

Broadening the Scope of PDS Liaisons' Roles in Community Schools

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ABSTRACT: Professional Development School liaisons are accustomed to developing relationships between their respective universities and partner schools. When the partner school is also a “full service” or “community” school, the partnership’s dynamics change. This article describes the expanded roles of two PDS liaisons as they negotiated the new dimensions of working to facilitate collaboration among all the partners in a full service community school while fostering a focus on whole child education. Qualitative data sources from the classroom teachers, partners, and liaisons demonstrate how NAPDS’ Essentials, 1, 3, and 8 are fundamental to the success of all partners in a full-service PDS community school.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; #3/Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; #8/Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

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Professional Development School (PDS) liaisons are the “glue” that sustain university/school partnerships and serve as the conduit between the two partners. Central to the work of liaisons is the ability to advance the partnership’s collective mission by serving in several capacities. While most PDS liaisons find themselves serving as resource finders, problem solvers, and critical friends, liaisons who work in the unique setting of a PDS

within a community school engage in expanded roles. Not only do they serve as the link between the school and university, but they also function as the bridge between the several partners co-located at the school site.

The PDS liaison is the common denominator among all partners and works closely with the personnel of the community school’s partnerships. In doing so, the roles of these individuals shift beyond a sole focus on the school and university partnership to include the seamless integration of the PDS, along with the co-partners of the community school. By weaving the PDS into all aspects of the

community school, liaisons foster a collective mission to help all constituents successfully negotiate with the wide range of professionals who comprise a community school model.

Full Service Community Schools

Full service or community schools are public schools serving as hubs of programs and services for community-based organizations located within the school building. Their programs and services are offered before, during, and after regular school hours to ensure that children are physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially ready to learn when they enter the school building (Children's Aid Society, 2011; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005). The full service or community school is unique in that it hosts all community agencies on-site. These community agencies provide easy access to programs for children and their families in the areas of health, social services, and youth development—while merging these with best educational practices. The community school mission supports children's overall developmental and academic needs while simultaneously strengthening families and neighborhoods (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Santiago, Ferrara, & Blank, 2008).

Fundamental to the community schools' mission is educating the whole child. Given that community schools are most often located in high poverty areas, which often suffer from limited resources of all types and a multitude of socio-economic needs, the pooling of resources from community partners forms the perfect collaboration through which to support children and their families (Gómez, Ferrara, Santiago, Fanelli, & Taylor, 2012). With a focus on partnerships as the building blocks that promote student learning, community schools have the power to transform educational outcomes for the most needy of students and families.

Community School Context

The authors of this qualitative project are two full-time tenured college faculty members serving as PDS liaisons in two community schools within the same suburban district. We are required to spend a minimum of two days per week at the public elementary schools overseeing all aspects of PDS work. This includes the supervision and placement of student teachers, teaching on-site graduate and undergraduate courses, and providing professional development to the schools' teachers and staff.

Our full service community schools network consists of five partnerships that support the “whole child” philosophy: (a) Open Door, a school-based medical health service provider, (b) The Guidance Center, a school-based social and emotional intervention service of social workers and psychologists, (c) OASIS, an afterschool enrichment program, (d) Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), a provider of adult education programs, and (e) our PDS school-university partnership.

As we negotiate the complex setting of a community school, we experience what Zeichner (2010) called *boundary spanning*, the formal sharing of responsibilities by education professionals that allow teachers and university faculty to move fluidly and comfortably across roles. Boundary spanning activities often place teachers in the role of mentor, collaborator, advocate, expert, and learner. These generally require an expanded set of skills not usually associated with the role of the teacher.

Likewise, as liaisons in a community school, we have begun to span boundaries as our roles have widened to include collaboration with all the educational, social, medical, and mental health personnel serving the students in our partnership school. In doing so we discovered that our roles have expanded and stretched beyond that of the traditional PDS liaison. We now find ourselves in a network of several partners, not just a single

partnership between our college and the public school. One of our goals is to seamlessly embed NAPDS Essential 1, a comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community within the school's community school and whole child education context. In these expanded roles we are called upon to ensure that classroom teachers and pre-service teachers in our charge have a thorough and thoughtful understanding of the mission and purpose of community schools. Our experience has shown us that teachers must believe that the events that children experience outside of school critically impact their learning. Therefore, as liaisons in this context, we must heighten individuals' and groups' awareness of the complex interconnectedness between a child's home life, community, and school experience.

Expanding Roles

With the increased number of partners involved in our school as a result of its full service or community school orientation, the PDS liaison has evolved into the nucleus of all the partnerships (see Figure 1). The liaison must serve as an ally in the classroom, communicating with and relating directly to teachers and the other partners and taking into consideration the various relationships among these partners and the services they provide students. For example, while OASIS, the afterschool program, works directly with the child and interacts with the parents and the school administrators, the program coordinator has minimal contact with the teacher or the pre-service teachers of the children who attend the after school program. The PDS liaison bridges the gap between the teacher and the afterschool program by consulting with the classroom teachers about their



Figure 1. *Multiple Relationships of a PDS Liaison in a Full Service Community School*

The PDS liaison becomes the nucleus of collaboration among the many partners in the full service community school.

students' tutoring needs and arranging for communication between the after school program provider and the teachers.

Since the community partners generally pull students out of the classroom individually or in small groups during instructional times in order to provide service, the teachers often encounter conflicts between completing the curriculum within the allotted time available and their commitment to cooperating with these service providers. Therefore, as liaisons we frequently act as advocates for the partner agencies by guiding the classroom teachers and pre-service teachers through the realities of working with these still-new partners. We also work with the community partners to help them understand the roles and concerns of the teachers and the students' families, as well as those of all the other partners.

As PDS liaisons we are accustomed to supporting faculty as they apply educational theory to practice. Once we go beyond instructional strategies and methodologies, we encounter other layers of bureaucracy to navigate in order to collaborate with additional partners. Developing a sense of collaboration between partnerships in the community school is critical to community school work. We extended NAPDS Essential 3 to include the professional growth of the all partners working at the school, not only the

teachers. PDS liaisons in community school often take on the additional responsibility of ensuring that teachers value the work of school partners, that all partners value each others' work and that all of us focus on what is best for children's education.

Exploring the Expanded Liaison Roles

Intuitively we knew that serving as PDS liaisons in a community school was somewhat different and would likely involve more responsibilities than those involved with working with a single university-school partnership. We knew that there would be more demands on our time. We knew we were interacting with more personnel by collaborating with the other community school partners. Aware of these shifts and new roles, we began to explore question, "What is the PDS liaison's role in a community school?" Using a qualitative research lens, we informally explored the multitude of roles and the changes that occurred for us as liaisons in these full service community schools. Data were collected in the form of fieldnotes, observations, notes on conversations and meetings, our personal reflections, and assigned reflective activities from on-site college courses.

Observational Findings

The initial and most visible difference we observed were those related to negotiating physical space within the schools and management of our time at the school. By virtue of the number of partners, PDS liaisons are now committed to attend additional individual and joint partners' committee meetings and advisory boards. Traditional committee membership in our PDS network includes monthly PDS working committee meetings, bimonthly consortium meetings and semiannual PDS Advisory meetings, as well as our individual PDS's monthly faculty and PDS leadership

meetings. In a full service or community PDS, our attendance is also requested at each partner's monthly meetings, the Community School Advisory Board meetings, and the Joint Community School Advisory Board of our two PDS community schools. Usually we cannot accommodate these additional meetings within our two required days per week at the schools. We no longer solely represent and serve our individual partner, the college. Now we must incorporate and live the whole child philosophy through and with our other partners in the school.

We found ourselves taking the information gained through meetings with the other partners and 'teaching' it to the classroom teachers and pre-service teachers, thus serving the role of advocate for each community partner. This involved working with individual partners and between community partners. For example, the health service partner, Open Door, reported the need to increase student participation in their asthma program. They reached out to the classroom teachers, but found limited support other than making sure the permission slips were sent home. The PDS liaison discussed the asthma program in the student teaching seminar which moved a student teacher to incorporate the topic in a health lesson. The student teacher sought and received the support from the Open Door provider about asthma. Once the lesson was taught, the students became interested in participating in the program. The liaison coordinated with OASIS to extend the topic as a poster project in the afterschool program. Community partners began to collaborate with other community partners, as well as the classroom teachers, their students, and their families. In this case, the liaison served as the catalyst and conduit between all parties.

Reflective Partners' Findings

The most revealing data resulted from a reflective assignment given in a graduate class

held in one of the full service or community PDS schools. The class was specifically designed to address the needs of classroom teachers in the school enrolled in a mentoring course and was taught by the PDS liaison of the school. These experienced teachers were selected by the district to serve as mentors for new hires within the community school. The purpose of the assignment was to reflect upon how teaching in a full service or community school had changed their teaching practice. There were several reflective questions to which they were asked to respond. The most relevant were the following inquiries: (a) What have you learned about educating the whole child? (b) What have you learned about providing services for poor children and families? (c) What were your challenges working in a community school?, and (d) How has your practice changed as a result of participating in PDS initiative?

As evidenced by the reflective assignment, the teachers can discuss and value the whole child concept within a community school in theory, but do not totally accept their presence in the school. As C.P., a classroom teacher, wrote about the medical service provider, “Open Door has many wonderful aspects to service the child. I do like the fact that the child can receive medication, and be seen [by health care professionals for] well visits or if they are sick, in the school. I have found that it can impact your teaching.” From her statement it appears that she values the community school philosophy. However, she also suggests that when it is inconvenient she does not honor the partnership: “I will admit that if it is not convenient for the child to go out of the classroom I will send them later.”

Another example of not totally embracing whole child education occurred during a faculty meeting in which all the community school partners provided updates of their programs and events. One classroom teacher remarked, “I don’t need to hear an update from every partner every month in faculty meetings. I need to work on my curriculum.”

The frustration of time constraints and completing curriculum seemed to override the basic commitment of teaching in a community school.

These reflections and comments underscored the important role the PDS liaison can play as a collaborator between the partners of a community school. The reflections demonstrated the need for additional professional development of the teachers in whole child education, particularly in the importance of addressing children’s non-academic needs for successful learning to occur. The liaison also helps the other community providers to see the point of view of the teachers and coordinates relationships between the community partners and the teacher by developing protocols and schedules for students receiving services outside the classroom.

As liaisons, we remain steadfast in our belief that teachers must philosophically commit to the tenets of the community school for it to work effectively. Therefore, we seek ways to extend reflection, collaboration, and innovation beyond the university/school partnership to include all stakeholders, a vital component of the community school model that also clearly relates to NAPDS Essentials 1, 3, 8. This process takes time and nurturing. We believe we are making progress helping teachers embrace the innovative practices of partners within a community school. As a classroom teacher reflected,

The breakfast and lunch programs insure that students are fed and ready to learn. All aspects of the child are taken into account—medical, dental, nutritional, social, economic, and familial issues that may impact learning. Opportunities exist for parents to become educated themselves in parenting, nutrition, citizenship, accessing social programs and continuing their own education. Working at [our] school has raised my awareness of the cultural countenance of my students.

Another teacher noted,

The community school setting has helped me recognize that teaching stretches far beyond curriculum and content. With Open Door Clinic [on-site medical provider], students experience a minimal amount of time spent away from the classroom and instruction. Less interruption in instruction and faster medical attention and recovery allows for students to increase their learning capabilities.

The community school concept became part of the college's student teaching curriculum so that teacher candidates can live the community school mission. In addition to course readings about community schools, student teachers are required to shadow a community partner for a day. One partner from medical services reflected, "Having student teachers engage in the shadow activity helps them understand partners' roles, but also demonstrates that the PDS values the work of the partners." Following the shadowing activity of Open Door, a student teacher wrote the following reflection about her impression of the community school concept:

I have learned that Open Door is vital . . . When all of these things are provided on site; then there should be no excuses for the children to be absent from school for any extended times, and lose out on their education . . . parents who work do not have to lose a day's pay to take their child to the doctor's. . . . They [students] may lose about 20 minutes which is better than losing a half day or a whole day.

We believe our presence and the professional development that we initiate and lead at the schools have brought community partners into the PDS relationship. In so doing, we have fostered a deeper connection to the role of the liaison. Because we are viewed as advocates, partners rely on us to

interface with classroom teachers on their behalf.

Recommended Strategies

As PDS liaisons we naturally foster the Nine Essentials of a PDS (NAPDS, 2008). However, when working as a PDS liaison in a community school, we often find it necessary and advantageous to reach out and include other agencies represented in the community school especially when employing NAPDS Essentials 1, 3, and 8. Our mission becomes very comprehensive as we extend our role to work alongside community partners housed at the school (NAPDS Essential 1). We have two overarching recommendations for fostering whole child education philosophy with all partners in a full service PDS community school: (a) communication and (b) formal and informal professional development.

Communication

Developing a mechanism that allows current and relevant communication between all stakeholders is essential. For a full service community school to operate smoothly, all partners need be apprised of critical information. The means employed to communicate completely depends on the school, its needs, and its resources. Some possible avenues are electronic newsletters, electronic master calendars, a posted master room allotment schedule, bulletin boards, and regular public announcements.

Personal communication, face-to-face and one-on-one, also needs to be fostered. All partners should be encouraged to communicate with each other. A personal follow-up note from a partner who pulled a student out of class to the teacher of that student explaining the outcomes or recognizing the time missed from class can alleviate the 'resentment' and further the whole child efforts.

Professional Development

Ongoing professional development for both pre-service and in-service teachers that embeds the whole child philosophy in all PDS and community partnership endeavors is recommended. Formally requiring pre-service teachers to complete assignments related to whole child education begins to instill the foundation of the philosophy. Such assignments can be scaffolded before the student teaching experience, beginning with the reading of articles about PDS and full service community schools, and culminating in a video case study of the community to which the school belongs. In addition to the shadowing activity, student teachers are required assignments to promote whole child education, present parent workshops related to their children's education, attend the faculty meetings, complete a service project (e.g., a clothing drive), and leave a legacy project (give something back to the school) before they complete their student teaching.

Hosting a student teacher in a full service or community school indirectly impacts the in-service teacher who is the cooperating teacher as well as his/her colleagues. Often in-service teachers require direct and formal professional development. As always, the needs are partnership specific. Some successful professional development options for us are action research projects, in-service and credit bearing courses, modeling whole child philosophy by co-teaching with in-service teachers and facilitating lunch and learn sessions.

A significant part of teachers' and liaisons' daily work in a community school is the on-going interaction between themselves and the agency partners who service the students and their families. In essence, we are advocating the development of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The inter-agency collaborations of a full service PDS community school require a unique set of skills best learned through participation in communities

of practice. According to Wenger (1998), in communities of practice, a repertoire of skill and competence is built when one interacts with others to gain an understanding of differing perspectives and practices. Through boundary spanning in a community school, PDS liaisons can guide the community partners to build a community of practice. Through a community of practice, the partners can shape how they see themselves and how they view their own practices. ^{SUP}

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