Denver Public Schools: Chance Meeting at Annual Summit Results in Big Collaboration Back Home

587 words

Amanda Ludwig is a big fan of 100Kin10. Currently working as a Management Talent Specialist, she has been with Denver Public Schools for approximately three years. In that time she's attended two Annual Summits, a brainstorming session at the White House about the challenges facing STEM education, and several regional breakfasts.

"I beg for money to go to these things… 100Kin10 does an excellent job making these events feel important… like the work feels important."

Amanda smiles when recounting the seemingly "random" connections she made at 100Kin10 events. Yet, random often happens on purpose, thanks to careful design and planning on the part of 100Kin10. For example, the Annual Summits offer partner-led sessions that attendees can visit as they wish, creating their own schedule.

Checking her program during last year's Annual Summit in Chicago, Amanda noticed that a session was being facilitated by Colorado School of Mines and University of Northern Colorado, two big partners that she already worked with on a fairly regular basis. Grabbing a seat in the back, Amanda was shocked to learn that Mines/UNC had created a new STEM Teacher Preparation Program.

“They're partnering to do this really incredible work bringing STEM teachers into the city of Denver. It’s crazy that I don't know about this."

Rushing the podium afterward, she exchanged contact information with the presenters and returned to Denver determined to follow up with these exciting connections. She excitedly told her DPS colleagues about her discovery. "Hey, they're building a cadre of really amazing STEM teachers, student-teachers. We need to figure out how to get them into our schools."

Although it took almost a year to get the initiative off the ground due, Amanda and Justin Smith, the Student Teacher leader at DPS, are now consulting with Mines/UNC on their entire student-teacher placement process and were also invited to serve on their Teacher Advisory Group, enabling them to help shape every facet of the teacher prep program.

The Teacher Advisory Group brings in community members from their divisional universities, as well as students and prospective students. Thanks to a 100Kin10 collaboration grant they received in October of 2015, the advisory group will receive a few thousand dollars to cover expenses like transportation and food, which will help keep these valuable voices coming into the room for the next year.

“It's just been this really remarkable experience. Seeing it finally get off the ground and actually take flight.”

Together, they’re working to identify and capture engineering students with the aim of minting new teachers. “It’s an uphill battle,” Amanda acknowledges, “against the perception of teaching, or lack of prestige, especially for students coming out of a renowned university like School of Mines, where they can probably go out and make quite a bit of money.”

In Spring 2017, four (out of eleven) members of the first cohort of student teachers from the Mines/UNC STEM Teacher Preparation Program will be joining DPS in strategically designed teaching positions. For the first time ever, these carefully selected individuals will be graduating from the Colorado School of Mines with two prestigious degrees: engineering and teaching. At DPS, they'll spend one semester student-teaching (as education majors do) so that they really get a sense of what it means to be a science teacher coming out of an engineering degree program.

“In a world where STEM teachers are hard to find and the number of student-teachers is going down pretty dramatically, hiring these engineering teachers is a huge step forward.”