Cover Story

Education Specialist Degree in Leadership
A New Degree Expanding Beyond the Master’s Degree

by Dottie Barnes

About the Director
Dr. John Shinsky, Associate Professor of Education

by Jaymes Pyne
new degree offered in the College of Education at Grand Valley State University centers on district leadership and offers expertise beyond the master’s level for more responsible roles in education.

“We are so excited about offering this exceptional leadership program that is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association,” said Dr. John Shinsky, Associate Professor of Education. “It is a great opportunity for our Grand Valley students to obtain the best blend of research, theory, and practice for leading our school systems into the future.”

The Educational Specialist Degree in Leadership expands understanding and perspectives to prepare candidates to take K-12 district leadership positions, such as Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum Director or Superintendent.

“This degree meets the needs of those individuals who want to expand their education beyond a master’s degree, but are not at a point that they want to pursue a doctorate degree,” Shinsky explained.

The specialist degree consists of 30 credits composed of 18 hours of core requirements: six 3-credit courses, a 9-hour cognate in Educational Administration or a 9-hour cognate in Curriculum and Instruction, and a 3-hour course, which is a culminating experience - leadership theory into practice. Seven key areas are emphasized in the program including educational leadership, instructional and curriculum leadership, educational management, organizational and community relations, professionalism in leadership, leadership practices, and educational leadership in a complex state, national and world context.

“This program is about preparing future educational leaders,” said Pat Oldt, Vice President for Planning and Equity. “Many of the current leaders will be retiring over the next few years. We need the very best to take their places.” It is estimated that 70 percent of central administrations in Michigan will be retiring in a five-year period.

There are currently 51 students working toward the degree. “I am elated at the number of students interested in this program, from both the Grand Rapids area and across the state of Michigan,” Shinsky said. “Our faculty has taken great pride in developing the highest quality program possible for our students. We expect that the students who complete our Educational Specialist program will be well prepared to face the difficult challenges of our educational systems, and will make a significant difference in field of education in the future.”

Priscilla Kimboko, Dean of Graduate Studies & Grants Administration, said work on the concept for the new degree goes back more than six years. “It was a huge task for the College of Education and the Graduate Council to work through,” she said. “It was a good challenge and all those involved had a willingness to work hard to ensure rigor and quality.”

At the helm of the new Educational Specialist Degree is Dr. John Shinsky, currently Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Department Chair in the College of Education at Grand Valley State University.

Dr. Shinsky spent 27 years in the Lansing Public School District, first as a classroom teacher, then as an administrator and Director of Special Education, and finally as Area Director of 14 southside Lansing schools. He received his Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree and Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Educational Administration all at Michigan State University, and has served on many local, state, and national boards.

As an undergrad at MSU he was a First Team Academic All-American football player.

While Dr. Shinsky has had much professional success, a major focus in his life is also on his philanthropic projects. While conducting training in Texas, he became aware of the deplorable conditions orphans faced across the border in Matamoros, Mexico. This hit very close to home for John because he had also lived in Parmadale Orphanage in Parma, Ohio.

Because of this significant event in his life, Dr. Shinsky felt the drive to give back to others in need and show them success and care as he was shown. After meeting with numerous community members, John began what would become La Ciudad de Los Niños, The City of Children of Matamoros.

Through careful planning and contributions, a new orphanage was designed. The layout consists of multiple buildings including dorms and vocational training centers, a soccer field, and a school within walking distance. Dr. Shinsky is also planning on adopting a local schoolhouse as well, and by June 5th of this year he hopes to have 5 buildings in the orphanage finished, which will give the non-profit organization access to further grants based on spending and development expectations.

Many community members have given greatly and supported the project locally, statewide, and nationally. “There have been significant contributions from the Grand Rapids area that I am very proud of,” Dr. Shinsky remarks.

Students of Grand Valley State University, Michigan State University, and community members are encouraged to donate and volunteer time at the site in Matamoros, Mexico as the project progresses. One-hundred percent of all donations go towards developing and maintaining the orphanage.

For information on giving to The City of Children Organization or for additional information visit: www.shinskyorphanage.com.

Donations can also be given directly to: Capital Region Community Foundation 6035 Executive Drive, Suite 104 Lansing, MI 48911