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Student teachers, interns are vital for teacher recruitment, student achievement

By David Title | *May 12, 2017*

As a former superintendent of schools for Fairfield, Conn., I have personal insight into how valuable it is to have nationally renowned universities as part of our community. Through this proximity, and based on long-established relationships, I saw students from area colleges teaching and interning in our public schools, and even had the opportunity to hire some of them into full-time assignments. The strategic and creative support they provided for the children and teachers in our classrooms and their contributions to the district was invaluable then, and remains so today.

Even in this challenging economic environment, school systems are expected to improve learning for all students. The benefit provided by student teachers and educational interns from our state's private colleges and universities cannot be overstated — it offers an important asset that often is overlooked, but is absolutely essential to improving educational outcomes for a diverse population of students.

Student teaching truly is a two-way street. First, college students gain useful knowledge and hands-on, interactive training that helps prepare them to become successful teachers and administrators; and second, they serve as a “second adult” in the classroom, allowing more one-on-one student learning, helping teachers work effectively with small groups and exposing children to additional mentors who are passionate and excited to be working with them.

Student teachers do more than simply assist teachers in the classroom. There is a shortage of hands in every school, so student teachers help in lunchrooms, assist with bus duty, are assigned to playgrounds before school and for recess and serve as additional eyes and ears during assemblies and special events. They also bring new ideas and perspective that is refreshing and inspiring.

These are classic apprenticeship opportunities. College students gain valuable real-world experience, and school systems get to gauge the best and the brightest future teachers coming out of our colleges. This opportunity results in better-informed hiring decisions, as school systems recruit teachers from this pool of graduates who are already proven, understand school and district culture and have demonstrated their ability to work effectively with our students. It serves as another way for a district to improve its pipeline for talent and resources, especially as school systems face chronic teacher shortages in certain subject specialties. Additionally, student teachers don't cost taxpayers a penny - their training is part of their undergraduate and graduate work.

Internship programs are equally valuable. For a full year, these student interns support schools in a variety of formal capacities, including functioning as substitute teachers, and for 10 weeks, as student teachers. This cost-effective program saves districts the cost of hiring substitutes, fills an increasing shortage of substitute teachers and offers long-term consistency in classrooms. It also offers a chance for interns and districts to learn about one another for a full school year. This experience maximizes the chances that the intern, if hired as a full-time teacher, will become a highly successful teacher in our schools.

Student teachers and interns support both urban and rural districts. This critical work exposes them to a wide variety of socio-economic realities, cultures and needs, and helps them understand the diverse challenges facing a wide range of children and schools. For example, student teachers and interns who may never have considered full-time employment in an urban system may find that their true passion is to work in that setting.

At [Sacred Heart University](#), we have embraced this collaborative, hands-on experiential learning for the past 25 years, and we have robust outreach efforts and long-standing, successful relationships with school systems from New Haven down to southern Fairfield County. Between 55

and 75 students from SHU participate annually, just from our [College of Education](#). Other SHU degree programs, such as nursing and hospitality management, have their own work-study programs. Our Education interns attend summer internship workshops and a student-teaching seminar on campus and must interview with interested schools for assignments matching their preferred subject area. If chosen by the school, they then are assigned to a certified cooperating teacher, a SHU faculty supervisor and a personal mentor in the school.

With the help of the schools we serve, student teaching and internships offer the comprehensive training necessary to be successful in the classroom. In fact, the vast majority of graduates hired as full-time teachers in southern Connecticut come through internship programs. It is another essential benefit provided to Connecticut's towns and cities by private colleges and universities—in addition to their role as employers, the support they offer surrounding communities and the millions of dollars they pour into local economies every year.

Creating highly effective teachers is a key to achieving our mission as a university and to boosting achievement for students in public schools. We are proud of our efforts to help prepare and create the next generation of teachers and school leaders, and we encourage legislators and the public to consider this additional value as debates continue about funding for higher education, meeting tax shortfalls and attracting employers and residents to our state.

David Title is a full-time assistant professor in the Educational Leadership program at Sacred Heart University's [School of Education](#). He is a former superintendent of schools for Fairfield and Bloomfield.