

*By Design: Professional Development School
Partnerships at the Gladys W. and David H.
Patton College of Education, Ohio University and
Athens City Schools*

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Context and Setting

Outreach and engagement that connects the Patton College at Ohio University with P-12 schools has been a strong tradition in our Southeastern Ohio/Appalachian region. In the mid-1980s, a partnership aligned with the Coalition of Essential Schools and 9 “Common Principles” was one of the first (CES, 2013). Alignment with 19 “Postulates” of the National Network for Educational Renewal (Goodlad, 1994) followed. The seeds had been planted, Ohio University established a

Center for Partnerships, and several Professional Development Schools began to emerge and flourish (Conrath, 1997). In 2008 we welcomed a new alignment with NAPDS, incorporating the “9 Essentials” into our PDS practices. Most recently, the Blue Ribbon Panel Report commissioned by NCATE (2010) brought us “10 Design Principles for Clinically Based Preparation.” In 2013 we were initiated into full membership in the National Network for Education Renewal (NNER). In 2014 our PDS Partnerships with the Athens City Schools received the NAPDS

Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement. Our purpose in this article is to share highlights drawn from our application for this award.

Athens City Schools is one of six school districts formally affiliated with the Center for Professional Development School Partnerships at Ohio University. Examples representing development and implementation of the 9 Essentials are drawn from the primary grades (K-3), the middle grades (4-9), and the Adolescent-to-Young Adult (AYA; 7-12) level, reflecting the established grade bands for licensure to teach in Ohio.

The scholarly literature on design, innovation, and re-design of teacher education programs has provided useful insights (Henning, Weade & Geist, 2011). For instance, responding to a large number of principles, postulates, or essentials—whether nine or ten or 19 of them—can quickly become a checklist to be “ticked off.” Alternatively, questions might be raised: How would a designer think about this? How might these items cluster into larger wholes? Brown (2009) proposes design thinking as a tool for generating innovations. The fundamental tenet behind such an approach is that we learn by making. Instead of thinking to build, we build to think—to try out, to make adjustments, to inquire, and to innovate. By extension, embracing the 9 Essentials is a commitment to innovate, by design, together with our PDS partners, in support of P-12 student learning. In what follows, we have clustered the evidence of our consideration of the Essentials in groups of three. Examples chosen to illustrate each were originally featured in our application for the award.

Essentials 1, 2, and 4: A Mission and Culture Embracing Active Engagement in the School Community, With Shared

Commitments to Innovative, Reflective Practice.

A formal mission statement, adopted in recent years by and for all PDS Partnerships is comprehensive, yet also specific:

Our purpose in the creation of this Professional Development School relationship is based on continuous learning for all participants in the professional development community. [We] recognize that both the university and school faculty can renew and revitalize their respective educational missions. As partners, we are committed to goals of high and equitable student achievement, effective instructional practices, and school structures that support student learning. This will be achieved collaboratively through:

1. Providing a quality clinical setting for preparation of teacher candidates.
2. Providing continuous professional development for PDS teachers, university faculty, and administrators.
3. Promoting and conducting inquiry and research directed at the improvement of teacher preparation.
4. Renewing and redesigning teacher preparation curricula and practices at the school and university levels.

Improvement of P-12 student learning lies at the very core of the mission that brings the Patton College (at Ohio University) together in partnership with the Athens City Schools. All partners are committed to goals of high and equitable student achievement, effective instructional practices, and support for student learning, and commitments are strategic. PDS partners collaborate each year to establish an “annual plan of work.” Plans frequently include candidate-implemented intervention in math or literacy, school-community projects, joint professional development, and project-based inquiry designed to produce outcomes that support P-12 student learning.

A school-university culture that embraces active engagement in the school community is abundantly evident in Athens City's Professional Development Schools. Candidates in the primary grades (Early Childhood; K-3) spend two full days a week in their schools, and also participate in after-school seminars, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and on occasion a dinner theatre (or similar) evening event. During the school day, over the course of a full year, teacher candidates learn to plan, teach, assess, and differentiate instruction. With the support of a Teacher Liaison and Faculty Coordinator they also engage in project activities, such as supporting struggling readers, providing small group interventions, providing structured tutoring. All told, K-3 teacher candidates in the junior year log over 500 hours in their Athens City Schools Professional Development School.

Teacher candidates seeking a Middle Childhood teaching license (grades 4 thru 9) are randomly assigned to one of four PDS districts, one of which is at East Elementary, Athens City Schools. Candidates log in 160+ hours in their junior year PDS, while also completing campus-based coursework for two content specializations. Middle Childhood candidates gradually learn to plan, teach, assess and differentiate instruction. They also engage in projects that range from providing support for struggling students, assisting with after-school activities, and participating in "article shares" with mentor teachers.

Developing a PDS partnership at a single school or district at the AYA level (7-12) in our context would be challenging. Schools and districts are typically small and far away. PDS partners have had to think "outside the box" in creating PDS networks for Mentor Teachers who come together from many different schools. Following a small pilot in 2011-12, a year-long Clinical Experience, culminating in the Professional Internship in Teaching was launched, and subsequently taken to scale, program-wide. Mentor teachers have noted that their candidates build

stronger and closer relationships with students through active engagement in a single classroom, for the full year, and they feel well prepared for teaching. Candidates are viewed as being more committed to their students and teaching than in the past, and better able to have a direct impact on student learning. This initiative is one part of our move to more clinically-based teacher preparation programs, which now includes Middle Childhood and Special Education Candidates, as well as graduate students seeking an initial teaching license. Several are currently matched with Mentor Teachers at elementary, middle and high school levels in the Athens City Schools. In the PDS Network model, learning through practice is a key foundation on which the program is constructed, and P-12 student learning lies at the very core of all aspects of program and professional development experiences of Interns and Mentor Teachers alike.

Shared commitments to engagement of mentor teachers and teacher candidates alike in innovative, reflective practices are a hallmark of the PDS experience in Athens City Schools. Examples include:

West Elementary RTI for Early Literacy.

Over the past five years, the Teacher Liaison, Candidates, and more recently, retired teacher volunteers, have collaborated to ensure systematic reading intervention for at-risk students. In quick response to unanticipated legislation in Spring 2013, Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee, the PDS partnership was able to provide systematic, focused intervention for at-risk students, five days per week.

Morrison-Gordon Elementary Reading Intervention.

Without access to Title I funding, PDS Teacher Candidates are filling the void. With support and coordination offered by the Teacher Liaison and Faculty Coordinator, each Candidate is conducting intervention in small groups with K-3 students who struggle with reading. Without

the PDS Candidates, there could not be a reading intervention program. With competitive funding awarded through a Patton College Mini-grant, and matched by the Morrison-Gordon PTO, Leveled Literacy Intervention materials were purchased to meet students' needs. In 2012-13, all third graders increased their instructional level by three guided reading levels.

The Plains Elementary Math/Reading Intervention.

Center-based instruction for math and reading intervention, designed and assessed by teachers, has been a signature pedagogy at The Plains for several years. Responsibility for planning the centers is gradually released to the candidate as they each rise to the opportunity. In alignment with campus-based methods courses, the candidates design, teach and reflect on their lessons. With support through a competitively awarded mini-grant from the Patton College, matched with the contributions of a teacher at the school who is also trained facilitator, PDS candidates participated in four, two-hour workshops that infused theory with practices they could use in their center-based math and reading interventions, to effectively offer "Academic Choice" to their K-3 students.

East Elementary Community Involvement.

East is a neighborhood school, duly proud of its multi-cultural and diverse student population. Teacher Candidates at East are afforded multiple opportunities for interaction with families and to experience, first-hand, the role that parent and family involvement has on student learning, self-esteem, and academic success. Middle Childhood candidates design year-long service learning projects. One was to answer a call for more non-fiction materials in the school library. Another was to support school beautification efforts in preparation for the school's 100th anniversary. East Elementary teachers were awarded a Patton College mini-grant to provide workshops that infused theory with

classroom management practices candidates could use to provide support for all students in their PDS.

Essentials 3, 5 and 9: Resources, Rewards, Recognition and Professional Development, With Engagement and Public Sharing of Deliberate Investigations of Practice by Participants.

Each year, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is reviewed, reconciled, and/or renewed for the upcoming Partnership year. The MOU outlines the relationship and resource sharing that supports the PDS Partnership. The most valued resources include:

- *The Teaching Fellow.* Each Spring, school partners interview and select a Graduate Teaching Fellow (typically, a newly licensed teacher) who will partner in a job sharing arrangement, half days, with the Teacher Liaison, who can then use the release time to carry out PDS oversight, conferring with Mentor Teachers and Teacher Candidates in their classrooms, and other projects, as invited. The Fellow, concurrently enrolled in a master's program at the university, is supported by a standard Graduate Assistant appointment, including partial waiver of tuition and a GA stipend;
- *Graduate Tuition Waivers.* For those who request them, a limited supply of tuition waivers is available to PDS Mentor Teachers seeking Professional Development through University coursework;
- *Space in PDS Schools.* To the extent possible, Athens City Schools has provided valued space to accommodate PDS activities. In addition to space in PDS classrooms, and sometimes sepa-

rate spaces for intervention programming, Athens City Schools has generously offered “Partnership Rooms” for Teacher Candidates to keep belongings, eat lunch, and convene on-site PDS Seminars.

- *Patton College Mini-Grants for Academic Engagement & Outreach.* Most typically, the funding is sought to provide support materials and structured seminars for joint professional development for PDS Mentor Teachers and their Teacher Candidates.
- *Ongoing and Reciprocal Professional Development.* Each PDS is responsible for building a “Plan of Work” each year that includes a professional development interest or project or “book club” for which tuition-supported university credit can be offered. Popular topics in recent years have included: School-wide inclusion, Democratic Teaching, Integrated Thematic Instruction, Literacy Collaborative and Everyday Math.
- *Sponsored Workshops: Mentoring Teacher Candidates; Co-Teaching.* Over the past three years, teachers throughout Southeastern Ohio have participated in one, or both, of these free, credit-bearing workshops. Mentoring resources have been highly valued, both at the time of the workshops and thru web-based access for sharing as they engage in mentoring and co-teaching with candidates in their own classrooms.
- *Conference Travel for Publicly Sharing Outcomes of Engagement in Inquiry and Investigations of PDS Practices.* The Patton College and Athens City Schools have collaborated to provide support toward travel and conference expenses for PDS Mentor Teachers, Administrators, Teacher Candidates, Teaching Fellows, and University Faculty, to attend annual meetings of the NAPDS and, more recently, the National Network for Education Renewal

(NNER), as well as more local and regional conference venues.

- *Best Practices: Examined.* All engagement in PDS collaboration with Athens City Schools is intentional and deliberately planned to meet the needs of individual learners in that particular school setting. Opportunities for reflection and dialogue occur in the schools, on the university campus, and in the community. Meetings are convened regularly and Mentor Teachers are frequently invited for involvement in the Unit for the Preparation of Education Professionals (U-PEP), various Design Teams for Engagement and Outreach, and networking at local, regional and statewide policy levels in a Communications and Connections Group.

Essentials 6, 7 and 8: Formal Roles and Responsibilities, Governance, Reflection and Collaboration.

Key partners at the highest level of leadership and administration include the superintendent of schools and the dean of the college who review and renew their Memorandum of Understanding about the Partnership. School principals comprise the highest level of building-level leadership, administration and support for each PDS.

It is important to recognize that the building-level Partnerships at Ohio University do not reflect a single model. Rather, practices evolve in line with the interests and preferences of school-based teacher leaders and their university faculty partners. For instance, as noted in our application for the NAPDS award, the Athens City PDS programs at the Elementary level are well established. Full engagement with Athens Middle School and Athens High School is more recent and emerging. Although variations are prominent across all sites, designated

roles for key personnel at the building level typically include:

- A Teacher Liaison – A classroom teacher who provides leadership and oversight for supporting the mission and day-to-day operations of the PDS. Liaisons also mentor a Teaching Fellow in a co-teaching “job share” model that provides release time for carrying out the Liaison role.
- A Faculty Coordinator – A university faculty partner who co-mentors teacher candidates, monitors candidate progress and manages placement data, convenes a weekly on-site seminar with candidates, shares information with mentor teachers about available university courses and workshops, and supports project development interests.
- A Teaching Fellow – A fully-licensed teacher (usually first year) selected for a co-teaching “job-share” role in the Teacher Liaison’s classroom, while also pursuing a master’s degree at the university.

Structures designed to enable continuing support in a culture of collaboration, reflection and shared governance are established at all levels of operations. At the building level, the Teacher Liaison convenes regularly-scheduled meetings of a Steering Committee for Mentor Teachers and a building administrator. Similarly, the Center Director convenes regular meetings of a Steering Committee of Teacher Liaisons and Faculty Coordinators, to address and resolve issues of mutual concern and to generate opportunities for cross-site collaboration. The Center Director also convenes a series of Pre-Semester Planning Meetings that bring university faculty teaching “methods courses” together with Liaison Teachers and Faculty Coordinators to articulate and refine a shared plan for the semester.

Our Athens City Partners (among others) also enjoy the benefits of working together

with others to improve P-16 education for all. Our Unit for the Preparation of Education Professionals (UPEP) serves as the accreditation-affiliated tripartite organization of faculty and programs across Ohio University its five regional campuses. Similarly, Teacher Liaisons are frequently called on to join Communications and Connections: A group of school superintendents, teachers, university faculty, professional development providers, and other policy makers at local, regional and state levels of governance in P-12 education ^{SUP}

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