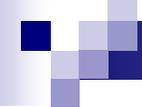


THINKING ABOUT ARSI AND THE AMSP

Mark St. John

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www.inverness-research.org

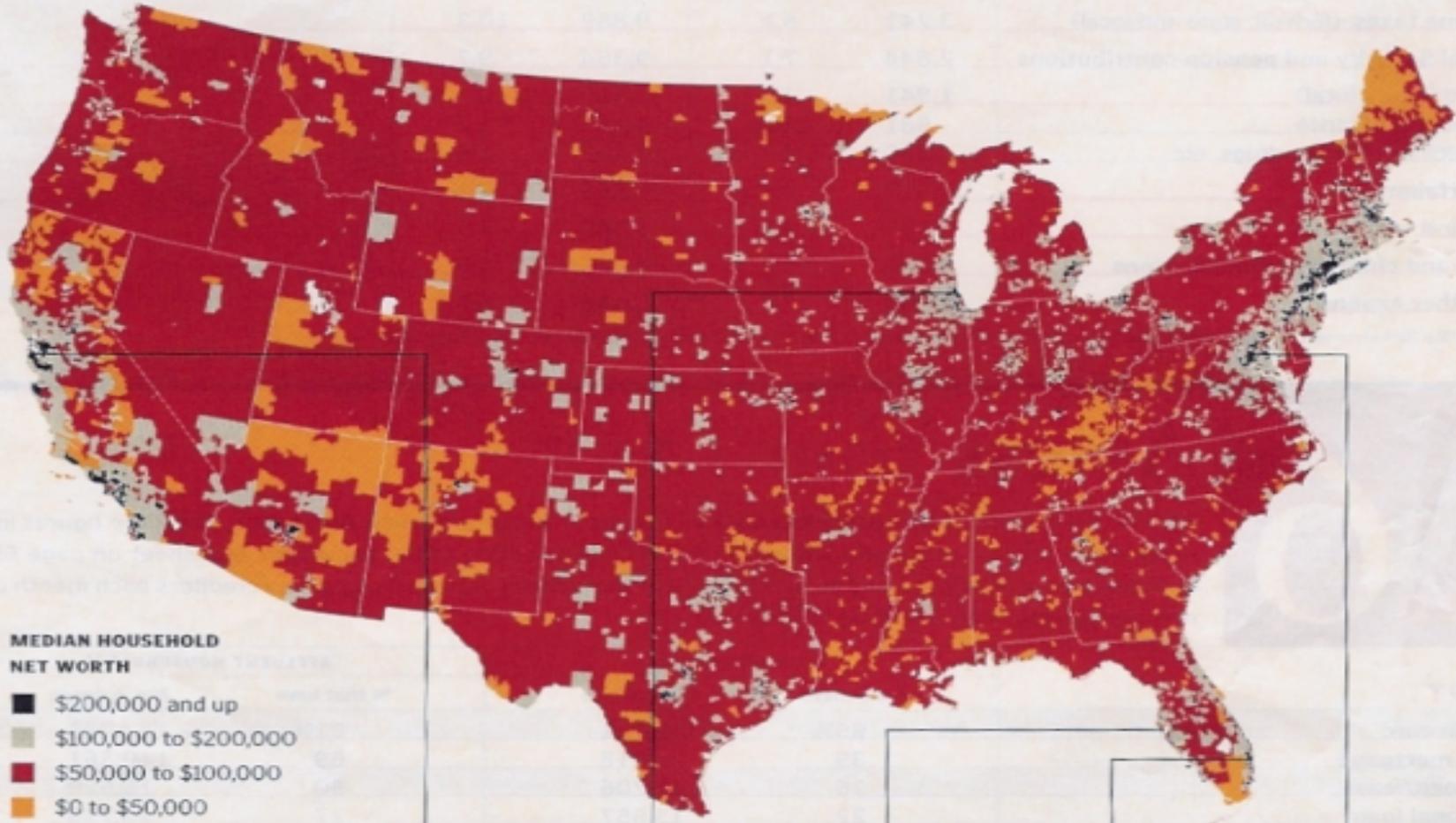


***What I learned from the Rural Systemic
Initiatives --***

***A conference held jointly by ARSI and AMSP
Lexington, Kentucky
April 2000***

THE NATURE OF RSI COMMUNITIES

A MAP OF HOUSEHOLD WEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD NET WORTH

- \$200,000 and up
- \$100,000 to \$200,000
- \$50,000 to \$100,000
- \$0 to \$50,000

FIVE WEALTHIEST ZIP CODES

ZIP CODE: 94027	ZIP CODE: 60043	ZIP CODE: 34228	ZIP CODE: 33480	ZIP CODE: 20004
Atherton, Calif. \$461,107	Kenilworth, Ill. \$439,677	Longboat Key, Fla. \$411,707	Palm Beach, Fla. \$433,765	Washington, D.C. \$432,219

The RSIs serve areas that have been impoverished and depleted over time in many different ways

- *The RSI communities are not only rural and poor, but they are really a sociological phenomenon of the United States. They are rural, but also they are places that have historical residues of poverty ... so you really need to be honest about what the RSIs are doing ... They are addressing some egregious behavior of the United States toward some of these people. So we say Rural Systemic Initiative – but underneath, it's a lot more. It's a whole other ball game, not just rural education...*
- *There is a fatalism that comes along with not having hope... The people in Appalachia are prone to accept their circumstances... they see things as inevitable and they think that they have no control over events and over the future... so there is a deep fatalistic attitude that pervades many communities and families... and this leads to a dysfunctionality that is widely shared....*

A sense of place, and pride in community, family and tradition

- **Place, family, community and tradition are core values in rural communities.**

If we talk about isolation, it is an isolation that we have selected - and want to stay within. I don't see a lot of Navajos or any of the indigenous people wanting to go out there to Los Angeles and try to survive in that setting - they really do want to stay on their own home ground...

A lot of people mistakenly think that people only live in remote areas (in Alaska) because they can't make it in a big city... And I think that quite often in a reform effort when you start talking about trying to change things in rural areas, there is sort of a suspicion on the part of the locals that 'you want us to look like them.' You want us to look like a big city, and we are here because we don't want to be a big city. We like being who we are and where we are.

RSI Communities Are Remarkably Similar

- **While the RSI participants recognized from the outset of the conference that commonalities among them would naturally exist, they were surprised, as were we, to learn how very similar their respective communities were.**

We tend to look at ourselves as coming from the Navajo nation and because of that we believe we are somewhat unique - and that our problems are unique and different from everyone else's. But after listening to the ARSI presentation I realized that if we took out "Appalachia" and replaced it with "Navajo," we wouldn't know the difference.

Understanding Schools And Schooling In Rural Communities

- **Rural schools and school systems are small.**
- **Rural schools and districts are not only isolated; they may also be geographically and politically fragmented.**
- **Rural schools have very limited capacity and resources to devote to their own improvement.**

The same teacher teaches math and science, either K-12, or 7th grade through 12th grade, and when we asked the district to align the curriculum, then she is spending her time trying to do that, maybe driving the bus, and all of these other issues. There are just not enough people....

Poor rural communities have ambivalent attitudes about the value of education

In terms of my own experience with growing up... and observing my dad's desire for us to really become educated...you know, he prayed for my education and wanted me to be educated and at the same time he cried... I never really understood that, for a long time. And then finally one day it dawned on me. He was saying, "I want you to be successful and I want you to go to school, but in doing so, I know that you are going to be leaving this place and you are going to be losing your culture." That saddened him and it made him cry. So the Navajo people saw the school system not as a system that enhanced their own language and culture, they saw it as the enemy.

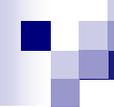
Implications for ARSI and AMSP

- *Need to support local work and leadership development*
- *Need to take a long-term community development perspective*
- *Need to balance national (perspective) with state perspective with local perspective.*



What I learned about ARSI

– and from ARSI



Teacher Partners – A way to develop local leadership

- *The power of a strong leading teacher in a small community*
- *The power of a network of leading teachers*
- *The growth of teacher partners over time – and the customization and evolution of their role*
- *A flexible approach to serving districts at very different points in their development*

The TP as “Standard Bearer”

One of the things that struck me is that at the time ARSI began its work, there really wasn't a keeper of the vision for math and science in those districts. There wasn't someone to lead the charge... there were no – and still are no – math or science supervisors; everyone is a generalist... The ‘central office’ staffs tend to be very small and so the ARSI-supported “teacher partner” became the standard bearer for math and science reform in those districts...

Teacher Partner as Key Capacity

It seems to me like the big issue for all of us is building capacity, however you want to define capacity... If you have a strong local person working with your project, they remain as a residue even after you are gone... Then your work leaves a residue... And if in that person you have put capacity in the district, then the district can continue to build on that legacy...

Local Leadership – The Ability to Customize Improvement Efforts

- *Over the years, we have come to see ARSI's work with districts as developmental in nature. Just as an educator works differently with children at different stages of development, so ARSI is learning to work with counties and districts that vary tremendously in their readiness for reform.*

ARSI influence
(mean ratings)

Develop and support a "point person" for math & science education reform



Develop a committed and empowered core group of people who can support and sustain reform



Create and sustain an overall positive trajectory of the math & science education reform in the district



Develop a cadre of strong math & science lead teachers



Help the district gain knowledge of and mechanisms for assessing field realities



Enhance overall "seriousness" and priority that the district places on math & science education reform



Creating visible examples of success in classrooms and in the district to build upon

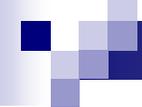


Assuring that the "signal-to-noise" ratio of math & science education reform in the district is strong enough to be significant



Helping to ensure that financial resources necessary to implement a district-wide program are available





ARSI: A multi-level leadership development project

- *School and classroom*
- *District*
- *State*
- *Regional*

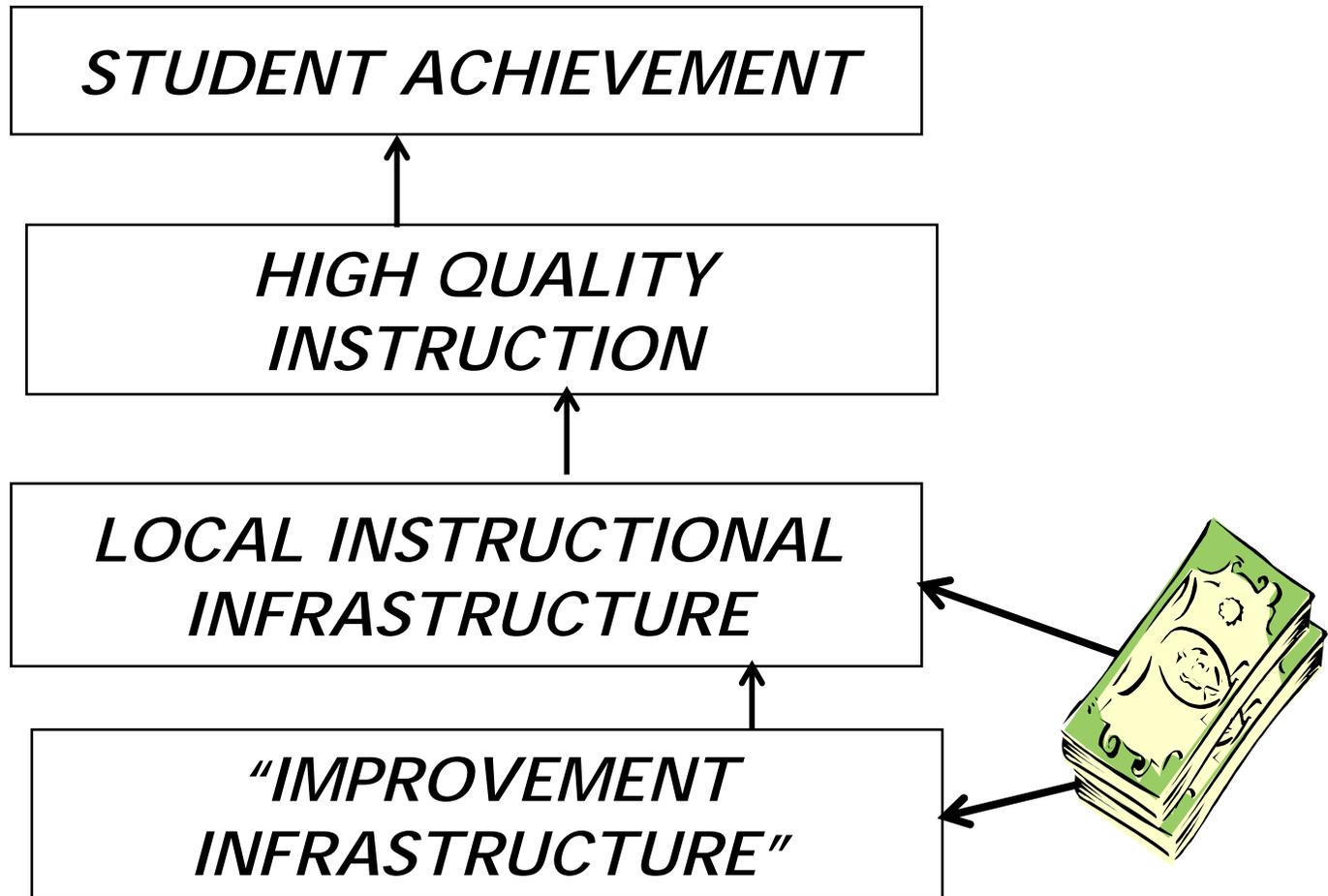
Summary of five-year progress

- *ARSI's most significant contribution is the development of local capacity, particularly in the form of indigenous leadership that has both the ability and commitment to pursue further improvements in mathematics, science and technology education.*

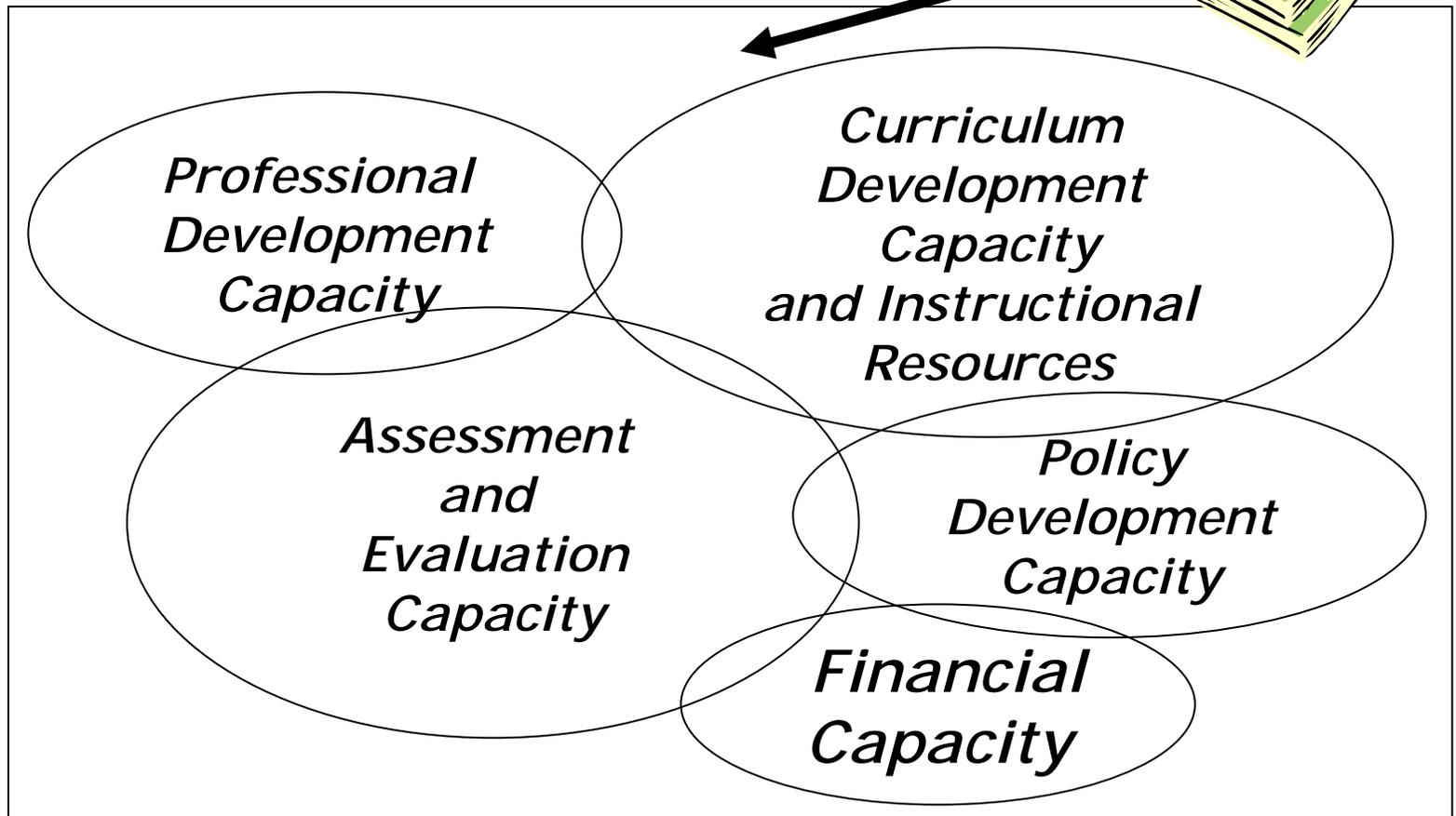


The Improvement Infrastructure

The Nature of Investments Made In Educational Reform



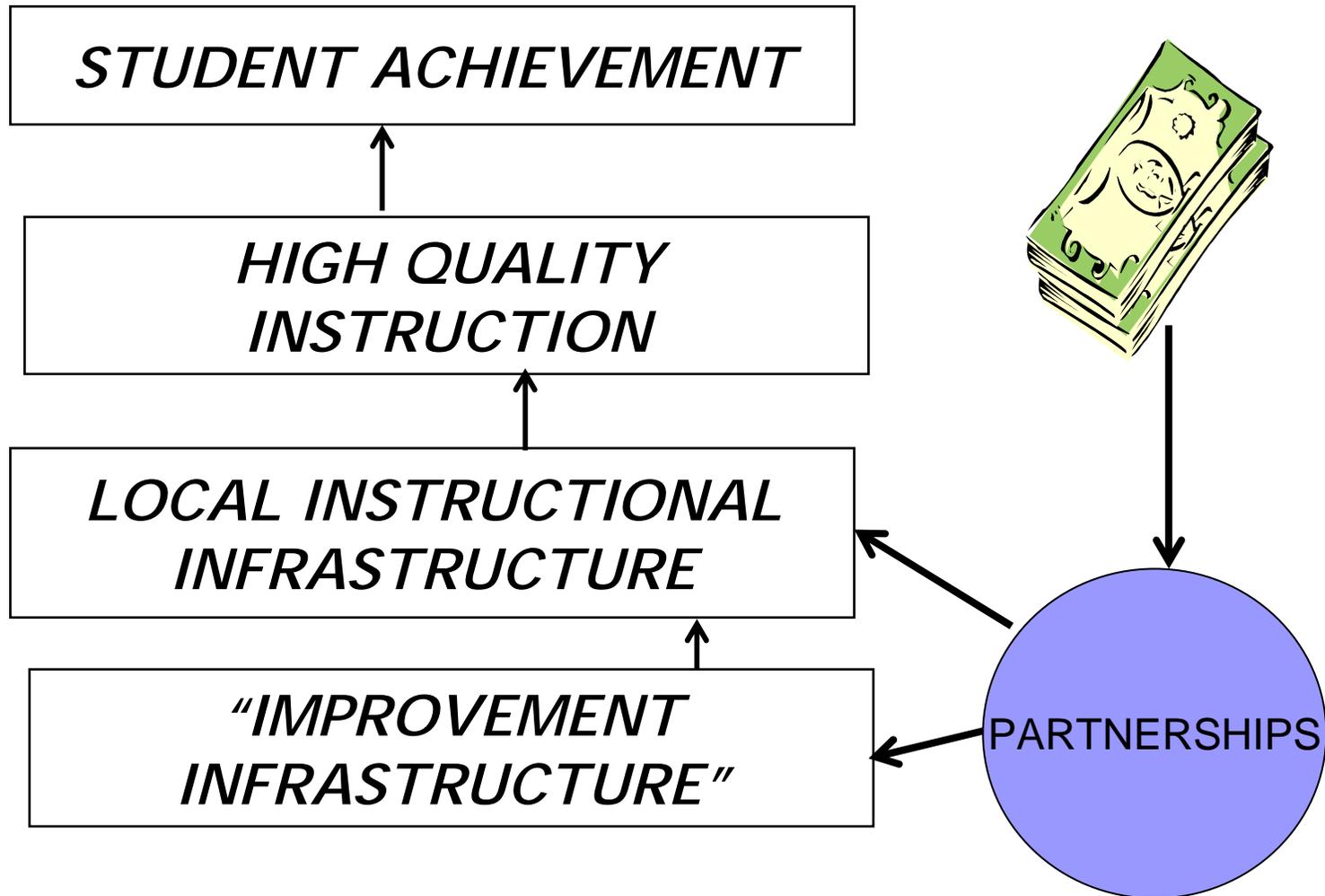
The Improvement Infrastructure





THINKING ABOUT THE AMSP

The Nature of Investments Made Through the NSF MSP Initiative

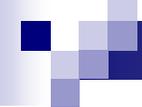


THE PARTNERSHIP(S) TO COME

- *University people and school district people working together to build the Appalachian Math and Science Education Improvement Infrastructure*

Partnerships – A context for people working together

- *Partnerships come from people working together not vice versa.*
- *The shared commitment to important work is both the rationale and the context for the creation of authentic partnerships.*
- *The work of partnerships needs to be initiated and pursued by all sides of the partnership.*



Partnerships generate creative activities that strengthen the system that supports good math and science teaching and learning.

- *Professional development*
- *Student research experiences*
- *Curricular innovation*
- *Assessment practices*
- *Policy review and formulation*
- *Community outreach and advocacy*
- *....*

Some criteria for a good partnership

- *Is there significant level of interaction between partners?*
- *Does the partnerships help focus all partners on the mission and goals of the work to be done - i.e., on improving science teaching and student learning?*
- *Does the partnership provide for a sense of shared ownership of and investment in the work of the project?*
- *Is there a high level of respect and trust between partners? Is there "shared risk and vulnerability"? Does the partnership create honest and genuine dialogue so that all partners can share and learn from each other's perspectives?*
- *Does the partnership allow for individual partners to contribute their strengths, and at the same time, learn things that allow them to further develop their capacities in areas they are not as strong?*
- *Does the partnership grow over time, both broadening the involvement of others and strengthening the depth and quality of its own work?*
- *Does the partnership help individuals understand and then transcend the boundaries of their own institutional cultures and traditions?*
- *Does the partnership create a "win-win" situation so that all partners feel that the benefits to them are greater than the costs involved?*
- *Does the partnership generate, create and support creative activities?*

Rules of Thumb

- *Think both ways*
- *Work at two levels*
- *Get it going, then get it good*
- *Be proactive – ask for what you want; try things out!*



END