Setting the standard for EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Monroe’s new superintendent trains future principals to lead with instincts for inclusion and equity

AS A VOLUNTEER in her daughter’s kindergarten classroom, Fredrika Smith couldn’t help but notice that some children seemed a little lost. They weren’t smiling as much or participating as enthusiastically as her little girl.

She wondered why. Was it because English wasn’t their first language? Did they feel unwelcome? What could she do to make them feel more engaged and excited about learning?

Fredrika (who goes by “Deka”) has asked those and countless other questions throughout her career as a teacher, principal, school district administrator and now as superintendent of Monroe Public Schools.

A lecturer in UW Bothell’s innovative Leadership Development for Educators (LEDE) program, Deka is training school principals in how to keep social justice, equity and inclusion at the forefront of everything they do. She draws on years of experience forging strong connections between schools and families in diverse communities.

Deka was studying for her doctorate in education when one of her professors at University of Washington — who had “She is uniquely courageous in her commitment to educational equity, especially for kids with special needs, English language learners and students from impoverished backgrounds. She really goes the extra mile to figure out how the system can best meet their needs.”

BRAD PORTIN, DEAN, UW BOTHELL SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
MUCH LIKE THE EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATORS we train, UW Bothell’s School of Educational Studies is constantly embracing new challenges — always striving to meet the emerging and complex needs of K-12 school systems.

One of many examples: Our Expanding Capacity for Special Education Leadership (ECSEL) program is addressing a critical shortage of qualified special education managers in public schools.

“Districts have a hard time finding and retaining people who have the unique set of skills to do this work,” says Dean Brad Portin. “You need someone who’s a strong leader, who’s incredibly mindful of all the federal and state regulations, and who truly understands the needs of special education students and families.”

We’ve added a special education endorsement that general education teachers can earn online so they can more confidently and effectively support students of all abilities in their classrooms.

A rigorous English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement is now embedded into the education master’s degree with a series of courses that exceeds state standards.

And future elementary school teachers graduating with a new bachelor’s degree in Educational Studies will be the first group required to complete their K-8 endorsement with a certification in either special education or ESOL.

“We believe that every teacher is a special education teacher and a second-language teacher,” Dean Portin says. “No matter what level you teach or where, you’re going to have students with special learning needs and those who are learning to speak English.”