As presidents and/or provosts of the New Jersey’s colleges and universities you are being asked to comment on the Relay School of Education’s petition to be recognized as a higher education institution with the authority to grant master’s degrees in education. Your comments are due October 10, 2012.

As deans, directors, and chairs of teacher education programs, we believe the Relay School of Education (RSE) operates as an alternate route training program involved in the practical, clinical preparation of candidates and does not qualify as a degree granting higher education institution. The fundamental distinction between education and training is why we believe the RSE should be denied the authority to grant graduate degrees. The RSE is a narrowly defined training program, designed for a particular type of school, which is defined by a specific style of teaching. At this time, the longitudinal research regarding the impact of this style of teaching on students is not available. While New Jersey colleges and universities have a long history and are strongly committed to producing highly “effective” doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers, the broader mission of graduate and/or undergraduate education is to develop in their students those faculties of the human mind whose powers of intelligence and imagination make all intellectual life possible. While the results of a good education are ultimately vocational in nature, the belief that the primary purpose of education is the development of professional competence is not only misguided, it is extremely dangerous. The ultimate and timeless aim of education, to paraphrase Mortimer Adler, is the development of “free human beings who know how to use their minds and are able to think for themselves.” The RSE falls short of this standard. The narrow scope of the RSE curriculum places it in the category of “training” and is more appropriate for the program’s current alternate route teacher certification status. Elevation of the program to an advanced degree granting institution would necessitate an increase in the depth and breadth of the intellectual and academic development of its students and, at this time, is not evident in the RSE proposal. To continue otherwise diminishes our belief in the power of education, the value and nature of advanced degrees, and does a disservice to the students our institutions serve.

In addition to the broader argument and context described above the following items support the position that the Relay School of Education (RSE) petition should be denied:

- The New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 9A) stipulates that graduate courses should be taught by faculty who engage in research. This is not evident from the materials submitted thus far.

- The RSE is not regionally accredited. Presently, the RSE is a candidate for Middle States Accreditation and would appear to fall short of meeting the requirements outlined in “Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation.” There is some question as to whether New Jersey can authorize a branch campus from an institution in another state that is not accredited in the home state.
• The N.J.A.C. requires that faculty resources in branch campuses parallel those offered by the main campus.

• While the program was granted interim accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as part of Hunter College's Teacher U, there is no evidence that the changes and additions to the curriculum of the RSE would meet accreditation standards in its proposed form. The RSE's accreditation visit is currently scheduled for the fall 2013.

• Additionally, with respect to the curriculum, there is no evidence that the proposed assignments and their measures will provide data that is considered valid and reliable as a measurement of teacher effectiveness. The latter would be necessary for accreditation purposes. Since their accreditation review has not yet taken place, it cannot be determined that the curriculum will effectively meet the necessary learning outcomes.

• Most alternate route programs have considerable faculty oversight of curriculum and coursework and provide feedback related to teaching placements; the proposal for the RSE site in Newark indicates that only one full-time faculty member will be available on-site; all others will be part-time. The students in the program will be discussing their ideas and concerns independent of faculty input and critique.

• There is a lack of evidence, vis-à-vis publications in refereed journals, that the RSE program provides sufficient training to adequately prepare novice teachers to be effective.

• The curriculum lacks a focus on researched best practices and focuses entirely on classroom strategies. Such focus exclusively on strategies provides the "how," but not the "why" of effective instruction. In effect, prospective teachers are being taught to implement strategies without being able to clearly understand the contexts in which those strategies should be employed.

• The curriculum is largely video-based. These "vignettes" are not analyzed by using research from recognized researchers in the field.

Suggested Readings:


http://gothamschools.org/2011/02/14/a-new-graduate-school-of-education-relay-to-open-next-fall/