

The Story of a Unique Collaborative Partnership Focused on Preparing Effective Teachers to be Successful in High-Poverty/High-Minority Schools

Laila J. Richman, Towson University

Cheryl Wittmann, Maryland State Department of Education

Maggie Madden, Maryland State Department of Education

ABSTRACT: This article describes an innovative partnership between a state department of education, local school systems, and institutions of higher education aimed at increasing the number of effective teachers for high-poverty/high-minority schools through collaborative partnerships, rigorous coursework, ongoing professional development, intensive internships, and mentoring with research-based induction, all focused on meeting the needs of diverse learners. This partnership builds on the Professional Development School (PDS) model and its success in improving teacher retention and facilitating communication between all stakeholders. The results of this collaborative effort will ultimately impact teacher preparation and clinical practice in the state, and perhaps nationally, through the development of a manual outlining the partnership's findings and recommendations.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; #2/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #3/Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; #4/Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; #5/Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Introduction

Since the 1960's, educators, parents, and advocates have expressed concerns about the low level of academic achievement in schools serving high-poverty/high-minority student populations. Pogrow (2006) echoes these frustrations stating that "despite the unselfish and creative efforts of many in high-poverty schools and of the profession as a whole, such schools

generally remain highly ineffective in terms of their ability to reduce the learning gap" (p. 223). Research suggests that students who attend high-poverty/high-minority schools have limited educational opportunities and are less likely to graduate and go on to post-secondary education than their peers in low-poverty schools (Audet al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2009).

One of the key factors noted as a potential cause of this continued low performance is

the lack of highly qualified and effective teachers teaching in these high-poverty/high-minority schools (Glazerman & Jeffrey, 2011; Isenberg et al., 2013; Keigher, 2010). Even more concerning, when Storz (2008) interviewed over 250 youth in high-poverty/high-minority schools, he found the students were acutely aware of the lack of teacher quality and educational opportunities in their schools. Recognizing this issue, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, through the allocation of billions of dollars in funding for education through the Race to the Top Fund, identified one of the four core areas of reform as “recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most” (Race to the Top Summary, 2009, p. 2).

Teacher Retention and Professional Development Schools

One factor that directly impacts the success of students in high-poverty/high-minority schools is the significant attrition rate of teachers. Research indicates that almost 50% of new teachers leave the classroom within five years of beginning in the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Indeed, in some districts across the nation, as many as one third of new teachers leave after their first year (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2011). The annual turnover rates in urban, high-poverty schools are even higher (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2004; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007). One of the reasons teachers leave is they simply are not adequately prepared for the circumstances in which they are working. Research clearly shows that quality teacher preparation programs produce more effective teachers, lead to better student outcomes, and result in lower teacher attrition rates (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). Furthermore, when

teachers are provided with training that is tailored specifically to the contexts in which they plan to teach, they are more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Burstein et al., 2009).

In recent studies of urban-focused teacher preparation programs, findings suggest that purposeful collaboration between teacher preparation programs and school-based personnel in support new teachers may have long-lasting positive effects on teacher retention (Donaldson, 2009; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). The recent National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Blue Ribbon Panel Report also advocates that strategic partnerships between preparation programs, school districts, and state agencies are critical to improving teacher preparation and effectiveness (NCATE, 2010). Such collaborative relationships are a hallmark of the Professional Development School (PDS) model. The successor to NCATE, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2014), defines a PDS as:

a specially structured school in which Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) and P-12 school clinical educators collaborate to (1) provide practicum, field experience, clinical practice, and internship experiences; (2) support and enable the professional development of the EPP and P-12 school clinical educators; (3) support and enable inquiry directed at the improvement of practice; and (4) support and enhance P-12 student achievement.

In addition to the focus on collaboration, one of the defining characteristics of the PDS model is a focus on equity and diversity, both at the school and college/university levels. This focus on equity and diversity can help provide new teachers with a better understanding of and sensitivity to their school's environment and culture. This understanding can be important in retaining teachers in school environments unfamiliar to them.

Evidence suggests that preparing candidates using the PDS model enhances retention (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). Neapolitan et al. (2008) found that the

quality of professional learning communities, intensive mentoring, and inquiry and service projects embedded within the PDS experience may have some bearing on the overall understanding, skills, dispositions, and willingness of novice teachers to commit themselves to stay the course during the first five years. (p.15)

The study also found that teachers who completed their training in a PDS program were more likely to take jobs in schools with 50% or greater free and reduced meal rates than were the non-PDS prepared teachers (16%). Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2011) found teachers prepared in PDS programs reported higher levels of confidence in meeting the needs of diverse learners. Abdal-Haqq (1998) found that interns prepared in PDS schools felt better equipped to instruct ethnically and linguistically diverse students and had lower attrition rates during the first few years of teaching.

Maryland Teaching Consortium

In the state of Maryland, a PDS is defined as a “collaboratively planned and implemented partnership for the academic and clinical preparation of interns and the continuous professional development of both school system and institution of higher education (IHE) faculty” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2007, p. 1). The state has taken the PDS model one step further by creating an integrated assessment framework that merges teacher preparation program approval and PDS assessment, encouraging IHEs to consider their PDS sites as integral components of their programs. Maryland currently requires all traditionally prepared teacher

candidates to complete their internships in a PDS. Although Maryland has had good success with its PDS model, the state still experiences a significant teacher quality gap between high-poverty and low-poverty schools. The state estimates that only five percent of teachers teaching in high-poverty/high-minority schools are considered “highly effective” (MSDE, 2010). The goal of the state is to increase that percentage to at least 30%, thereby increasing access to quality instruction for all learners.

In an effort to reach this goal, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), using the PDS model as a basis, created a collaborative partnership focused on developing guidelines to support the preparation of teachers to be effective in high-poverty/high-minority schools. In 2010, as part of the Maryland Race to the Top proposal, the Maryland Teaching Consortium (MTC) was formed and all public and private Maryland approved teacher preparation programs were eligible to apply for membership. Five IHEs were accepted in the first year and five additional IHEs were added in the subsequent two years, for a total of ten participating IHEs. In addition to this overarching partnership, each IHE member within the Consortium identified a minimum of two PDS partners, in most cases an existing partnership and a new partnership. Currently, there are seventeen participating PK-12 partner schools. Representatives from local school systems as well as the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) also participate in the MTC, offering both local and national perspectives.

The MTC partnership is unique and innovative in that it provides structured opportunities for professional collaboration beyond the traditional scope of PDSs. The Consortium provides relevant professional development opportunities for all MTC members, prompting rich discussions and problem-solving around difficult issues in

teacher preparation, particularly surrounding recruitment, preparation, and retention of effective teachers for high-poverty/high-minority schools. Interns are also critical members of the MTC and provide feedback about how to best support their ability to be effective in high-poverty/high-minority schools.

The MTC meets a minimum of six times each year and all members, including interns, are invited to the meetings. At the end of each meeting, IHE and school partners work together to discuss what components of the information learned that day can be applied to their respective settings. In addition, the MTC holds an annual two-day Summer Institute where partnership teams work intensively to reflect on the previous year's activities and plan for the upcoming school year. By involving teachers, interns, administrators, state department of education representatives, school district representatives, and IHE faculty, a true sense of shared responsibility and accountability for preparing effective teachers has been created and drives the collaborative mission of the group.

An additional benefit of the MTC for several of the partnerships is that it allows an existing PDS to be directly involved in the development of a new PDS partnership with a school that has similar student demographics and needs. Through this collaborative relationship, the incoming PDS site benefits from the experience and expertise of the existing site. School personnel also work together to identify the resources and professional development needed to increase both the number of highly effective teachers currently at their school sites as well as the preparation of new teachers to be highly effective in working with diverse learners in high poverty settings. Based on the schools' identified needs, the IHE can provide support in a variety of ways, including offering site-based college credit and providing focused and sustained professional development. Partner schools also provide guidance about critical components of the IHE's teacher preparation program that may

need to be added or revised. This offers the partner schools the opportunity to provide input about program coursework and experiences.

Beyond the partnership at the school level, the MTC itself offers a unique opportunity for IHEs to collaborate as well. Faculty from participating private and public IHEs meet on a regular basis, sharing resources, asking questions about common issues, and providing information about individual program components. Through the MTC, IHE faculty work across institutions to develop new strategies for preparing effective teachers for high-poverty/high-minority schools. Each IHE serves as a case study and collects data on both original as well as new program components to inform the work of the MTC. A few example programmatic changes that have been made to date are the addition of taking interns on bus tours of the neighborhoods surrounding the partner schools, the creation of a *Spanish for Educators* course taught onsite at the partner school, the development and implementation of an academy model, and the creation of enhanced mentor training materials. Each IHE actively collects data such as surveys, observations, and interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of such programmatic changes. In addition, follow-up survey data from graduates is also gathered.

The ultimate goal for the MTC is to establish common agreement on program components that will provide a teacher with skills and tools to positively impact student growth and achievement in high-poverty/high-minority schools. One way MTC is working to identify these is by having each participating site analyze data from their own programs, candidates, graduates, and partnerships and compare their findings with other partnerships in the Consortium. At each MTC meeting, partnerships also collaborate to identify any knowledge, skills, and dispositions from the information provided during the session that are critical to preparing and

retaining teachers in high-poverty/high-minority settings. Next, the discussion centers on what current program components currently exist and what additional program components might be necessary to ensure the development of the identified knowledge, skills, and dispositions in future teachers.

Within the first two years of the MTC, partnerships have identified the critical knowledge along with numerous skills and dispositions effective teachers should have to be successful in high-poverty/high-minority schools. In an effort to translate this valuable information into accessible guidelines, a subgroup of the MTC membership, which includes representation from all partnerships, has been tasked with the development of a manual that will be disseminated statewide and nationally. The manual will include case studies of each of the participating partnerships, identify critical program components and resources, and provide a glossary. The guidelines manual is currently under development and will be finalized upon completion of the project in the fall of 2014. The guidelines manual will serve as a companion to existing state documents for teacher preparation in Maryland, inform and enhance all teacher preparation programs, and serve to create a common set of practices for preparing effective teachers for high-poverty/high-minority schools.

Conclusion

This innovative approach to addressing the significant need for preparing more effective teachers for high-poverty/high-minority schools reflects what it means to be a PDS, while also recognizing the value, expertise, and experience of all involved in such partnerships by shifting the work from a hierarchical structure to a truly collaborative endeavor. Classroom teachers, IHE faculty, interns, and representatives from the state department of education are working side-by-side to ask difficult questions and to think

outside the box for solutions. It is estimated that 165 interns will be directly involved in the work of the MTC; many more future teachers will be impacted by the collaborative efforts of all those involved in the Consortium. Ultimately, the benefits of this work will be realized by the increase in the number of effective teachers who are prepared to improve the learning outcomes of all students, particularly those in high-poverty/high-minority schools. ^{SUP}

References

- Abdal-Haqq, I. (1998). *Professional development schools: Weighing the evidence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Aud, S., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Kristapovich, P., Rathbun, A., Wang, X., & Zhang, J. (2013). *The condition of education 2013 (NCES 2013-037)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Ronfeldt, M., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). The role of teacher quality in retention and hiring: Using applications-to-transfer to uncover preferences of teachers and schools. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(1), 88–110.
- Burstein, N., Czech, M., Kretschmer, D., Lombardi, J., & Smith, C. (2009). Providing qualified teachers for urban schools: The effectiveness of the Accelerated Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 31(1), 24–37.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Cannady, M., McEachern, K. P., Piazza, P., Power, C., & Ryan, A. (2011). Teachers' education, teaching practice, and retention: A cross-genre review of recent research. *Journal of Education*, 191(2), 19–31.
- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. (2014). Retrieved from <http://caepnet.org/resources/glossary/>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Inequality and the right to learn: Access to qualified teachers in California's public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 106(10), 1936–1966.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2009). A future worthy of teaching for America. *Education Digest*, 74(6), 11–16.

- Donaldson, M. L. (2009). Into—and out of—city schools: The retention of teachers prepared for urban settings. *Equity & Excellence In Education*, 42(3), 347–370. doi:10.1080/10665680903034753
- Glazerman, S., & Jeffrey, M. (2011). *Do low-income students have equal access to the highest-performing teachers?* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30–33.
- Ingersoll, R., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Education Research*, 81(2), 201–233.
- Isenberg, E., Max, J., Gleason, P., Potamites, L., Santillano, R., Hock, H., & Hansen, M. (2013). *Access to effective teaching for disadvantaged students.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- Keigher, A. (2010). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2008–09 teacher follow-up survey (NCES 2010-353).* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics.
- Maryland State Department of Education. (2010). *Race to the Top Application.* Baltimore City: Author. Retrieved from http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/167F463A-3628-47B7-8720-353C3216AD1A/25539/Racetothetop_Application_MD_06012010.pdf
- Maryland State Department of Education Program Approval and Assessment Branch. (2007). *Professional Development School Assessment Framework for Maryland.* Baltimore City: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/75608A85-6909-4BE3-A4D8-D08C759D0A5A/14214/PDAssessmentFrameworkRevisedAugust2007.pdf>
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2003). *No dream denied: A pledge to America's children.* New York: Author.
- Neapolitan, J. E., Hartzler-Miller, C., Kenreich, T., Wiltz, N., Schafer, K., Proffitt, T., . . . Bolton, J. (2008). Keeping good teachers: Connections to professional development school preparation. *School-University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association for Professional Development Schools*, 2(1), 61–72.
- Pogrow, S. (2006). Restructuring high poverty schools for success. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(3), 223.
- Sandoval-Lucero, E., Shanklin, N. L., Sobel, D. M., Townsend, S. S., Davis, A., & Kalisher, S. (2011). Voices of beginning teachers: Do paths to preparation make a difference? *Education*, 132(2), 336–350.
- Scafidi, B., Sjoquist, D. L., & Stinebrickner, T. R. (2007). Race, poverty, and teacher mobility. *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 145–159.
- Storz, M. (2008). Educational inequity from the perspectives of those who live it: Urban middle school students' perspectives on the quality of their education. *Urban Review*, 40, 247–267.



Laila J. Richman is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at Towson University. Her research interests include Universal Design for Learning, collaboration, and effective teacher preparation.

Cheryl Wittmann is a Teacher Quality Specialist in the Division of Educator Effectiveness at the Maryland State Department of Education and is also the Project Manager for the Maryland Teacher Consortium.

Maggie Madden is a Program Approval Specialist in the Division of Educator Effectiveness and the PDS Coordinator at the Maryland State Department of Education. She serves as the Project Director for the Teach for Maryland Consortium.