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Seton Hall University and Paterson Public Schools Partner on Innovative Education Leadership Program to Help Under-performing School Districts

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. – Seton Hall University and Paterson Public Schools together have embarked on an innovative education leadership training program funded by a $1.5 million Turnaround School Leaders Program federal grant. The grant to the Paterson district, in conjunction with Seton Hall, is the only such federal grant awarded in New Jersey and one of only 12 such awards in the nation. The program uses interactive, web-based video simulations to immerse program participants in scenarios that depict real-world challenges facing administrators each day in under-performing public schools. The participants make decisions, live, as the scenario plays out and learn the consequences of their actions.

Phase I of the program involves Seton Hall school leadership professors Michael Osnato, Jan Furman, and Daniel Gutmore and adjunct professor Loretta Pohill working directly with principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders in Paterson, teaching them the techniques and tools they will use both in their schools and in Phase II of the turnaround schools program involving the interactive video simulations.

“For example, we teach them how to do walk-throughs, which is akin to a doctor doing daily rounds in the hospital,” said Michael Osnato, chair of Seton Hall University’s Education Leadership Management Program. “We show them how to visit classrooms regularly, two or three times a week and look for certain ways that they can help the teachers in a positive, collaborative way. It is a different form of support of the teachers, by being in the classes more often, but for shorter periods of time.”

The program will train 45 Paterson principals and aspiring principals in all, 15 in each of the three years of the grant. The video simulations would then be used beyond the grant end date to train teacher leaders in turnaround techniques for years to come.
“Simulations are widely used for training in medicine and the military. By developing this new tool, Paterson is showing other urban districts the benefits of applying high-impact, low-cost simulations to school leadership preparation,” said Dale Mann, professor emeritus, Columbia University and managing director, Interactive, Inc., Paterson’s technical partner in creating the simulation.

“The U.S. Department of Education selected Paterson as one of a handful of ‘turnaround’ school districts in the country to develop and test a new method for training aspiring school principals,” said State District Superintendent Donnie Evans. “The district is creating a web-enabled virtual school that requires aspiring principals to confront problems, make choices and then – critically – see the consequences of their actions. In collaboration with Seton Hall University and Interactive, Inc., our district will develop what we hope will become a national model for the development of turnaround school leaders.”

The Turnaround School Leaders Program is designed to create a pipeline of trained and supported principals and teacher leaders prepared to provide long-lasting and steady leadership in low-performing school districts as well as encourage retention of those highly-trained principals and aspiring principals far into the future.

“We expect this to be a realistic and highly effective training tool in difficult schools where children deserve a chance,” said Osnato.

ABOUT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
One of the country’s leading Catholic universities, Seton Hall University has been a catalyst for leadership — developing students in mind, heart and spirit — since 1856. Home to nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students and offering more than 90 academic programs, Seton Hall’s academic excellence has been singled out for distinction by The Princeton Review, US News & World Report and Bloomberg BusinessWeek.

Seton Hall, which embraces students of all religions, prepares its graduates to be exemplary servant leaders and caring global citizens. Its attractive main campus is located in suburban South Orange, New Jersey, and is only 14 miles by train, bus or car to New York City, offering a wealth of employment, internship, cultural and entertainment opportunities. The university’s nationally recognized School of Law is prominently located in downtown Newark.

For more information, visit www.shu.edu.

ABOUT PATERSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
The Paterson Public School District is a diverse urban school district located in northern New Jersey. As the third largest school district in New Jersey, the district enrolls approximately 29,000 students in 54 schools to accommodate students in Pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The school district’s strategic plan focuses on four priorities: Effective Academic Programs; Creating & Maintaining Healthy School Cultures; Family & Community Engagement; and Efficient & Responsive Operations. For more information, visit www.paterson.k12.nj.us.