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## ARTICLE SAMPLE

*This article was written by Jen Viano for Collegium, the alumni magazine for St. John Fisher College.*

### Forging a Principal Partnership

***Fisher and the Rochester City School District team up in a unique educational program to train the city's next generation of school administrators.***

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) is facing a challenge that is not uncommon among all school districts in New York State. More than 50% of the District's principals are of retirement age and, until recently, there was not a plan in place for attracting other qualified administrators to take their places. The national pool of administrative candidates is diminishing, and the RCSD did not want to raid its neighbors in trying to fill the void. Instead, the District took a proactive approach and looked within its community for a partner that could help execute an aggressive succession plan.

Enter St. John Fisher College.

Fisher has a 50-year track record of reinvesting in the Rochester community and is proud that the majority of its graduates remain in the Rochester region. Their successes are well-documented and Fisher's reputation in the community has grown in stature because of their achievements. According to Dr. Larry Pound, Chairman of the Education Department, Fisher quickly rose to the top of the District's list of potential partners because "the District respects the quality of Fisher's Education Department and has been impressed by the caliber of the students that we've sent them in the past. In addition, the District knows that Fisher is innovative and has successfully launched creative and flexible programming. We are getting the reputation in our community for being willing to try new things and be on the cutting edge of trends."

The partnership between Fisher and the RCSD is attracting attention because the College custom-designed the program to meet the District's specifications, and the District stepped up with financial support. The 30 District teachers who are enrolled in the program will pay 40 percent toward the cost of their degrees, and the RCSD will assume the remainder of the costs. All participants have met Fisher's requirements for admission, but the final selection of the first class was made by the RCSD. Participants agree to stay with the District for at least 5 years after they receive their degree in order to avoid any monetary penalty. "The inaugural class of 30 participants are drawn solely from the Rochester City Schools," according to Dr. Kathleen Powers, Associate Vice President for Fisher's School of Adult and Graduate Education (SAGE). "Fisher will open the program in Fall 2001 to other students interested in pursuing the educational credential for assuming leadership positions in various school settings: public, private and suburban."

The focus of the program is on preparing administrators with the specific skills and knowledge needed to be successful leaders. Newly-named Program Director Dr. Arthur "Sam" Walton is a veteran administrator with more than 30 years of successful

experience as an administrator and professional educator. Walton affirms that “strong leadership is vital to any effective school. Administrators must be prepared to handle multiple tasks, diverse audiences and conflicting demands. Our challenge in this program is to help the participants to acquire the skills, values and knowledge necessary to handle complex and interrelated social and educational issues often seen in an urban setting.”

Rochester teachers Bryant Cromartie and John Rowe know what it's like to be in the trenches in an urban school. School violence, lack of parental support, and substance abuse are all very real challenges that they face on a daily basis. These frustrations lead some teachers to “burn out” and exit from the public school system. Not so for Bryant and John. These two teachers want to be part of the solution. They are willing to assume the added responsibility of going back to school to gain the necessary skills to become successful principals and tackle these issues head on.

Bryant is a product of the Rochester City Schools (Charlotte) and has been employed as a teacher at the Dr. Freddie Thomas Learning Center for three years teaching 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Both Bryant and John, who teaches 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Charlotte Middle School, believe that the betterment of their students depends largely on engaging the students' parents in the process. “The parents of most of my students are not involved in volunteering in the classroom or even meeting their children's teacher during the course of the entire year,” explains Rowe. “For some it's an issue of disinterest; for others, it's a matter of not having transportation to get from a job in the City out to the school in Charlotte during the daytime. Frankly, these kids need support and many of them just don't get it at home.” Cromartie agrees, adding that “my students are as motivated as their counterparts in the suburbs; they just need adult support.”

Both teachers also cite the need to teach social skills in school and work with their students on some of the fundamental behaviors that used to be taught at home. Bryant hopes that, as a principal, he can institute workshops on conflict resolution and work with teachers to focus on raising the students' self-esteem. Both men agree that one of the best aspects of the Fisher program is the introduction of case studies based upon real urban school situations.

Instead of “courses” in the traditional sense, the 32-credit-hour program is organized around a case-study approach using data and information from actual school districts. Students are also required to participate in internships that are directly linked to the program of study. The District will grant program participants some time away from their jobs in order to complete the internships, but the remainder of their studies will be completed in a weekend format. Each weekend session runs Friday evening and all-day on Saturday on alternate weekends. In addition to its convenience, the weekend format is compatible with the case-study approach of the program, whereby students work in study groups in a relaxed, “executive” environment as opposed to a classroom setting.

St. John Fisher College has seen great success with the weekend format over the last three years as part of SAGE. The Educational Administration Program is the 10<sup>th</sup> advanced degree program developed by SAGE. Fisher received approval from the New York State Education Department for the program earlier in the year using the state's newly-established education standards. Fisher's faculty, administration and the RCSD developed the proposal collaboratively. “Bigger schools can't move fast because of the bureaucracy,” explains Fisher Education Department Chair Dr. Larry Pound, who wrote the proposal to the State to seek certification. “When Fisher sees an opportunity, we are better positioned to go for it.”

Community partnerships are becoming a hallmark of the current administration. From the collaboration between the Wegmans Inner City Schools that host Fisher Service

Scholars, to the academic internships that are embedded in the contract with the Buffalo Bills, Fisher is an active participant in the Rochester community. "Our partnership with the RCSD began with the design of the program and continues today with the enrollment of the first class," says Dr. David Arnold, Provost of the College. "The degree of collaboration from conception to birth of a new program represents an ideal college-community partnership."

Dr. Clifford B. Janey, Superintendent of Schools for the RCSD, agrees. "This partnership with St. John Fisher College enables us to tap our best classroom educators for positions of school leadership. It is a unique strategy for ensuring a qualified pool of administrators who are well-trained in instructional leadership in urban schools, and for advancing our agenda to help all students meet high standards." Walton echoes the importance of working with the community, adding "There are certainly challenges in shaping a positive educational environment, but if you look at them through a different lens, they quickly become opportunities. Opportunities for us to improve the current and future educational conditions and results for students of all types."

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