program developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that assigns experienced educators to assist struggling districts in planning and implementing effective school reform. Distinguished Educators work through the Capital Area Intermediate Unit (CAIU) on behalf of PDE. As necessary, CAIU assigns teams of DEs to work with districts that need targeted technical assistance to improve student achievement. Some districts, particularly those entering corrective action, may be required to work with a team of DEs during the restructuring planning process.

Although DEs are assigned to districts in carefully configured teams, the Distinguished Educator role is flexible in order to meet specific needs of different districts, schools, and students.

- DEs may serve as coaches or mentors for administrators in some districts.
- At times, DEs may drive relatively prescriptive district-level solutions to improve student achievement.
- Distinguished Educators link PDE to school improvement activities across the Commonwealth; information from DEs about school improvement may be used to inform statewide policy and regulation.

In general, DEs recommend a variety of strategies to help struggling districts identify instructional or systemic barriers and critical gaps to improving student achievement. Then the teams work alongside district staff to overcome barriers and fill those gaps.

DEs are comprised of current or retired administrators, teachers, education specialists, and consultants. They are selected by CAIU following a multi-step application process, and they possess a wide range of experience and expertise. Once selected, DEs agree to serve for at least two years. They may serve as full-time members of a district “core team” focused on instructional leadership or as “specialists” who help district administrators and a “core team” of DEs in specific areas of expertise.

DE Core Team members consist of full-time experts in leadership and/or curriculum. Their leadership and/or curricular expertise covers one or more of several areas:

- **Strategic Planning.** Expertise in education improvement planning, with experience in writing, implementing, and/or evaluating districts or schools.
- **District Leadership.** Expertise in district leadership, district or school governance, school boards, and capacity-building at the district level.
- **School Leadership.** Expertise in school leadership, including school governance, instructional leadership, and “artful use of infrastructure.”
- **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.** Expertise in teaching, including curriculum, assessment, and instruction.
- **Math and/or Literacy.** Expertise in using research-based strategies in math and/or literacy.

DE Specialists are commonly assigned to support several different DE Core Teams across the state. Specialists bring very specific areas of expertise to the process of school improvement planning and implementation:

- **Budget and Finance** at both the school and district level

- **Special Education and/or ESL** including instructional and regulatory issues
- **Parent and Community Connections**
- **Human Resources** including union relations
- **Communications** with and through the media
- **Technology** as applied to both operations and instruction
- **Safe Schools** including discipline
- **Professional Development**
- **Student Services**, such as mental health, drug and alcohol prevention, and migrant education

Issues to Consider

Many distinguished educators are retired administrators who have been out of the classroom for some time. When individuals serve as DEs, the two-year commitment does not count towards retirement in the Pennsylvania School Employees Retirement System. Therefore, in practical terms, the conditions of employment favor those who are already retired over those who are working toward retirement. Furthermore, of those DEs who are retired, many retired from administrative positions rather than classroom teaching assignments. This means that many DEs do not have direct classroom experience in their immediate past.

Recommendations made by Distinguished Educators generally are advisory, not binding. In a few cases, district administrators have suggested to PSEA members that the local must accommodate the recommendations of the DE, even if there are contractual issues at stake. In general, this is not the case, and recommendations from DEs are just that--recommendations. Of course, in the instances where a district is not complying with state or federal requirements, following the guidance from a DE on how to come into compliance may be mandatory. In general, any proposed school reform should be discussed with your PSEA UniServ Representative.

Not every district is in a good position to benefit from the assistance of Distinguished Educators. School reforms are most effective when undertaken in a collaborative, trusting context. In districts where there is little trust between union members and administrators, or in districts where collaboration among teachers, education specialists and support professionals is not commonplace, change is hard to implement and unlikely to succeed.

For More Information

More information on the Distinguished Educator Initiative in Pennsylvania can be found at <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/pas/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=109084> or by contacting Carla Claycomb, Ph.D., in PSEA's Education Services Division at cclaycomb@psea.org or 1-800-944-7732, extension 7022. At PDE, questions can be directed to Dana L. Klouser, Administrative Officer/Distinguished Educator Program Manager, sklouser@state.pa.us or 717-705-3771.