



FACULTY SENATE

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 6, 2018
To: Andrew Rogerson, Chancellor, UA Little Rock
John Bacon, CEO, eStem PCS
From: Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, UA Little Rock
Re: Response to Boyette report on the UA Little Rock/eStem partnership

Number: FSM-2018-02

The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate reviewed the Boyette report, *University of Arkansas at Little Rock – eStem Public Charter Schools: Feasibility Enhancement Study* (October 2018). The report identified several areas of concern related to the partnership between eStem and this university. The most notable conclusion was *“While neither institution has realized all the benefits anticipated, at this point in the relationship, the potential benefits to UA Little Rock are minimal, which makes the partnership unbalanced and strained”* (pg. 24). The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate concurs with this assessment, but in stronger terms we view the partnership in its current state as detrimental to the functioning of UA Little Rock and our ability to fulfill our institutional mission.

This is an unfortunate but not unforeseen conclusion: we already pointed to the strain and imbalance in the Faculty Senate recommendation passed in December 2017. However, we do agree with Boyette’s assertion that a positive outcome is possible with the renegotiation of the Memorandum of Understanding that will identify specific benefits for both institutions with defined metrics to monitor success. Our priority now, just as it was last December, is to protect and maintain a positive learning environment for all UA Little Rock students, while at the same time establish an enriching and safe learning environment for the eStem students who would share our campus. It is in that spirit that we make the following recommendations:

Recommendation: Select scenario #3 as the most viable option that results in mutual benefit.

Scenario #3 (pg. 29) provides the optimal framework to reach the full potential of this unique partnership. Keeping the eStem seniors on campus while housing the lower grades at another location alleviates much of the concerns about liability described in the report. (We actually think the report understates the seriousness of this issue.) Seniors, many of whom would be 18 years old, will be better prepared to assimilate into the college campus experience. This option also allows for close oversight of the students’ safety by ensuring developmentally appropriate educational experiences and social interactions. Scenario #4 is a potentially viable option but it does not address the issues of liability and congestion as it would keep 10th and 11th grade students in Larson Hall.

Furthermore, keeping the seniors on campus allows a more manageable number of students (n=325) to integrate into a campus environment where resources and facilities are stretched. The growing eStem student population is placing an unrealistic strain on our student center facilities, walkways, common areas, and parking. With only 325 students, several of the cooperative relationships envisioned by eStem parents are more feasible. It should be noted that the report indicates that most of the other institutions offering high school/college partnerships have much smaller enrollment than the current eStem enrollment, and exponentially smaller than the envisioned eStem enrollment. It is difficult to offer the eStem students a college experience when they outnumber the college students.

Recommendation: Create a blended high school senior/college freshman experience

The report cited data collected from eStem parents indicating that opportunities to earn college credit and to participate in college experiences were advantages to being located on our campus. By limiting this experience to seniors only, the UA Little Rock-eStem partnership might become a capstone senior experience for eStem students. This experience, in partnership with UA Little Rock, would involve integrating eligible seniors into lower-level college courses on campus where they can earn college credit, access faculty expertise, and be involved in student life across campus. Student would have access to many courses that are typically not offered in the high school curriculum due to lack of available resources and qualified instructors. For example, ANTH 1415 Physical Anthropology is an introductory course that serves as a science lab course and introduces students to a discipline and potential career. Additionally, there is a potential for UA Little Rock faculty to collaborate with eStem faculty in developing courses and experiences that leverage some of the unique centers and programs at UA Little Rock, including the STEM Center, Survey Research Center, Nanotechnology, Engineering, as well as use of the various academic support centers such as the Writing Center and the Math Assistance Center.

Furthermore, campus cultural events and academic curriculum could seamlessly enhance and enrich the eStem curriculum. Campus theater and dance productions, art exhibits, student research expos, and other regularly occurring campus activities could be built into the senior curriculum. The high school seniors would become familiar with the rich culture of a college campus and develop a college readiness, thus increasing the likelihood that these students will attend, persist, and graduate from college.

Recommendation: Reorganize the Donaghey Student Center cafeteria space to make it usable for all students, faculty, and staff, and improve processes for free/reduced lunch

The report notes that the attempt to solve the crowding problem in the cafeteria created an unintended consequence of increased congestion in other common areas used by UA Little Rock faculty, staff, and students. Therefore, we recommend that the student cafeteria space in the Donaghey Student Center be reorganized to allow more common areas for groups of students--from both UA Little Rock and eStem--to eat lunch and congregate without paying. With the eStem campus presence limited to 325 seniors, there will be enough space for both student groups. Additionally, we insist that a process be developed to more sensitively serve eStem seniors eligible for free or reduced lunch without these students experiencing the indignity of being required to go through a different line, go to a different room, or otherwise be required to publicly identify their status in order to get their meal.

Recommendation: Exploring areas of potential collaboration between the UA Little Rock and eStem faculties

While we agree with many of the recommendations provided by the Boyette report, not all recommendations were viewed as credible but are worthy of consideration.

- The Graduate Fellows Recommendation, which was based on a program at the Ohio State University, is not a viable option with the size of our current STEM doctoral population. For the foreseeable future, there will not be a reliable stream of graduate students who could serve in this capacity. However, developing innovative secondary and post-secondary STEM curriculum content is highly valued by federal granting agencies. There is a potential to broaden this collaboration to include faculty in STEM areas, graduate students, and eStem teachers in order to seek out these funding opportunities and build institutional capacity.
- Teacher candidate placement is an important aspect of teacher preparation that prepares them for the realities of the classroom. Quality internship placements are critical to the retention of early career teachers once in the field. Petitioning the Arkansas Department of Education to waive the requirement of placing interns with licensed teachers would undermine the reputation of our programs in area school districts, many of which employ our graduates. However, we would recommend exploring ways of developing incentives for eStem teachers to enroll in UA Little Rock graduate teacher preparation programs to meet the requirements for licensure, thus increasing the pool of eligible placement opportunities. Furthermore, many of our faculty can provide mentoring, support, and professional development for eStem teachers in areas of assessment, integrating technology into the learning environment, working with students with special needs, and enriching curriculum for students who are gifted and talented and require more challenge.

Recommendation: Building UA Little Rock and eStem collaboration metrics into the high school's School Improvement Plan (SIP)

A SIP provides a plan for continuous school improvement and defines targeted work for the school to raise the achievement outcomes of its students. Creating a plan that focuses on a proposed blended eStem/UA Little Rock senior experience would create measurable benchmarks to assess the outcomes of the collaboration for eStem students and teachers. Additional metrics would be developed to assess the mutual benefit of the collaboration to include use of facilities and other resources, increased matriculation of eStem students to UA Little Rock, and changes to UA Little Rock enrollment.

It is clear from the scenarios presented in the Boyette report that scenario #3 addresses most of the unintended problems and issues that have arisen out of this unique collaboration as it currently exists. This option presents the most viable plan moving forward and, as reflected in our recommendations, creates the potential for significant opportunities for the students and faculty of both eStem and UA Little Rock.

These recommendations would require an investment of resources on the part of eStem to subsidize scholarships for senior experiences, tuition for dual enrollment, and lab and facility fees. There would also be a significant commitment of resources from eStem to move the 10-11th grade students to another location. The potential benefit of this commitment is an innovative model for a secondary/post-secondary partnership that increases college readiness and improves the college pipeline for students in Arkansas.