Director’s Corner: Teachers are the Key

Reviewing the daily classroom messages, visiting the school, and participating in Parent / Teacher conferences all give parents an opportunity to witness the central role of teachers in their children’s education. NAEYC recognizes the importance of high quality teaching by dedicating two standards in the national accreditation system to teaching practices and teacher professional development. Standard #3 (Teaching) focuses on using effective developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching approaches. Standard #6 (Teachers) ensures that accredited programs build a teaching team that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children’s learning and development and to support families’ diverse needs and interests. We are fortunate to be embedded in a university culture that continually strives for best practices in all aspects of the education process and also provides the human resources support for all campus employees. This context enhances our laboratory school’s ability to both lead and innovate in the realm of early childhood teaching.

• Naturally, we begin with recruitment and retention of effective educators who share our passion for building a caring learning community that is responsive to children’s and adults’ interests and needs, designing a rich learning environment, and promoting meaningful learning that helps everyone deepen their conceptual understanding of relevant topics and strengthen skills in all domains.

• The CMU human resources system helps us search broadly for educators with relevant college degrees and experience, provides excellent benefits and continuing education resources, and offers coaching for our administrators so that we can best integrate our staff as a team and support each individual's unique personal and professional growth.

• We have the freedom to plan our school calendar and schedules such that we can both fulfill our laboratory school responsibilities and design the best professional development for our staff. Both TIME and RESOURCES are essential. Having nearly two weeks at the beginning and end of each school year to focus on professional growth, plus weekly team planning and staff development time enables us to meet and exceed the accreditation requirements. We can provide the fundamentals for staff orientation, health and safety training, and seminars in ethics, child development, assessment, special needs, etc. In addition, we can effectively utilize opportunities to learn via active involvement in collaborative advancement projects. For example, instead of simply taking a seminar on issues related to diversity, we can engage our staff in a book study on dual language learners and initiate an international practicum experience with Korean colleagues.

• Our schedule and excellent staff/child ratio also afford opportunities for individuals, teams, and the whole staff to reflectively focus on continual quality improvement. We are privileged to share our educators as leaders in the field, serving on local and national boards, mentoring pre-service teachers, collaborating on research projects, speaking and writing for national audiences, etc. In these ways, we invest in the quality of our educators and strengthen the whole team’s ability to foster the best possible learning experiences for everyone involved in our laboratory school.