

# Millersville University Secondary Education PDS

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**ABSTRACT:** Millersville University of Pennsylvania (MU) has over 150 years of proud heritage in the preparation of teachers. This article describes how the Secondary Education Professional Development School (PDS) Program model has transformed Millersville University's secondary teacher education from a traditional teacher preparation program into a dynamic learning community. In the PDS program all members share a common vision that both unites us and challenges us to engage in work that benefits the wider education community. Our mission is to improve the teaching and learning for secondary students in the classrooms where PDS interns learn and work. We believe this shift in focus, from developing our pre-service teachers to making a positive impact on the classrooms where our students work, has been the driving force behind the PDS and continues to push us to serve our partner schools in deeper and more collaborative ways.

*NAPDS Essentials Addressed: All of the "Nine Essentials" are addressed in this article.*

## There is Something Special Happening at Millersville University!

"Wow, what are you doing at Millersville University?" This is a question PDS faculty are asked with remarkable frequency. Principals from as far away as North Carolina have called PDS faculty at Millersville University (MU) to ask about our teacher-training program after hiring graduates from our Secondary Education Professional Development School (PDS) Program. However, principals and administrators in our partner school districts, who eagerly hire our PDS graduates, already know why graduates of the MU PDS are so successful.

"Happy to work with you again. We just hired our second former PDS student!"

—Administrator email 8/30/2013

When a Lancaster County, Pennsylvania administrator was asked to explain why she preferred to hire PDS graduates, she explained:

Through the year-long PDS program, students are offered many educational experiences which help to develop a deeper understanding of the profession. Because of this program, student teachers/interns are better prepared for teaching and more competitive in the application process.

—Administrator email, 9/27/13

Indeed "there is something special happening at Millersville University!" In just six years, the PDS model has transformed our secondary teacher education from a traditional teacher preparation program into a dynamic learning community. While research and theory informed this transformation, the real story of the PDS is contained in quotes, emails, and tweets from all members of the PDS community, which we share throughout

this description. It is our hope that through hearing our story, the excitement we feel about our program will be contagious.

"The more I teach, the more I learn that confidence begets confidence #mupds13."

—Intern tweet, 9/19/2013

## History of the PDS at Millersville University

Millersville University of Pennsylvania (MU) is the state's oldest normal school with over 150 years of proud heritage in the preparation of teachers. With this history comes rich tradition and a strong reputation for teacher preparation. Sadly, this tradition too often translates into resistance to radical change. In 2007, a group of MU faculty members traveled to the Professional Development Schools National Conference in Las Vegas and was introduced to the "Nine Essentials" of a Professional Development School. This document challenged us to envision a better way to prepare future teachers at our institution and resonated strongly with our experiences as both mentor teachers ourselves and faculty at MU. We envisioned a new program that benefits our pre-service teachers, our local school partners and improves the learning experiences for the secondary students in the classrooms where our pre-service teachers learn and work. We left the conference energized to challenge tradition and to create a new model of secondary teacher preparation at MU using the Nine Essentials of a PDS as our roadmap.

Beyond the tradition of resistance, designing a PDS program for secondary education posed unique challenges. At MU secondary education students are not classified as education majors but rather are awarded degrees within their content departments. The PDS spans all three colleges on MU's campus and includes twelve separate academic departments. As is the

case at many institutions, these academic departments do not fully understand the demands of the teaching profession, and balancing the need for comprehensive content preparation with our commitment to extensive and authentic field experience in the PDS was and remains a difficult task. Developing a cohesive secondary PDS required similar outreach across academic disciplines within our partner schools. Like many secondary schools, academic departments in our partner schools are geographically and professionally segregated. Thus, our PDS grew through the work of bringing different groups of people together for a common purpose: to help Millersville students make a positive impact on the learning experiences of public school students. With this as the focus of our work, our pre-service teachers became the bridges that linked the content areas together.

The PDS candidates are working together as a cohort and there is a great deal of strength and support for each other by having this degree of support for them.

—Administrator, Survey Response, Spring 2011

What at first seemed impossible in its scope and complexity has coalesced into an exemplary and cohesive program. Our PDS started in 2009 with a pilot of five students in one district and has steadily expanded, increasing 20 fold to approximately 100 students in seven districts in 2015. Today 75% of secondary education majors graduate from our PDS program. The graduates from the PDS program are actively sought after by employers, and PDS graduates find permanent teaching jobs immediately after graduation at a rate nearly double that of graduates from our traditional secondary education program.

Another one of our PDS students accepted an offer at Wilson SD! I spoke to two of the principals at Wilson and they spoke exuberantly of the high quality of our candidates and how deep their understanding of the teaching profession was. They attributed it to our PDS program. Kudos, team!

—PDS Faculty email 5/2/2013

## Why We are Committed to the PDS Model

The most important question we ask our interns regularly is “How are you making a positive contribution to your classroom?” To evaluate the intern’s progress, mentors ask themselves, “Is the intern an asset to my students?” Keeping the focus on the secondary students we serve forces all members of the PDS partnership to think beyond their own organizational constraints. While we firmly believe that the PDS program produces better-trained teachers, the keystone mission of our PDS program is to improve the learning opportunities for the students in our partner schools. The mission begins by changing the vocabulary in our program: student teachers became Interns; cooperating teachers became Mentors; the different field experiences merged into a year-long Internship; and the various undergraduate methods and

issues courses coalesced around a Professional Bloc of connected coursework and expectations. The design of the program promotes equity for all partners because the structure of the PDS program was developed collaboratively with our school partners and continues to evolve every year in response to annual evaluations from mentors, faculty, and interns.

Question: How did the PDS intern impact the students in your classroom?

The impact was very positive for my students. They had another person to help answer questions during lab, tutor during flex periods, someone to bring the knowledge of college expectations, and another set of eyes for safety concerns. He also helped assess and grade papers throughout the year, which meant more rapid feedback of results. He was able to catch up students who were absent so that they did not get lost in class.

—Mentor Survey, Spring 2011

Additionally, because the PDS program intentionally juxtaposes theory and practice, interns have consistently displayed a deep insight into the complexities of classroom teaching.

When I first started my gut reaction was that this was nothing like the idealistic stuff that I learned in my courses at Millersville, but then in thinking about it, I realized that that was the only way to adjust experientially to the situation here. I think there has to be some kind of idealism matched with a realistic mindset. I think you have to reconcile that inherent paradox of how a great teacher needs to think and how it is never going to be that simple or that clear, but you still need to have those two things battling it out in your mind the whole time.

—Intern interview, 4/12/13

## Summary of the MU PDS Program Structure and Design

For PDS Interns, the program begins in the spring prior to their first PDS semester. Prospective interns interview with the PDS mentors to determine mentor/intern pairings for the following year.

The opportunity to meet potential PDS students in the spring is a tremendous strength. Even though the ‘interviews’ are short in duration, they provide the opportunity to prevent mentor/intern relationships that may not be successful.

—Mentor survey, fall 2013

Mentors and Interns have the summer to share texts, curriculum guides and to begin planning for the fall. While not all Mentor/

Intern pairs meet during the summer, it is common for Mentors and Interns to communicate regularly about plans for the internship. Interns officially begin their placement during the school district's teacher in-service days prior to the start of the university semester.

Hello Dr. Dietrich, What a great start to the school year. I have met my intern. What a fine young man. He is very excited and getting well adapted to the high school. I am having a difficult time in telling him to go home!!!! LOL The PDS program is so wonderful.

—Mentor email 8/30/2011

The internship is designed so the fall semester allows them to spend three days/week in the classrooms and two days on campus for the methods and issues courses. After trying many scheduling variations, mentors report that this schedule is superior for the mentor, the intern and most importantly the secondary student who needs consistency in the schedule in order to view the intern as an essential member of the classroom from the beginning of the internship.

Fifteen credits of required courses in the fall semester include: 1) content methods, 2) content literacy, 3) instructional technology and assessment, 4) special education and 5) issues in secondary education. Interns are organized into cohorts first by their partner school, then by content area in the courses. While every effort is made to preserve the integrity of the cohorts, the MU PDS is also required to operate within the budget of all certification programs. This has necessitated class size requirements that often impinge on our ability to offer sections that are purely from one partner district or insure that all English interns are in the same section. The lack of external funding that would enable smaller class sizes, on-site courses, and more sections was initially viewed as a liability for the PDS program, but looking forward, the sustainability of the program is enhanced by its ability to operate within existing budgets. Fall semester courses are taught by PDS faculty serving as partner school liaisons, visiting schools, observing interns and connecting with mentors and partner school administrators as well as teaching their university PDS classes. This allows the faculty to authentically integrate the course work with the field experience.

I think the traditional model where the supervisors used to breeze in and observe to get it done without, well, I guess I would say without investment, you have really changed that dynamic. You are really invested in what [the intern] is learning, and he seems a lot more invested in this classroom. I guess I would just call it investment.

—Mentor Interview, 4/18/13

In the spring semester, interns work all day, every day in their secondary classrooms and take one evening course on Differentiated Instruction in a blended online/in-person format. In many cases, fall faculty liaisons also supervise interns from

their fall semester courses in the spring semester of the internship. While on the surface this looks like traditional student teaching, the second semester internship is often a deeper and a more intense experience than traditional student teaching.

By being with me all year, my intern can develop a relationship with my students. This is key to being a successful teacher in our district.

—Mentor Survey, Fall 2013

To enact our apprenticeship model of teacher preparation, from the start we implemented St. Cloud State University's research on co-teaching into the design of our PDS program (Bacharach et al, 2010). Intern's experience with co-teaching and our mentors' enthusiasm about it has shown that it is the essential way to implement a philosophy of interns being an asset, not a liability, in the secondary classroom. We have also found that the philosophy has led to interns being seen as real teachers in the classroom. And paradoxically the trust this approach has engendered in mentor teachers has led to interns being given more responsibility and more opportunities to learn earlier than in our traditional programs.

My intern is great - she started doing things with the class the second day she was here!

—Mentor email 9/10/2013

Question: What was your proudest PDS moment this year?

When my mentor trusted my input when I said, "Okay, I think that this should be fixed on this lab or that we should change these questions on this worksheet" and he agreed with me and made the changes. The second moment this year is when my students began asking me questions over Mr. C. or when they would come in and ask Mr. C. if I could teach that day. It touched me and really made me feel part of the classroom.

—Intern, Survey, Fall 2010

## Managing our Complex PDS

The MU PDS has a "flat" organizational structure by design. The PDS program at MU began around a conference table with university faculty sitting with school partners talking about how to restructure teacher training in a way that benefits secondary students. While we have continued to expand, the spirit of the "conference table" conversations has not waned. Due to our growing size, our communication has by necessity become more organized.

Mentors, University Faculty, School Administrators and University Administrators meet every fall for a half-day meeting and every spring for a full day to evaluate what is working and to discuss needed changes to the program. The professional

development meetings are social, reflective and informative. Mentors, in particular, anticipate these meetings and routinely arrive early in order to “catch up” with fellow PDS friends over a cup of coffee. The PDS community uses this time to evaluate and modify the program. We talk candidly about what is working, what needs to be changed, and what we should do next. The meetings also provide an opportunity to learn new skills. In the past we have included workshops on co-teaching, mentoring, technology integration and Web 2.0 tools. The discussions have produced curricular and structural changes including: the creation of the school liaison and PDS coordinator positions to improve university and school communication, modifications to fall field schedule to improve intern integration into the secondary classroom, a scaffold guide for co-teaching, a list of common field assignments for all PDS courses, and a list of school/community activities for interns.

PDS faculty meets twice a month. At these meetings, faculty members discuss interns’ progress both in the field and in their university courses. These conversations often result in the ability to address concerns early. The mentors also provide the faculty with evaluations of the intern’s progress both informally during the faculty liaisons visits to the schools and formally through frequent written evaluations.

The PDS coordinator sends monthly newsletters via email to the interns and mentors. The newsletters share information about PDS activities, upcoming due dates, and professional development opportunities. Mentors, administrators, and faculty meetings and communications are at the core of the partnership and essential to our building of community. Having a PDS that spans multiple university departments and seven area school districts, we need to regular communication.

## Staying True to the Common Vision

All members of the MU PDS program share a common vision that both unites us and challenges us to engage in work that

benefits the wider education community. Our mission is to improve the teaching and learning for secondary students in the classrooms where interns learn and work. We believe this shift in focus, from developing our pre-service teachers to making a positive impact on the classrooms where our pre-service teachers work, has been the driving force behind the PDS and continues to push us to serve our partner schools in deeper and more collaborative ways. As we continue to expand and grow our partnership, we are challenged by this common vision to do what is “right” in terms of adding value to the secondary classrooms where we work. We continually look for opportunities to reallocate our resources, to restructure our work and to rethink our processes to better meet the learning needs of the secondary students. With this vision as our beacon, we are excited to continue our PDS work! <sup>SUP</sup>

## References

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