

# Special Education Professional Development Schools: Why Do Candidates Choose to Participate?

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*Research findings demonstrate that PDSs effectively prepare general education teachers and lead to increased student academic outcomes. Previous studies within the extant literature have investigated the application of the PDS model with traditional credential candidates. Acute teacher shortages and the implementation of alternative credential routes have increased the number of non-traditional credential candidates. This study reports on candidates' primary reasons for participation in an alternative special education certification program which applied precepts from the PDS model. A questionnaire containing 23 Likert-format and open-ended questions was administered to PDS participants (n=80). Results concerning the factors that lead to PDS participation, perceived program benefits and challenges, and participants' perceptions concerning the differences between PDS and traditional settings are discussed.*

One of the most critical problems facing the field of special education is the acute shortage of fully certified special education (SPED) teachers (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004). California's teacher shortages, which mirror the bleak national trends (Center for Teaching and Learning [CFTL], 2003; 2004; 2005), resulted in 54% of first- and second-year special education teachers during the 2003-2004 academic year serving as the teacher-of-record without holding a basic special education credential (California Department of Education, 2004). These realities are significant because of the role teacher quality--as measured by knowledge, expertise, education and experience--plays in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2001). This critical link between teacher quality and

student achievement is evident in California's 1,772 program improvement schools where students are five times more likely to be taught by an under-prepared teacher than students in the highest performing schools (CFTL; 2005). Data further demonstrate that "special needs students of color" have the greatest likelihood of being taught by under-prepared teachers (CFTL; 2005).

In response to implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the desire to reduce persistent and acute teacher shortages, the increased number of teacher candidates entering the profession via alternative credentialing routes, and the need to effectively prepare teachers (and thus reduce attrition rates), many universities have restructured their teacher credential programs.

California's teacher shortages, coupled with NCLB mandates, have necessitated the California State University System to develop viable alternative credentialing programs. This paper reports on one such program, the California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) Special Education (SPED) Professional Development School (PDS). This program blends elements of the PDS model into an existing alternative credential program, and seeks to not only to reduce the critical special education teacher shortage facing the districts in the university's service area, but to effectively prepare in-service candidates to meet the needs of their students.

### **THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS IN PREPARING TOMORROW'S TEACHERS**

PDSs are innovative partnerships that seek to increase student achievement and effectively prepare teacher candidates through the renewal of teacher education. They seek to meet the needs of P-12 students, credential candidates, school districts, and universities struggling to meet state and federal mandates. These university/school collaborations have been referred to as partner schools (Prater & Sileo, 2002), clinical schools and professional development schools (Holmes Group, 1986), with the latter being the most widely used label (Abdal-Haqq, 1998).

Although the definition of a PDS is not universally agreed upon (Teitel, 2000), the PDS literature supports the following components based upon the Holmes Partnership (1986; 1990) and Goodlad's (1990) earlier conceptualizations that PDSs are: (a) school-based; university students attend courses held at a local school site rather than the traditional university setting, (b) student cohort centered, (c) collaboratively designed and implemented. Both stakeholders--the local school (or school district) and university--collaborate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the PDS and are responsible for the outcomes of such endeavors.

Since their inception over 20 years ago, the number of PDSs has grown substantially, resulting in more than 1,000 PDS sites within the United States (Schwartz, 2000, as cited in Frey, 2002). Research findings indicate that the development and implementation of PDS models effectively prepares general education teachers and leads to increased student outcomes (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Holmes Group, 1990; Levine, 2002).

A review of the literature examining these formal partnerships has focused almost exclusively on the preparation of general education teachers (Prater & Sileo; 2002) despite calls (Esposito & Lal, 2004; Prater & Sileo; Yessel, Koch, & Merbler, 2002) for additional research specific to special education. This lack of additional research has left many questions about the state of special education partnerships, particularly SPED PDSs, unanswered. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of previous studies have implemented the PDS model with traditional credential candidates (pre-service teachers) who attend university programs and complete traditional fieldwork. Acute teacher shortages in many large school districts (*e.g.* Chicago, Los Angeles, New York) and the implementation of alternative credentialing routes have increased the number of non-traditional credential candidates (teachers employed full time) who attend university credentialing programs but do not complete traditional fieldwork. Although limited in number, the existing studies examining the implementation of PDSs with in-service general education teachers have demonstrated positive outcomes (Cantor & Schaar, 2005). This variance within the population of credential candidates--pre-service versus in-service--may reduce the generalizability of previous PDS research findings to education urban settings where teacher shortages are most acute.

In addition to the paucity of investigations specific to in-service teachers, is the limited number of investigations assessing the extent to which the PDS model is equally effective in preparing in-service SPED teachers. However, an emergent body of literature demonstrates the effectiveness of the models application to the

preparation of special education teachers (Esposito & Lal, 2005; Esposito, Lal, & Berlin, 2006; Yssel, Koch, & Merbler, 2002). It reasons that the application of the PDS model to special education settings would result in increased teacher and student outcomes. However, the nature of implementation, requirements of participants and barriers to successful implementation may differ when compared to implementation in general education settings. Additional questions arise when the model is applied to special education urban settings striving to prepare non-traditional in-service credential candidates. Given the likelihood that acute teacher shortages (both general and special education) in urban centers will continue to persist in the future (CFTL, 2005; Ingersol, 2001)—thus increasing the number of “under prepared” teachers working with students—the need to develop viable models, such as the CSUDH PDS, for the preparation of inservice teachers is warranted. As such, this study sought to (a) provide an overview of the university’s SPED PDS, (b) identify factors which lead to credential candidates’ participation in the SPED PDS, (c) identify candidates’ expectations concerning the benefits and challenges resulting from their participation, and (d) identify candidates’ perceptions concerning anticipated differences between traditional university teacher preparation programs and the PDS program. In doing so, we seek to add to the PDS literature examining the application of the model to alternative certification programs which prepare in-service candidates, with particular emphasis on the preparation of in-service SPED candidates.

## **MEETING THE NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS, CREDENTIAL CANDIDATES, AND K-12 SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS**

The university in this study is located within the greater Los Angeles County. The schools within its service area are multiethnic, multi-lingual, often economically poor and have acute teacher shortages, particularly in the field of

mathematics, science and special education. The NCLB Act’s emphasis on ensuring students have access to highly qualified teachers has put additional strains on these school districts that for years have been unable to meet teacher shortage demands. Central to the CSUDH College of Education (COE) mission and value statement is not only the desire to increase collaborative relationships with the districts and schools within its service area but to “maintain a model of collaborative urban educational excellence, recognized for preparing teachers, administrators, counselors, and other specialists who work effectively with a variety of learners from diverse backgrounds (COE Mission Statement; 2005 [www.csudh.edu/coe](http://www.csudh.edu/coe)).”

California’s current teacher shortage demands are currently been met by the hiring of Provisional Intern Permit (PIP) teachers and District or University Intern teachers. These candidates are in-service teachers; they teach full time and assume all of the responsibilities a credentialed special education teacher would. However, they also are pre-service in that they have not completed an accredited teacher education program. University intern candidates have met subject matter competency, are enrolled in a university post-baccalaureate or graduate program, complete the credential requirements within 2 years and teach full time in a school or district with an established Intern Agreement with the University. District interns have completed an undergraduate degree, have met subject matter and are currently enrolled in a state approved district credential program. The PIP teachers have 3 years experience in an educationally related field or have completed nine university units in education, are currently enrolled in a university program and teach full time but have not met subject matter competency.

Typically, PIP teachers must successfully complete 2 to 3 years of graduate work or post-baccalaureate work and pass two state exams-- in subject matter and reading instruction proficiency-- to qualify for an Education Specialist Preliminary Level I Credential; an additional 15 units must be

completed within 5 years of receiving their preliminary credential to qualify for an Education Specialist Professional Level II Credential. In keeping with the COE's mission to establish collaborative relationships while seeking to improve the teacher preparation programs, and thus increase student achievement, the COE received several federal grants aimed at developing and implementing the PDS model with inservice teachers (both general and special education) working in low performing school districts within its service area. Integral to the CSUDH PDS models was the recruitment, training and retention of qualified teachers. Please note that this manuscript reports only on the development and implementation of the CSUDH SPED PDS model.

### ***Candidate Needs***

Central to the operation and effectiveness of the SPED PDS are the needs of candidates. The consideration of their needs is particularly important because California has a history of high teacher attrition rates, likely exacerbated by its arduous credentialing process, low teaching salaries, and the high probability that beginning teachers are likely to be placed in challenging urban settings where they receive limited support (Andrews, Miller, Evans & Smith, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001). Because these candidates teach full-time in economically poor, multiethnic, multilingual special education settings and attend accelerated classes in the evening, they have different needs than do more traditional candidates. In establishing the SPED PDS, factors such as program length, program costs, fieldwork constraints, and the type of support needed by this unique credential candidate population were taken into account.

### ***District Needs***

Four different PDS sites are located within the Los Angeles Unified School District local districts. During the initial start up phase of the university's PDS, the College of Education in this

study determined that partnering with the local districts was more effective than establishing agreement with individual schools for three reasons: (a) credential candidates teach full time in numerous schools distributed throughout the local district, (b) the federal grant funding the PDS aimed at increasing the number of credentialed SPED teachers in the low performing schools in the geographic regions served by the university, (c) it seemed reasonable that affecting sustainable change required a formal collaboration with a district rather than single school.

The collaborative partnership between the local districts and the university provides for the design and implementation of curriculum specific to the districts' diverse population. The PDS provides assistance with the goal of reducing attrition rates by providing candidates with the skills necessary to meet the demands of urban special education classrooms, providing support with demonstrating subject matter competency, and providing on-site coaching. The SPED PDS is unique in that it provides accelerated training and support for minimally trained, non-credentialed teachers working full-time in elementary and secondary classrooms that are difficult to staff. It is hoped that through the district's and university's collaborative efforts, teachers will be effectively trained to meet the demands of these settings, so that attrition rates are reduced, thus enabling districts to focus their attention in directions other than filling vacant positions.

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The SPED mild/moderate disabilities credential program is designed using the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) approved university curriculum. The University offers two programs; one is an on-campus program and the other is located off-campus at different schools within a large urban school district. The district sites have been designated as PDSs for both general education and special education credential programs. Off-campus SPED PDS programs are accelerated and run for one year from fall through

summer. Candidates who elect to participate in the off-campus program are aware that the program is accelerated and they will take courses in a specified order with their cohorts. Although, each PDS program is located at one particular school site within the district, not every SPED candidate

teaches in that particular school. They do, however, teach in the district that the PDS serves.

Instruction for all SPED courses including field-work seminars is delivered at the off-campus sites. Whereas candidates' field-work seminars are conducted at the PDS site, their field experiences are supervised at the schools in which they teach.

**Table 1: Program Comparison**

Program Elements	University Program	PDS Program
Course Work	CCTC approved curriculum	CCTC approved curriculum
Course Load	6 semester units per semester	12-15 semester units
Typical time required to complete program	5 years Emergency Permit Teachers 3 years non-interns 2 years for interns	1 year and one summer session 1 year and 3 months- Interns 1- year and 3 months- non-interns
Field Work	Two semesters field work	
Typical Size of Classes	Non- cohort with class size ranging from 35- 40 students with class size capped at 40	Cohorts with class size ranging from 15- 25 (class size capped at 25)
Program Counseling	Students assigned to full time university faculty member Faculty Student Ratio is typically 200:1	Students within PDS site are assigned to one full time university coordinator Faculty: Student Ration: 1-25
Tuition or Scholarship Support	Students who enter as Interns receive \$ 150.00 gift receipt for local teacher supply store <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholarships granted from outside funding agencies granted on individual basis</li> </ul>	Students who enter as Interns receive 150.00 gift certificate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students receive scholarship for student fees, tuition and all text books specific to course</li> </ul>
Subject Matter Support	May participate in district supported workshops 2 <sup>nd</sup> year pre-interns mandated to attend workshops	Subject matter preparation courses provided to students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May participate in district workshops</li> <li>If mandated to participate then schedules are accommodated for</li> </ul>
Field Work	Most participants are in-service teachers (emergency credential, pre-interns credential, or intern credential)	All participants are in-service teachers currently employed in the district partnering districts. In-service teachers work full time under emergency credential, pre-interns credential, or intern credential.

SPED candidates within each PDS are grouped together in educational cohorts consisting of 15 to 25 students, all of whom are employed full-time at school sites within the local district. Because they are not fully credentialed but are the teacher of record, they are considered in-service teachers who are teaching full time under an emergency credential, pre-intern credential, or university intern credential. The cohort candidates attend all classes together and progress through the program at the same pace. The same curriculum is used for the PDS as for the traditional on-campus program. However, as noted in Table 1, the courses are accelerated and candidate collaboration is a primary focus. These cohorts serve as peer-support networks that provide assistance in both the candidates' university and teaching contexts. This support is a significant factor in both program completion and teacher retention. School-based programs strengthen the ties the candidates have to their district. These candidates see the district as a community rather than a set of isolated schools. This experience allows them to situate themselves and their classrooms as core participants in this larger context.

Collaboration is critical in the design and implementation of the PDS. The school or school district and university work together in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the PDS. Mentor teachers, course instructors, and fieldwork supervisors are current or former members of the district in which the PDS resides. Their experience provides a deep understanding of district practices and assists the candidates in acculturating themselves to their new work setting. These instructors and supervisors also serve as contacts within the district when logistical questions and concerns arise. This process begins during the initial stages of grant writing and is nurtured through quarterly advisory board meetings. This close relationship is also evidenced in the use of district personnel, whose schedules are often modified when university course work begins prior to the end of an employee's day.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodologies have been the most frequently employed methodologies in PDS research (Hess Rice, 2002). Researchers have suggested that qualitative research design enables the researcher to capture the uniqueness and nature of the PDS being investigated. Although many researchers (Teitel, 2000, 2003; Mebane & Galassi, 2000) caution that sole reliance upon self-report is insufficient to document the impact of PDS work, the authors of this paper hold that the uniqueness and flexibility of the university's SPED PDS could best be captured through self-report and descriptive methodologies, particularly in light of the fact that decisions regarding coursework relevancy, the accelerated rate, and the types of support provided to students were decisions made at the university and district level without the input of candidates who would most directly be affected by such decisions.

Data was analyzed across two dimensions. First, quantitative data were categorized (disaggregates and aggregates) and percentages and means were computed. Second, open-ended questions, the qualitative data, were analyzed and coded using the constant and comparative method. Data reported in this study are part of an ongoing assessment process aimed at improving and sustaining the PDS efforts.

### *Participants*

In order to meet the above stated objectives, a *PDS Pre-Questionnaire* was administered to SPED PDS candidates. The majority of students enrolled in the program taught high school (n= 38; 57%). The number of years teaching ranged from less than one year to 10 years, with respondents reporting the following: 20% (n=14) had been teaching less than 1 year at the time of administration, 19% (n=13) had been teaching 1 year, 20% (n= 14) teaching 2 years, 16% (n=11) had between 3 and 4 years of experience, and 24% (n=17) reported 5 or more

years of teaching experience at the time of survey administration.

### **Questionnaire**

Consistent with previous researchers' cautions (Hess Rice, 2002), the questionnaire is specific to the individual PDS partnership. Because literature is limited concerning the implementation of the PDS model with non-traditional candidates, and because the candidates are on-the-job, we felt it was particularly important to assess the reasons for participation as well as their perceptions regarding the most challenging aspects of participating in an accelerated program. The questionnaire (Esposito & Lal, 2004) consists of 23 items (see Appendix). Items provided standard demographic data, elicited participants' perceptions of cohort structure, and addressed candidates' reasons for participation. Three open-ended questions asked participants to identify primary differences between the PDS and the traditional program, what they felt they would gain upon completion of the PDS program, and to list the most challenging aspects of participating in the PDS program.

## **RESULTS**

Results are presented according to the variable each question sought to assess, with emphasis on candidate's perceptions concerning reasons for participation, perceived differences between the PDS and university program, perceived gains upon completion of the program, and perceptions concerning the most challenging aspects of PDS participation. What follows are the questions and responses:

### ***Why Do Candidates Choose to Participate in PDS Programs?***

Participants were asked to indicate reasons they chose to participate in the PDS program in three different items. The first was through selection of items presented in a check list, the

second asked participants to rank order the three most important reasons for participation and the third asked respondents to select the single most important reason for participation and to elaborate. The majority of respondents (n= 63; 90%) indicated the monetary scholarship for books and tuition was a significant determining factor in selecting to participate in the PDS. Responses surrounding this question indicated that "It is difficult to afford further education, but the scholarship makes it wonderfully affordable and worthwhile." Candidates indicated that "Money is always a concern" and that some "Can't afford to go to school without the financial assistance." As one candidate stated, "Teachers have to continue their education to obtain a credential, and the state/district does not provide assistance."

Other responses fell into four distinct categories, Location/Convenience (n= 42; 60%); Learning Environment (n=35; 50%), Material Presented (n= 16; 23%), and Accelerated Program (n= 14; 20). This question (University vs. PDS) was structured so that respondents were provided with the opportunity to list multiple differences. What follows is a discussion regarding the analysis of the four categories.

***Location and Convenience.*** Los Angeles, similar to most large cities, has a tremendous traffic problem that is most acute during the late afternoon hours when the majority of the candidates travel to campus to attend class. Given the stress and difficulty of driving in traffic, it was not surprising that the majority of candidates positively commented that the PDS differed from the university setting in that there is "no stress from having to get to campus" and "no parking concerns." In keeping with the Holmes (1986; 1990) and Goodlad (1990) conceptualization, the university's PDS implements site-based classes held at local school or at the district offices.

***Learning Environment.*** Candidates indicated that there was a qualitatively different learning environment that resulted from the cohort centered approach and small student faculty ratio. Responses indicated that participants perceived the PDS program would provide greater support than

would the traditional university program. This category contained three sub-categories that centered around the following, (a) individual attention from district faculty, (b) support from cohort members, and (c) general comments concerning the “classroom environment.” One student identified the following three differences: more opportunity for collaboration with peers in a relaxed environment, a more realistic approach from instructors, a stronger commitment from participants. Another typical response was from a student who stated the following: “PDS program is more concerned about students; PDS program truly cares about teaching us how to be effective teachers; PDS program has less students- more one to one attention. Traditional teaching programs have larger classes/teachers seem less concerned.”

Many of the respondents indicated that they would have more “individual attention at the PDS,” “more access to instructors,” and a more “intimate environment.” Responses concerning the individualized attention are not surprising given the acute special education teacher shortages, which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of students entering the university system. Many universities are grappling not only with an increase in student enrollments, but a decrease in the number of qualified instructors and budget reductions, which have consistently increased the student-faculty ratio.

**Relevant Course Material.** Integral to the restructuring of teachers education programs is the desire to “reduce the disconnect between theory and practice” (Teitel, 2003). Many proponents of the PDS movement have posited that PDSs provide a more realistic learning environment. Our findings were consistent with previous research findings in that PDS participants (n=16; 23%) indicated that they felt the PDS curriculum was more relevant to their daily teaching than the traditional university program. For example, one student stated the PDS program is “more focused to occupation and professional development.” Another student’s comment reflected the belief that “material is applicable immediately in our work.” Another student stated

that the PDS would provide “tips on how to be a better teacher. A lot of information (IEP behavior modification plans) useful for the classroom.” This comment as well as similar others, may result from candidates close access to instructors who are from the local district. Intuitively it makes sense that if one has greater access to highly qualified teachers and a more intimate setting, one may feel more at ease to ask specific questions.

**Accelerated Program.** PDS participants indicated (n=14; 20%) that another perceived primary difference between the university program and the PDS program was the accelerated pace. As stated earlier, the funding source for the CSUDH PDS was based upon an accelerated alternative certification program which would enable candidates to complete coursework within three semesters (fall, spring and summer). As evidenced in candidates’ responses to perceived challenges discussed later in this paper, the accelerated program, although highly desired, can also be very challenging. As one student stated in her response to the perceived difference, “the amount of time to do assignments is much shorter.” As will be discussed in subsequent sections, the shortened time frame may be stressful for some students.

### ***What Do Participants Hope to Gain Upon Completion of Program?***

Responses concerning what participants hoped to gain upon completion of the program were categorized into two broad categories, knowledge and support.

**Knowledge.** The overwhelming majority of responses (n=53, 76%) centered around the participants’ desire to be more effective teachers. The participants’ desire to improve their teaching abilities through increased knowledge is not surprising given that 39% of participants had one year or less of teaching experience. Within the category of knowledge, answers centered on students’ belief that not only did they feel they would “gain knowledge to be a better teacher,” but that they felt faculty members and the cohort would provide this knowledge. The responses



related to knowledge also evidenced the relevance of the skills being acquired. One respondent stated, “[I will gain] knowledge of the teaching profession.... learn both the art and the science of teaching... learn strategies to be a more effective teacher.” This response demonstrates that much of what teachers learn is related to specific teaching strategies as well as theory related to the practice of teaching. Additional comments suggest candidates felt that completion of the program would increase their confidence in their teaching ability. Three respondents indicated that this knowledge would give them “more confidence as a teacher.”

**Support.** Many of the candidates reported that through participation in the PDS program they hoped to gain support. Two primary themes concerning support emerged--support resulting from district and university faculty and support from peers in the cohort. Statements such as, “I will gain long-lasting friendships with others in the same boat as me” may indicate a different quality in the support. Responses such as, “opportunity to form collaborative relationships with colleagues” does not differentiate between colleagues and cohort members. Three responses indicated that candidates felt they would gain “friendships,” with many indicating relationships but not explicitly stating friendships.

### ***Most Challenging Aspects of Participation***

Responses to the question assessing the most challenging aspects of the PDS revealed a strong concern for issues related to participating in an accelerated program. Although the responses primarily fell into the category of accelerated program, two additional categories were kept separate, requirements of teaching full time and the motivation to meet the demands of the program successfully. Each of the categories will be discussed separately.

**Accelerated Program.** The majority of responses (n=55; 79%) indicated that the greatest perceived challenge would result from participation in an accelerated program. Within

this category responses indicated that keeping up with requirements and attending class two nights a week would be difficult. As stated earlier, participants are expected to complete all of the traditional course units, including assignments specific to the CCTC standards of the program. The majority of responses addressed the fast pace of classes with specific mention to “keeping up with all of the reading, keeping up with all of the work, getting all of the requirements for class done in time.”

### ***Requirements of Full-Time Teaching.***

The finding that many (n=15, 21%) students feel that meeting the demands of both working full time and completing university coursework can be overwhelming is consistent with the PDS literature. In the literature specific to time constraints; Abdal-Haqq (1998) states that PDS work is labor intensive, both in terms of the nature of the work, as well as the time required to do the work. These findings may be particularly acute for the participants in the SPED PDS because they are on-the-job candidates, with limited experience, teaching in a difficult field in difficult to staff schools. Responses within this category such as “...extensive demands on time and learning in school while new on the job” evidence the difficulty in-service candidates experience. The large percentage of students who voiced concern demonstrate the value the assessment of students perceptions has in planning and implementing PDS programs.

**Motivation.** The difficulty of working full-time and attending university courses full-time required students to remain highly motivated. One student’s statements, “I have to sacrifice time with my family....can not play golf...I’ll get over it,” evidences students’ need to consistently evaluate their choice to participate in the PDS program. Motivational issues were also evident in the response of a student who stated that “coming to class after work, with lots of energy” would be a considerable challenge. Again, these comments speak to the difficulty experienced by on-the job candidates who work full time and attend school full-time.

## **SUMMARY**

These findings suggest that the SPED candidates' primary reason for participating in the PDS program was the monetary scholarship afforded by the U.S. Department of Education Grant. Participants further indicated that the convenient location, the supportive learning environment, relevance of course materials and the accelerated time frame from entrance to credential completion were also anticipated differences between traditional university programs and the CSUDH PDS program which lead to PDS participation. When asked about anticipated participation outcomes, candidates indicated overwhelmingly that their knowledge specific to teaching within urban settings would be increased. Responses further indicated that candidates expected to receive support from not only their instructors but their cohort peers. It is not surprising that the candidates, who are faced with the demands of teaching full time in difficult to staff urban special education classrooms while simultaneously completing university credential requirements, indicated that the accelerated rate of the PDS program would make it difficult to meet these demands. Also not unexpected, were responses that indicated candidates were concerned about their ability to remain highly motivated given the difficulty of both teaching and working full time.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Estimates indicate that acute teacher shortages (both general and special education) in urban centers (Ingersoll, 2001) will continue, with researchers predicting a severe teacher shortage in the state of California within the next decade (CFTL, 2005). These estimates suggest that increases in the number of "under prepared" teachers working with students are therefore likely to persist into the future, as such, the need to develop viable models, such as the CSUDH PDS, for the preparation of inservice teachers is critical. With many Universities and Districts seeking to

implement PDS's these findings have direct implications specific to both the preparation of general and special educators, particularly inservice candidates. First, the location of the PDS – specifically the fact that classes are held at a district site rather than on the university campus – was identified by candidates as a primary positive attribute of this alternative program. This instantiation of the collaborative nature of the PDS model can be implemented by other university/district partnerships. Secondly, the use of a district-based site, as well as the employment of district personnel as supervisors and instructors, produced a mutually beneficial educational environment. This bridge between theory and practice should be of great benefit to candidates who often grapple to meet the demands of their classroom. Having immediate access to practical information specific to a given school district should assist inservice candidates in meeting classroom demands. The relevancy of material after all is critical to on the job candidates who are most in need of such information in a timely fashion. Thirdly, results indicated that the accelerated curriculum was a major contributing factor in the desirability of the SPED PDS program. As critical shortages are evidenced in increasing numbers of urban districts, the need to recruit candidates and "graduate" credentialed teachers in a timely manner is of utmost importance. By compacting the credential program the PDS model meets the needs of both credential candidates and the districts that employ them. This innovative program served to increase the number of well prepared teachers which should lead to increased K-12 student outcomes. The increase of certified teachers- both general and special education- in a timely matter would certainly benefit urban districts struggling to meet NCLB requirements.

Additionally, the social organization of learning in the SPED PDS - specifically, the cohort-centered approach - was identified as a critical factor in candidate satisfaction. The support networks created by these cohorts, and lauded by the candidates, will serve to abate high attrition

rates. The cohorts in this study enabled collaborative relationships that assisted in-service teachers in navigating the challenges of their new work environment. It seems reasonable that cohorts in other settings, including general education, would be of great benefit to candidates. Retention, a frequently cited challenge for urban districts, often results from the placement of novice teachers in difficult to staff schools with limited resources (Darling- Hammond, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001). The cohort-centered approach can be implemented in both in-service and pre-service programs as a method of establishing needed support systems in both general and special education settings.

Given the limited number of investigations specific to PDS work within the context of alternative inservice settings, further research is most needed. This is particularly true within the context of alternative special education alternative certification routes where the greatest number of inservice credential candidates are most likely to increase (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin; 2004). It is these authors' hope that this work has answered researchers call for additional SPED PDS research as well as added to the extant PDS literature by identifying the reasons inservice candidates participated in the program, their perceptions regarding the differences between traditional programs and the university's SPED PDS program as well as, anticipated challenges resulting from participation. These findings may be of benefit to other universities who are implementing the program with in-service candidates, as it is likely that teacher shortages in the state of California (CFTL, 2005) and across the nation will continue. Furthermore, it is hoped that this study has added to the PDS literature specific to the preparation of SPED teachers-particularly within urban centers. These authors encourage others to undertake similar investigations with the hope of improving PDS models within the context of alternative certification routes. Given previous research findings suggesting that participation in a PDS will be reduced unless individuals believe they will derive significant value from their participation

(Mebane & Gallassi, 2000), it is the authors' hope that this research will assist other universities seeking to implement PDS programs and increase PDS participation.

# APPENDIX A

## Pre-Professional Development Questionnaire

### Fall 2005

CSUDH, College of Education Professional Development Survey

**California State University, Dominguez Hills**  
**Pre-Professional Development Questionnaire Fall 2005** Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

(Please use a No. 2 pencil to completely bubble in your responses)

Dear Professional Development School (PDS) participant, we need your help with this important survey! The Graduate Education Department, School of Education, and CSUDH are in the process of compiling important information regarding the professional development school. We are seeking to improve the implementation of the PDS. As a participant, you are our most valuable resource for evaluating the program. We hope to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and implement changes as needed. Please be assured that the information you provide will be in the strictest of confidence.

Student I.D.  
(use last 6# of SSN)

0	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	0	1
2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	0	1
2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9

**Part I Background Information**

**Current Employment Status:**

<b>Teacher</b> <input type="radio"/> General Education <input type="radio"/> Special Education	<b>Setting</b> <input type="radio"/> Public School <input type="radio"/> Private School <input type="radio"/> Charter School <input type="radio"/> Community Agency <input type="radio"/> Non-public/Learning Center <input type="radio"/> Other (Specify) _____	<b>Ethnicity (Optional)</b> <input type="radio"/> African American <input type="radio"/> Asian <input type="radio"/> Caucasian <input type="radio"/> Hispanic <input type="radio"/> Multiple <input type="radio"/> Native American <input type="radio"/> Pacific Islander <input type="radio"/> Other (Specify) _____	<b>Age</b> <input type="radio"/> 20-29 yrs <input type="radio"/> 30-39 yrs <input type="radio"/> 40-49 yrs <input type="radio"/> 50-59 yrs <input type="radio"/> 60-69 yrs <input type="radio"/> 70+ yrs
<b>Non-teaching Educational Position</b> <input type="radio"/> Principal <input type="radio"/> Assistant/Vice Principal <input type="radio"/> Counselor (specify) _____ <input type="radio"/> School Psychologist <input type="radio"/> Other Assignment _____	<b>PDS District</b> <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> Other (specify) _____	<b>Gender (Optional)</b> <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female	

<b>Grade Level</b> <input type="radio"/> Preschool <input type="radio"/> Elementary School <input type="radio"/> Middle School/Junior High School <input type="radio"/> High School, subject _____ <input type="radio"/> Adult School <input type="radio"/> Other (Specify) _____	<b>Number of years teaching experience?</b> <input type="radio"/> Less than 1 yr <input type="radio"/> 1 yr <input type="radio"/> 2 yrs <input type="radio"/> 3-4 yrs <input type="radio"/> 5-6 yrs <input type="radio"/> 7-10 yrs <input type="radio"/> Other (specify) _____	<b>Estimate the percentage of ethnic groups that are enrolled in your school?</b> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Uncertain
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**Have you ever participated in a cohort?**  
 Yes  
 No

If yes, complete the following:  
 Describe the cohort \_\_\_\_\_

**1. To what extent did you enjoy working with cohort?**

List the things you liked about the cohort:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**If No, complete the following:**  
 I believe a cohort is \_\_\_\_\_

**2. To what extent do you feel you will enjoy working with a cohort?**

Greatly Enjoyed	Enjoyed	Somewhat Enjoyed	Did not Enjoy
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Part II. Questions**

- Indicate the reasons you chose to participate in the Special education PDS (select all that apply).
- Scholarship (book and tuition)
  - Accelerated Program
  - Location
  - University Support
  - To earn credits toward a Master Degree
  - Necessity to earn Special Education Credential
  - Opportunity to work in a cohort
  - Recommendation of friend
  - District Support
  - I have a friend who attended/attends the program
  - My principal/district encouraged me to apply
  - Peer Support
  - Opportunity to form collaborative relationships with colleagues
  - Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

From the above list rank the three most important reasons. □

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

From the above list, select the single most important reason and elaborate.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you believe will be the differences(s) between a PDS program located at a school site and a more □ traditional program located at the University campus? □

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you believe you will gain from participating in the PDS program? □

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What do you believe will be the most challenging aspect(s) of participating in the PDS program? □

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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