Elementary Education Department Guiding Principles
November 2014

Our Overarching Commitment:

To prepare teacher candidates who will educate students as citizens for a sustainable, globally interconnected, and diverse society in a way that challenges inequities and promotes social justice.

1. Teacher candidates will develop and enact a strengths-based stance and growth mindset toward themselves and toward learners, their families, and their communities and recognize that all people have assets to draw upon.

A strengths-based stance inspires a teacher to seek out and build upon the particular assets that each learner brings to the classroom. This is enacted through thoughtful and differentiated assessment and teaching practices that enable a teacher to identify and attend to the diverse capacities and needs of each learner. Closely associated is the idea of adopting a “growth mindset” by which the teacher helps students recognize that instead of having fixed abilities like intelligence, all people can develop their abilities through hard work and perseverance. To fully support all learners, a teacher must extend this stance to encompass the families and communities that learners come from, and take steps to identify, learn about, and draw upon those family and community assets in the classroom. Teachers also need to take steps to cultivate school cultures that value linguistic and cultural diversity as assets for learning.

2. Teacher candidates will develop and enact an ethic of care and a sense of responsibility for relating to learners of all ages with receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness.

At the heart of the professional role of teacher is the recognition that the needs and interests of one’s learners come first, ahead of the personal preferences of the teacher. This responsibility is enacted by being receptive to and observant about the physical presence of the learner and his/her interests, preferences, abilities, and needs. It also entails working to establish relationships with all the learners in a classroom. This includes taking responsibility for effectively and efficiently managing the classroom learning community, fostering social interaction and self-discipline, and establishing and maintaining high expectations for all learners.

3. Teacher candidates will develop and enact an understanding of teaching and learning as intellectual and humanizing endeavors.

Teaching is a complex, ever changing and stimulating profession. It defies rigid procedures and practices and demands instead a constant intellectual engagement in ideas about learning, learning theory, child development, subject matter content and pedagogy, equity, and the interactive nature of teaching itself. Teachers must notice things about learners and their interactions, reflect upon classroom and school life, investigate challenges, and adapt their practices. The contexts of teaching and learning are ever changing in response to interactions among students and teachers, in the pursuit of learning and in the daily life of classrooms and schools. Intellectual stamina and insight must
be coupled with compassion and appreciation for the humanizing aspects of teaching and schooling. Candidates need to cultivate attitudes, values, and beliefs for recognizing and supporting the dignity, humanity, and potential of the whole range of learners. They need to develop a critical perspective and a willingness to reflect with integrity and insight upon their own biases, taken-for-granted assumptions, and personal cultural backgrounds/perspectives. They need to be prepared to work with students and their families to co-construct knowledge, engage in a give and take of values, assumptions, and personal culture and experience, and to be an advocate for them in the schooling process.

4. **Teacher candidates will develop and enact a deep understanding of subject matter content, pedagogical content knowledge, and how people learn and develop.**

Deep understanding of the range of subject matter addressed in schools is an essential foundation for effective teaching. Candidates must understand the key concepts and ideas in each subject or area of study and what is the likely progression of learning about them? Teacher candidates also need to learn appropriate and engaging means of structuring and representing subject matter content for teaching and learning, to recognize common conceptions and misconceptions in subject matter disciplines, and to enact effective teaching strategies that can be used to address particular students’ learning needs. In addition, candidates need a foundation of knowledge about how people learn and develop and what to look for and expect from children at different ages. The opportunity to learn each subject well is a fundamental element of our efforts to create and sustain a just, vibrant democratic society.

5. **Teacher candidates will develop and enact a commitment to the fundamentally collaborative nature of teaching and learning and to the importance of collaborative partnerships that promote the learning and well-being of individuals, families, and the community.**

Teaching and learning are fundamentally situated in communities and among people. The basic purpose of public education is to educate learners for participation in democratic society. Within classrooms, teachers need to cultivate a learning community that welcomes, embraces, and challenges the whole range of learners and educates them about ways of interacting productively and respectfully. Teachers need to draw upon the assets of families and the communities in which they live and develop collaborative partnerships to enhance the learning and well-being of students and their families. Teachers also need to embrace the idea of collaborating with colleagues to address the complexity of teaching on behalf of students and families and to develop skills and commitments for generating and sustaining effective professional learning communities.