“Partnering for the future” is more than just a slogan for the College of Education; virtually all of its programs and centers exemplify this motto through collaborative efforts with the Washoe County School District (WCSD) and community organizations. Just a few years ago, the idea of establishing a shared vision for these entities began to take center stage. From it, the Community University School Partnership (CUSP) was born.

CUSP, now heading into its fourth year, serves as a clearinghouse for partnerships between the College of Education, WCSD and the community. Each of the more than 20 diverse participating programs and projects, called impact teams, are invested in the goal of strengthening professional education standards by coming together to share resources and ideas, and to take advantage of each program’s particular area of expertise. The purpose of CUSP is to facilitate these partnerships that motivate faculty and teachers to work together to build instructional and assessment initiatives to enhance student and teacher learning.

The effort is co-led by Margaret Ferrara, associate professor in the College of Education, and Salwa Zaki, director of professional learning at WCSD. “CUSP serves as a way to celebrate the relationships that exist among the community, the College of Education, and Washoe County School District,” says Ferrara. “These are important relationships that focus on student and teacher learning.”

The effort has seen great momentum in gaining representation from various Nevada education programs that encompass literacy, special education, STEM education, professional development, educational leadership and more.

Leaders of CUSP’s impact teams are quick to illustrate how they benefit from this unique experience and find common ground. Karen Barsell ’90 (social work), ’91 M.S., CEO and president of United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS), explains that her organization’s participation in CUSP has been incredibly positive. “UWNNS is focused on the goal of doubling the number of third-graders reading on time by 2020,” explains Barsell. “The relationships, resources and expertise we have access to as part of CUSP are extremely helpful, and CUSP also provides an outstanding way to highlight some of the positive changes taking place. Through CUSP, UWNNS is able to showcase its work and find like-minded professionals that are interested in helping us achieve our goal – a true win-win for us.”

UWNNS is just one of a few community organizations currently involved. Ferrara says that while CUSP already has strong representation from the University and school district, partnerships with the community are a vital asset that they would like to grow this coming year. “They are powerful change agents,” Ferrara says of community organizations. “Growing these partnerships is an integral part of the work ahead of us.”

CUSP has already garnered national attention for its distinct take on education partnerships. Education First, a professional services firm, has cited the CUSP project between the College of Education and WCSD as an example of how bold partnerships are effectively transforming...
The Community University School Partnership works to form collaboration between the College of Education, Washoe County School District and key community organizations to strengthen education standards by sharing resources and ideas. CUSP team members from left to right: Sherrie Bonderson ’11 M.S., Michelle Hinkson, CUSP Graduate Assistant Mark Romo ’16 M.Ed., Linda Vancitters ’82, ’07 M.Ed. and Associate Professor of Education and CUSP Co-coordinator Margaret Ferrara.

NevadaTeach, which provides college students in STEM fields the opportunity to augment their degree with the skills necessary to teach middle and high school, is one of more than 20 CUSP impact teams. NevadaTeach is also part of the nationwide UTeach initiative that focuses on tackling the national shortage of secondary education science and mathematics teachers. Pictured are Master Teacher Glenn Waddell Jr. ’09 M.Ed.; Master Teacher Mandi Collins ’02, ’07 M.Ed.; Master Teacher Megan Beckam and Program Coordinator Roxanne Piskel.

the teacher pipeline at local levels. Such close community relationships are rare at colleges of education across the country. National educator preparation organization Deans for Impact, of which College of Education Dean Ken Coll is a member, recently highlighted the college’s efforts at a semi-annual meeting and pointed to strong K-12 partnerships as a powerful tool for creating data-informed feedback loops.

Secondary education student and CUSP graduate assistant Kari Hyland sums it up well: “In the larger picture, CUSP connects individuals and organizations that might not have otherwise partnered, and also contributes to the spirit of collaboration that educators and administrators alike have worked so hard to build.”

To learn more about supporting CUSP, contact Kristen Kennedy ’98, director of development, at kristenk@unr.edu or (775) 784-6873.

The Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) Program, a CUSP impact team, brings outstanding secondary school teachers from around the globe to the United States to further develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills and increase their knowledge about the United States. The program will be heading into its sixth consecutive year this fall.

CUSP Impact Teams

The Community University School Partnership is currently made up of more than 20 impact teams based in northern Nevada, including:

- Dean’s Future Scholars
- Entrepreneurs Assembly
- Envirolutions
- Join Together Northern Nevada
- NevadaTeach
- Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project
- Northern Nevada Writing Project
- Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports Collaborative
- Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) Program
- The Nevada School Transformation Project
- United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra

While CUSP partners generally operate as standalone programs, they gather twice a year to discuss updates and progress toward their goals, share news and brainstorm ideas for continued collaboration. In addition, CUSP hosts an end-of-year showcase of growth and ideas. CUSP’s second annual showcase was held at the University of Nevada, Reno Innovation Center—Powered by Switch.