

From Good to Great: Designing a PDS Partnership that Increases Student Achievement by Preparing Better Educators

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Introduction

The College of Education at Rowan University has held a long and continuing commitment to the tenets of the Professional Development School (PDS) movement. The first PDS Partnership began in 1991 at Cooper's Poynt Family School in Camden, NJ. Since then additional schools have been added to the Rowan PDS Network. Two schools in the Rowan's network—Holly Glen Elementary and Edward R. Johnstone Elementary Schools—have a long history of exceptional commitment to continuous growth by all P-12 faculty and university members.

Not given to sitting back on past achievements, the partners understand and cultivate a culture of inquiry, reflection, and growth. The vision for these partners encompasses a fierce dedication to an essential question that goes to the heart of the Rowan PDS Network's mission: How can universities and school districts align our concurrent and mutual goals to increase student achievement by preparing and developing better teachers in our K-12 schools? The work conducted as PDS partners has answered this essential

question. This was evident when the partners applied and were awarded the 2013 National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement.

In this article we focus on the partnership of Holly Glen Elementary and Edward R. Johnstone Elementary Schools, two of the oldest schools in the current Rowan PDS Network. We describe the process we undertook to complete the NAPDS Exemplary Award application. We begin with a description of the resources available from the Association and how these resources were used to guide the writing of the proposal. This description is then followed by a summary of how we completed each of the application's elements, highlighting key evidence of how we addressing the NAPDS Essentials. We conclude the article with a discussion on how this process helped to reflect on the partners' future goals.

Resources

Each year the NAPDS award winner is asked to publish a summary of their application in *School-University Partnerships*. We began our application

process by reading the previous winners' articles. Each winner approached their article very differently, but they each provided examples of their work, which addressed each element of the application. This was helpful because we could begin to compare and contrast our work to what each element required.

Next, we began with an outline of our own application. We soon realized that each element that needed to be addressed in the proposal application aligned with one or more of the nine PDS Essentials.

With our outline in place we began to brainstorm areas of our PDS work that addressed each of eight elements. The outline soon became our working document and eventually the final draft of our proposal. Throughout the process of writing the proposal, we had several questions, so we emailed the award committee chairperson for answers. This was our process and what follows is our final product.

In alliance with the "Back to the Basics of PDS Theme" for the 2013 PDS National Conference, our narrative will be centered on the four broadly-recognized purposes of Professional Development School work, which include preparing the next generation of educators, providing professional development to sustain current educators, engaging in collaborative inquiry designed to further the profession, and making a positive difference in the learning of P-12 students. These four strands, along with our adherence to the above essential question, serve as bright lights to guide us in our work.

Context

Holly Glen Elementary School is located in Williamstown, New Jersey and serves approximately 705 students, kindergarten through fourth, and employs over 100 faculty/staff members. Seventeen percent of students at Holly Glen are on an IEP while 7% have limited English proficiency (LEP). The student population is somewhat diverse. One percent of the students are American Indians, 5% Asian, 9% Hispanic, 18% African American and 66% are Caucasian. Holly Glen has been part of

Rowan's PDS Network for over a decade. Dr. Stacey Leftwich serves as Rowan's liaison to Holly Glen, also known as our Professor in Residence (PIR). Within the PDS structure, Holly Glen utilizes the faculty and students at Rowan University to enhance their young learners' achievement, focusing on the theme of teaching and learning, thus, creating a true learning community. Holly Glen's mission is to develop the potential and uniqueness of the individual student so he/she becomes an effective participant in an evolving global society.

Johnstone Elementary in Vineland, New Jersey serves approximately 450 students, kindergarten through fifth grade, and employs approximately 80 faculty/staff members. Johnstone serves a diverse population and delivers programs in bilingual, behavior disorders, LEADS, and affective education. Twenty-one percent of students at Johnstone are on an IEP while 33% are classified as having LEP. Students come from diverse home languages including English (54%), Spanish (40%), Ukrainian (.8%), Russian (2.5%), Turkish (.8%), Chinese (.5%), and Panjabi (.4%). Johnstone began as a Professional Development School in partnership with Rowan University in 2001, contributing to the revision of the college of education's teacher candidate evaluation form, participating in the development of TLC I rubrics and assignments, and piloting the co-supervision model. Dr. Valarie Lee served as Rowan's PIR from 2006–2012. The current PIR is Dr. Cori Meredith. Johnstone's mission is based on the conviction that all students can learn and that learning is the result of strong partnerships between parents, teachers, and community as well as the larger educational community. By embracing the strong belief that all students can learn, they weave their rich diverse community into all aspects of student learning.

Essential 1

The mission statement of the two partnerships is broad in outreach and scope to achieve the following two fundamental cornerstone themes: increased student achievement for all students,

and the professional preparation of teacher candidates, university, and K-12 faculty based on reflective inquiry directed at the improvement of practice. These two PDS partnerships do not operate in a top-down model but rather with the input and full participation of the greater educational and school community. As stated in the above demographics of each site, students come from diverse settings and bring a rich variety of cultures and experiences. Meeting the needs of all students forms the core of our important work. The following presents the outreach and scope of our efforts to provide meaningful and rich experiences to all students in the subsequent essentials.

Essential 2

PDSs frequently host university students for their clinical experiences and pilot new approaches to preparing the next generation of effective teachers. Holly Glen and Johnstone were the first to implement a yearlong clinical practice model for undergraduate students. Holly Glen and Johnstone also implemented a course on site. Coursework required practicum interns to research the development of students' progression of learning and strategies for achieving success for all students. This coursework was vital to building their expertise of the curriculum upon their return to the school to complete their final experience.

After reviewing one candidate's weekly reflection during her full-time teaching, it was noted that she was knowledgeable in her grade's standards and was able to reflect on her ELL students' understanding of the curriculum. When she found weaknesses in her assessments, she sought out more effective assessments through collaboration with her grade level peers. Her knowledge of the curriculum led to her revising her lessons and assessments to be more effective. Another intern found comfort in teaching mathematical concepts simply because she was in the classroom since the beginning of the school year and observed the evolution of the series, specifically the vocabulary and the format. As she witnessed students learning new concepts

as they were introduced, she was better able to understand the explanations and timing of how the materials were presented to students. She then used this expertise of the curriculum to confidently create differentiated lessons to meet the needs of the students in her math groups. Surveys completed by the mentors provided evidence that this group of interns was better prepared than interns from previous years. The data showed that the strategies that they implemented in lessons were more effective and demonstrated better understanding of the curriculum as a result of more time spent learning the curriculum while in the classroom.

This "Honors' Clinical Practice" course was co-developed by university and P-12 teachers at Johnstone Elementary School who will serve as collaborating teachers for these candidates. This experience is designed to help teacher candidates to develop scholarly inquiry in the teaching-learning environment. Honors' Candidates will also conduct a Lesson Study Methodology within their learning community.

The four-tiered lesson study within the Honors' Clinical Practice model is planned as a four-tiered inclusive process. Lesson Study Communities are planned for the teacher candidates, the collaborating teachers, the university supervisors, and the site administrators. This is a ground-breaking initiative. Progress for this initiative is shared at the PDS Council Network Meetings. Additionally, a doctoral candidate will be conducting her dissertation study on the transformational impact on the four layers of Lesson Study.

Essential 3

The annual Self Study Report provides an assessment process to support the continued development of the partnership. This thorough analysis of the work of the partnership includes conclusions, standings, and recommendations. The recommendations provide a clear focus for the next year. In September, the site-based leadership teams meet to review the identified area of concern and the professional development initiatives. In addition, the PDS Council

Network Meetings provide a forum to share resources that are funded by Rowan University College of Education and the Garden State Partnership for Teacher Quality. At the risk of sounding repetitive, the following initiatives are identified as PD goals for new groups of PD teachers. These PD programs will be ongoing because of the nature and the size of the group of teachers that participate. It is our experience that there is greater transformational success and institutionalization of skills when smaller focused groups of like-minded teachers are drawn into a PD such as Lesson Study. When teachers enthusiastically endorse programs to other teachers, the spark of learning and growth is ignited. This is an encouraging trend. The research supports “teachers teaching teachers” as transformational.

Essential 4

In support of our shared concurrent and mutual goals to increase student achievement by preparing and developing better teachers, the GSPTQ grant and Rowan University have funded the National Board Certification Professional Development known as “Take One!”. Teachers who are National Board Certified are shown to be better prepared to increase P-12 student achievement. This was a mutually determined innovation discussed by Dr. Louise Karwowski, the principal of Johnstone Elementary School, and Dr. Sharp, former Dean of the College of Education. According to research conducted by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, teachers who have achieved National Board Certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) significantly outperform their peers who are not Board Certified on 11 of 13 key dimensions of teaching expertise. According to a study released by the National Board Professional Teaching Standards, National Board Certified Teachers have a positive impact on student achievement, teacher retention, and professional development (<http://www.nbpts.org/resources/research>).

Johnstone Elementary enthusiastically embraced this initiative. Take One is basically the first step toward full National Board Certifica-

tion. Fifteen teachers from PDS schools are enrolled in the first cohort. The proposal will be offered to other Rowan-PDS partnership teachers. In addition, University PIRs provide demonstration lessons to the teachers at their respective sites. Lessons are always conducted on the days that the clinical candidates are in the classroom observing. Allowing the interns to see their university professor teaching young learners helps to understand practice that is being learned in the university course. The most valuable part of these lesson demonstrations is the reflective conversations that take place post lesson.

Teachers are also invited to demonstrate teaching strategies for undergraduate teacher candidates as well. Teachers are invited to teach literacy strategy/skill lessons to students enrolled in the onsite literacy course. In addition, students from Holly Glen’s PIR’s children’s literature course present a lesson to Holly Glen students and the classroom teacher evaluates the lesson.

Essential 5

Holly Glen and Johnstone Elementary Schools participate in the annual New Jersey Professional Development Conference held at William Paterson University. Teams of university and P-12 faculty share their work with other PDSs in the state of New Jersey. This conference is funded by the Garden State Partnership for Teacher Quality. In addition, both school partners presented at a 2009 PDS conference at Penn State. This is, of course, in addition to the National Association of Professional Development Schools Conference. PDS members are called upon to present their work to the educational community. Members include, but are not limited to university PIRs, school site coordinators, P-12 administrators, P-12 faculty/staff and teacher candidates.

Essential 7

Representatives from all PDSs meet formally every other month as part of the PDS Council Network to share the work of the partnerships

that encompasses all four strands of PDS work. Network co-chairs are chosen by vote every year, one from the P-12 site and one from the university. The organizational relationship is structured to create avenues for collaboration, reflection, and communication. This is accomplished by conducting formal and informal meetings, which are held on a regular basis, with the meetings held at rotating PDS school sites.

An important question emerged during formal and informal conversations: How can we nurture and sustain the delicate yet vital relationship of the teacher candidate and the collaborative teacher? This ultimately led to restructuring the experience for the university students. A “Mix and Mingle” initiative was created. Holly Glen identified the need for a better process in selecting and placing candidates. Prior to the official start of the junior level practicum, candidates are invited into Holly Glen classrooms to observe potential collaborating teachers.

This process is twofold. First, they are observing how the in-service teachers implement differentiated literacy instruction. Second, candidates are observing the in-service teachers to determine if his/her classroom is a place that the intern would like to conduct his/her practicum experience. Then interns participate in a “Mix and Mingle” luncheon to exchange “getting to know you” conversations. Similar to speed dating, the participants casually share questions and answers with the purpose of finding a potential match for their practicum experience. Candidates are then paired with a collaborating teacher based on input from both parties forming a relationship that could continue the following semester.

Using this model, candidates have become more confident and can ‘hit the ground running’ in their clinical practice placement. When this ‘teaching team’ is grounded in initial trust, both can concentrate on their P-12 students. According to one teacher, “The Mix and Mingle is an opportunity for a teacher to find a college student that shares the same level of excitement for teaching young readers. My clinical intern and I were paired at a Mix and

Mingle and shared a successful clinical internship. Since our dispositions and teaching styles were similar, we were able to create a yearlong, co-teaching environment for our first graders.” Our data show that this type of relationship occurred more frequently in the yearlong model set-up than it did when the clinical experience was only a semester long.

The “PDS Research Group” is used as a forum to disseminate research to a larger professional audience. These groups meet monthly to share current research about an area of interest. The group is also a forum to write up findings on conducted research and submit as conference proposals and/or journal manuscripts. Groups begin as bi-weekly research book clubs and later bi-monthly research writing groups. One of the groups in another PDS is working on a study that defines metro-rural issues in education today. This title is important to us in southern New Jersey because many of our districts are in rural settings yet encounter urban issues that might be otherwise overlooked, given the geography. Although this particular study group is in another PDS from our Network, the findings will have implications for Johnstone and Holly Glen teachers. This study will be shared with Holly Glen and Johnstone teachers during the PDS Council Network Meetings as well as being published in the PDS Newsletter to assist teachers in the understanding of the contextual factors that affect our P-12 students. This is an example of how the organizational structure provides a venue for reflective collaboration and the dissemination of research among all PDS members in our Network.

Essential 8

The faculty and staff at Rowan University as well as the members of Holly Glen and Johnstone all play active roles in each of the four strands. The “Professors in Residence” (PIR) role is held by a university faculty member who serves as a liaison between the university and the school. PIRs are responsible for communicating information to and from both settings, for modeling in-service and pre-service teacher-lessons, super-

vising teacher candidates in their clinical practice placements, reporting achievements, and for requesting and implementing resources necessary for all innovative programs. The PIR meets regularly with the P-12 site leaders to organize and manage professional development for all parties (PDS faculty/staff and university pre-service teacher candidates). The PIR, in conjunction with the site members, is responsible for co-writing the annual Self Study, which includes goals for teacher preparation. PIRs assist PDS teachers to co-write proposals and to co-present at PDS conferences.

PIRs hold the dual role as liaisons and internship supervisors. Supervisors are responsible for evaluating teacher candidates. Together with collaborating teachers, supervisors complete a mid-term/final evaluation and submit the documentation for teacher certification. The Coordinator of the Garden State Partnership for Teacher Quality Grant oversees and funds the pilot programs intended to initiate exciting research based programs designed to prepare the next generation of teachers. Two examples of grant-funded initiatives are Pre-service Lesson Study and the National Board Certification Take One! Professional Development Program. Finally, the Co-Chairs of the PDS Council Network facilitate the bi-monthly meetings in which representatives from each site intercommunicate strategies designed to increase P-12 student achievement. The co-chairs represent one P-12 member and one university member and are elected by the council members.

Essential 9

Holly Glen, Johnstone, and Rowan University distribute resources and rewards and recognize PDS work in multiple ways. Every year, teacher candidates are nominated and recognized for their outstanding achievements in the clinical practice experience through the "Outstanding Achievement Award." Outstanding candidates are honored at the College of Education Reception that is held following each semester. Also, at this time the new cohort of Honors' Clinical Practice students present their research and they are duly recognized. Additionally, pre-

service teachers who present at the College of Education Retreat are honored for their leadership roles.

Rowan University's College of Education provides the resources for PDS teachers and Professors in Residence (PIRs) to apply for mini-grants. Many of our accomplishments highlighted in the graphs in the appendix are funded by these mini-grants. As well, achievements by PDS teachers and PIRs are featured articles in the Rowan PDS Newsletter. The first edition was published in 2012. Prior to this newsletter, individual site based newsletters were published. This is the first designed to share research among all six of our PDS partners, three of which are new PDSs. The GSPTQ grant has funded the publication and circulation of this newsletter, as well as paid a stipend for the first editor. The editor will collect inquiry-based articles from the PDS members for subsequent editions. Subsequent editions will be quarterly. A comprehensive network newsletter is an improvement in how research and initiatives are shared across the educational community.

Future Initiatives and Goals

We continue to appreciate the saying "It's the journey, not the goal." This NAPDS award application process gave us a fresh vantage point on our PDS work. While the short term goal was to be recognized by our PDS peers for the accomplishments of the partnerships, the real advantage was the process itself. We went from the middle looking out to a full 360 degree panoramic landscape of our work and how to extend new initiatives to other members of the partnership.

The Rowan-Holly Glen/Johnstone Partnerships embrace a culture of growth. In his book, Jim Collins writes, "Good is the enemy of Great" (Collins, 2001). The Rowan-Holly Glen and Rowan-Johnstone PDSs have a long history of "good" practices and evidence of student achievement. Our partnership does not rest on its laurels. We look forward and we plan for a pathway to "great." We are dedicated to the question posed on page one. This is the

question that drives our growth toward great teachers who will increase academic student achievement: How can universities and school districts align our concurrent and mutual goals to increase student achievement by preparing and developing better teachers in our K-12 schools? ^{SUP}

References

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