Written by Tushar Rae
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Students stepping into Longfellow Elementary in Rock Island this school year will notice physical changes: a new media center and library, a new cafeteria, and a renovation that has added four new classrooms. But a more important change will be the school's new formal partnership with Augustana College.

The relationship will bring a liberal-arts-based curriculum to Longfellow - a contrast to the No Child Left Behind-forced shift in primary education that emphasizes reading and math skills to the exclusion of other subjects. Though the *content* of the curriculum will still conform to district standards, the *way* that content is presented will change: The focus will move to collaboration among students, small-group and individualized instruction, interdisciplinary learning, thematic teaching that attempts to make the coursework relevant, and the fine arts.

A No Child Left Behind-influenced curriculum "doesn't have anything to do with creative

problem-solving, imagination, collaboration - all of these skills we need to survive in the next millennium," said Pat Shea, an assistant professor of education at Augustana who was part of the planning team for Longfellow. "If we don't get those things taught, it doesn't matter how many facts we know. ... We are so off-target about what it means to be an educated person, and I think we as educators have the first line of responsibility to start speaking to that."

Investing in Longfellow

In early 2007, Rock Island/Milan School District Superintendent Rick Loy was deciding which elementary schools to close because of the district's declining enrollment and rising costs. Familiar with the informal partnership between Augustana and Longfellow (the schools are less than five blocks apart), Loy approached Augustana President Steven Bahls and asked the college to make a capital investment in the school.

Bahls declined, and in September Loy proposed a partnership without a capital investment. Bahls presented it at a faculty meeting the next day to a warm reception.

The school district and college formed a planning team that in November visited Thomas Metcalf Elementary School, the lab school at Illinois State University. Metcalf is used to model educational methods and theories, and to conduct educational research. During the visit the planning team interviewed faculty members, parents, and students, and saw how teacher candidates can be used in elementary schools. "After we left that place," Loy said, "we were more determined that not only *could* we make this work, that we *will* make this work."

In January 2008, the planning committee gave way to a development team of teachers from the Rock Island school district and faculty from the Augustana education department. The group began work on a liberal-arts-based curriculum and eventually helped select the teachers for the new Longfellow.

Moving Beyond Testing

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