

Policy Brief

May 2010

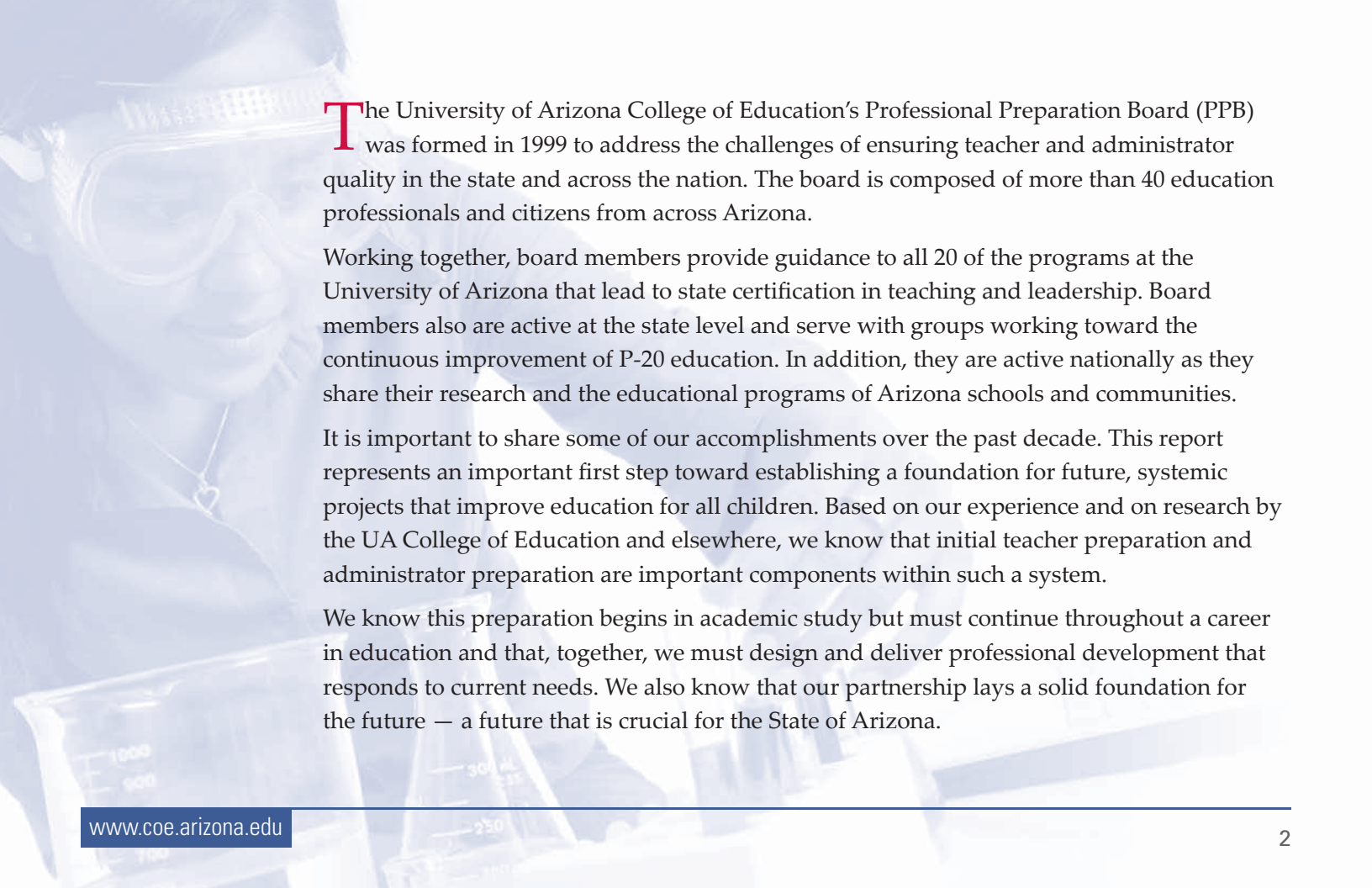


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Partnerships for Improving Education: Building a First Step



Prepared by the University of Arizona College of Education's Professional Preparation Board

The background of the page features a faded image of a woman wearing safety goggles and a necklace, looking down at laboratory glassware. The text is overlaid on this image.

The University of Arizona College of Education's Professional Preparation Board (PPB) was formed in 1999 to address the challenges of ensuring teacher and administrator quality in the state and across the nation. The board is composed of more than 40 education professionals and citizens from across Arizona.

Working together, board members provide guidance to all 20 of the programs at the University of Arizona that lead to state certification in teaching and leadership. Board members also are active at the state level and serve with groups working toward the continuous improvement of P-20 education. In addition, they are active nationally as they share their research and the educational programs of Arizona schools and communities.

It is important to share some of our accomplishments over the past decade. This report represents an important first step toward establishing a foundation for future, systemic projects that improve education for all children. Based on our experience and on research by the UA College of Education and elsewhere, we know that initial teacher preparation and administrator preparation are important components within such a system.

We know this preparation begins in academic study but must continue throughout a career in education and that, together, we must design and deliver professional development that responds to current needs. We also know that our partnership lays a solid foundation for the future — a future that is crucial for the State of Arizona.

What Matters

Excellent teaching requires more than knowing subject matter, teaching methods, or students, although each is critical. Great teachers must put their knowledge into practice by adapting and implementing curricula based on rigorous academic standards and ensuring the success of widely differing students whose backgrounds and learning needs vary enormously. Teacher education at the UA is practice oriented, which means that teacher-education students work in school classrooms alongside accomplished teacher mentors. Our teacher-education students examine the impact of instruction on student learning and effective techniques for modifying instruction for all students.

- **Teach Arizona**, designed in collaboration with the UA College of Education and the seven Tucson-area public school districts surrounding the university, is an intensive post-baccalaureate program in which prospective teachers work alongside an accomplished mentor teacher for an entire year. From 2000-2009, more than 80 percent of program graduates are still in teaching.
- **UCats** (University Content Area Theories and Strategies) is an elementary-education program based in schools and taught jointly by experienced teachers and university faculty. A longitudinal study of program graduates' teaching indicated not only that they met rigorous standards for teaching, but that they exhibited high-quality classroom management.
- Each semester the Rodel Foundation identifies Rodel Exemplary Mentor Teachers who mentor **UA Promising Student Teachers**. All UA Rodel graduates (from the first three years of the program) have completed three years of teaching in Arizona schools serving poor students.

We Are Accountable

Local school districts hold our programs accountable through direct feedback on program quality and indirect feedback based on hiring practices. They also directly influence program content by contributing to the curriculum and by teaching classes for university students. The monthly meetings of the PPB enable district administrators and university faculty and staff to discuss developing teacher quality and broad access of students to high-quality education. Yearly evaluations by the Arizona Department of Education plus the rigorous, five-year assessments, which include a site visit, are also important accountability tools to align the curriculum with Arizona learning standards. Stringent federal accountability through the Title II of the Higher Education Act, as amended in 2008, requires reporting and publishing graduates' pass rates on state licensure tests.

- Over the past five years, the pass rate on the **Arizona Education Proficiency Examination** has exceeded 95 percent.
- Local school districts are able to observe teaching candidates and routinely hire those who apply for openings. For example, over the past five years, **50 percent of all new hires** in Flowing Wells School District were UA graduates.
- The UA College of Education deaf and hard-of-hearing program is **one of only three in the nation** online and available to prospective teachers from across the state and the nation.
- **T-Prep** is an exit survey of all program graduates in the three Arizona universities. More than 85 percent of spring 2009 UA graduates graded their courses and field experiences with an A or B and would recommend their programs to future teachers.

Key to Success: Leadership Development

National and state research on teacher retention and school excellence confirms the importance of school leadership by administrators and experienced teachers. Responding to district needs, the college created principal-preparation programs that include courses addressing district issues and challenges. We partner with community organizations such as the Educator and Business Boardroom, the Arizona K-12 Center, United Way, and the Southern Arizona Leadership Council to provide leadership development for school and university administrators and program directors.

- We created the **Charter School Leadership Academy** to provide instruction in leadership skills and in legal and fiscal responsibilities for Arizona charter operators.
- The elementary-education program implemented field-based programs that simultaneously provide **content-focused professional development** for mentors and teachers in training.
- Three PPB district administrators have been recognized as **exemplary principals** by the Rodel Foundation and now conduct workshops for new principals.
- Numerous recent and current superintendents have been recognized as **State Superintendents of the Year**.



We must now look to the future.

The future of Arizona education requires a collaborative commitment to improvement and excellence. Improving teaching and learning conditions requires a systemic, multiagency approach. We have accomplished the first step. We have regular, ongoing communication, and we have established joint responsibility for program development and improvement.

- **We must** work more closely with UA President Shelton’s P-20 Council, community agencies, and local government to design a plan for a systemic alliance among educators, health professionals, social-service providers, and foundations to create a Tucson-area model for integrated services.
- **We must** expand our emphasis on co-professional development for mentors and prospective teachers.
- **We must** enhance our professional-preparation programs to focus even more on the communities — parents, businesses, and services — served by the schools in which our prospective teachers and administrators work. We must enable our students to learn about the skills and funds of knowledge available in those communities and to establish strong and positive relationships with community members.
- **We must** improve transparency and make more information about programs and development efforts available to the public for comments, suggestions, and engagement.
- **We must** do a better job of assessing the short- and long-term impacts of our programs on teacher retention and practice.
- **We must** work with our community and policy makers to create cross-institutional arrangements for studying how we can work together to enhance educational attainment.

The Professional Preparation Board is now poised to become something more than a forum for discussion. This UA College of Education Policy Brief, *Building a First Step*, represents our public and collective commitment to Tucson-area children and adolescents and to their teachers and administrators.

"The relationship between the UA and Richardson gives me the opportunity to observe potential teachers in action. It is a great advantage as I seek out quality teachers. I have five former UCats teaching at Richardson, and all have proven to be outstanding."

Lyle Dunbar
Principal, Richardson Elementary School

"The PPB provides a rich environment for leaders and researchers to collaborate with a focus on improving teacher quality. Since the quality of the teacher is the critical factor, we know this effort can positively support our students and their achievement."

Vicki Balentine
Superintendent, Amphitheater Public Schools
President, Arizona State Board of Education



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