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University of Connecticut

NEWS RELEASE

Nationally acclaimed school reform program moving headquarters to UConn(Released: 2/15/00)

by Janice Palmer, Office of University Communications

STORRS, Conn. -- The University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education is about to become the new home for one of the largest and most experienced comprehensive school reform programs in the country.

The Accelerated Schools Project, which had been based at Stanford University, is moving its national headquarters to the UConn campus in Storrs to partner with the Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

"We're proud to be chosen as the site for the center and thrilled that UConn will now be home base for two nationally acclaimed school reform programs," says Richard Schwab, dean of the Neag School of Education.

Henry Levin, who developed the accelerated program says, "By partnering with UConn's Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, the Accelerated Schools Project is establishing a close collaboration with one of the premier centers for gifted and talented instruction as well as a well-respected and innovative school of education."

Uniting the two programs at one location brings together two powerhouses in the field of education---Levin, the William Heard Kilpatrick Professor of Economics and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University and Joseph Renzulli, the Neag Professor of Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Connecticut. They are longtime professional acquaintances who have interacted frequently on matters of mutual interest. They share the same basic philosophy that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background or IQ, deserve the best public education possible by being provided with enrichment opportunities, resources and encouragement.

"Both of our organizations are dedicated to raising the ceiling for kids and providing them with interesting, challenging, and enjoyable learning experiences rather than the traditional remedial approaches that have not proven to be very effective in boosting achievement or genuine engagement in learning," Renzulli says.

Renzulli believes that as partners, the two groups can build on each other's specialties. "The Neag Center will benefit from the Accelerated Project's extensive experience in schools serving at-risk kids, and in turn, we can contribute our experience in targeting student strengths and providing know-how about strategies for high-end learning."

Since 1986 the Accelerated Schools Project has been dedicated to turning schools---particularly those with large at-risk populations-into places where all students are brought into the academic mainstream. By using accelerated learning and enrichment strategies instead of remedial instruction, under achieving students eventually perform at levels appropriate to their age group, rather than falling farther behind through the slowed-down, remedial process.

There are more than 1,000 accelerated elementary and secondary schools in 41 states and four foreign countries and the goal at each school is to treat all children as gifted and talented-a philosophy also at the heart of Renzulli's work.

Renzulli, who heads the Neag Center, has pioneered a number of teaching strategies for gifted education and for general school improvement which are being used by hundreds of schools around the country, including Accelerated Schools. Among Renzulli's strategies is the "Schoolwide Enrichment Model," a practical plan for turning schools into places for talent development. The mission of the model is to increase the level and quality of learning experiences for all students and it is another example of the compatibility of the two groups.

Although the two programs will be housed together at UConn, each will maintain its own identity and operation, but they will work closely in building on the expertise of each other's staff, resources, and existing programs and will collaborate on research and seeking funding.

The addition of the Accelerated Schools national center to the Storrs campus is expected to have an impact on the Neag School of Education as well. Long term plans call for the creation of a chair in urban education. "The fact that two notable school reform programs will be based at UConn should serve as a powerful magnet in attracting highly competitive candidates," says Schwab. Also, he expects new programs will be created which will build on the strengths of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model and Accelerated Schools Project.

News of the partnership has "excited many educators familiar with Levin and Renzulli" according to James Meza, chairman of the department of educational leadership and counseling at the University of New Orleans. Meza is also director of one of 11 Accelerated Schools Satellite Centers. He says, "Renzulli and Levin are two remarkable men who've devoted their careers to children. They'll be able to build on one another's strengths and those of their associates to put together a major alternative to public education as we know it today."

Meza oversees 52 schools as the regional service center for four southern states. Among them are 17 elementary schools in Memphis, Tenn., where at least 80 percent of the children live in poverty. Last year, an evaluation of six of the schools by a third party found that in reading, they outperformed other school reform models and a group of comparison schools. The results were equivalent to raising reading scores on standardized tests from the 30th to the 70th percentile for schools with high populations of poor and minority students. Improvements in mathematics, science and social studies were also impressive according to Meza.

"The Accelerated program has made a huge difference in our school," says Sue Reese, a kindergarten teacher at the Sheppard Accelerated Elementary School in Santa Rosa, Calif. She is also the Accelerated coach for the school where 97 percent of its students come from economically disadvantaged homes.

Reese says, "Although we can't always tell by standardized test scores, our kids are doing better; they're learning how to learn and how to make meaning out of what they learn; they are disciplined, and the attendance and transience rates have improved." Those changes haven't gone without notice. Last year the school received the National Blue Ribbon Award for excellence in education from the U.S. Department of Education.

As part of the decision to move the Accelerated Schools national headquarters to UConn, Levin who had been serving as director, is handing over the reins to Gene Chasin, former superintendent of schools for the Nashoba Regional School District in Bolton, Mass. and chair of the national policy advisory board for the Accelerated Schools Project. Chasin has been involved with the Accelerated Schools Project since 1991- serving as a principal at one of the early schools and then helping to establish the North Carolina Satellite Center.

Levin who will continue a close affiliation with the Accelerated Schools Project, also is director of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, a nonpartisan entity. He is a specialist in the economics of education and human resources and has published 14 books and almost 300 articles on these and related subjects.

Renzulli is the director of the National Center for the Gifted and Talented which is part of the Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development. He has authored several books and hundreds of articles, but his proudest achievement is the annual summer program on enrichment learning and teaching he created 23 years ago. "Confratute" has drawn more than 16,000 educators from across the country and overseas to the UConn campus.