

# *Trailblazing Partnerships: Professional Development Schools in Partnership With Emporia State University*

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**ABSTRACT:** Emporia State University is committed to preparing future elementary education teachers through the collaborative efforts and ongoing reflective practice between the university and school districts. The Professional Development School is the vehicle behind the structured involvement in the process of immersing student-teacher in a clinical model with the application and analysis of academic rigor experienced in the university classroom. The Nine Essentials of the Professional Development Schools are exemplified in the partnership between Emporia State University and 45 Kansas schools. It is the synthesis of such culture of practical experiences with theoretical framework that creates the dedicated and informed educational professional.

*NAPDS Essentials Addressed: All Essentials are addressed with this article.*

## **Introduction**

In the beginning, there were two. In 1993 Emporia State University (ESU) launched its first Professional Development School (PDS) in partnership with the Olathe school district in Northeast Kansas and in the 20 years since has built a rich history of educational excellence. The momentum of our PDS partnerships resulted in collaboration with 45 elementary schools from the Wichita, Emporia, and Kansas City areas. The results of these ‘trailblazing partnerships’ are the extended and reflective experiences in the classroom through which the interns are transformed into teaching professionals, leaders, and role models.

Initially, there were two schools in the Olathe district selected to welcome twenty interns through the partnership. Two years later, the Emporia Unified School District requested that the PDS program add two schools in the fall of 1996. In 1998, leadership of both the Emporia and Olathe school districts recommended that ESU expand its existing PDS program to require all students to participate because of the demonstrated success of the program in preparing future teachers. At the urging of Dr. Tes Mehring, former Dean of The Teachers College, the faculty worked with administrators and teachers at PDS sites to bring about the successful implementation of the PDS program for all elementary education majors beginning in August 2003.

The mission of the PDS program expanded as ESU began a partnership with three community colleges in the Kansas City and Wichita areas: Kansas City Kansas Community College

(2002), Butler County Community College (2004), and Johnson County Community College (2010). These partnerships allow ESU students to complete general education requirements at the community college and finish their elementary education program, taught by ESU faculty, at the community college location and at PDS sites nearby.

## **Essential Members of the Partnership**

As our PDS partnerships have grown in number and diversity, the outreach and scope of our mission has expanded to include public schools students, PDS interns, mentor teachers, ESU faculty, community colleges, and other institutions. Each experiences a multitude of benefits from participation in our partnership work.

### **Public School Students**

PDS interns have a positive impact on elementary students in their assigned classes and promote positive student attitudes toward school. Interns work with individual and small groups of students in addition to teaching whole group lessons and units. By reading case studies that are developed as interns work with struggling readers and by Teacher Work Samples (TWS) that provide students with the process of assessment, data analysis, and differentiated instruction, the academic impact of PDS can be documented. Concurrently, they are addressing the individual needs of each student in a diverse classroom. Olathe principal Linda Voyles commented, “As always, extra skilled

support in a Title I school is a huge benefit. The interns come to us with many skills and are ready to have them refined in a real classroom environment.”

### PDS Interns

One primary benefit for future teachers working in two PDS classrooms during their senior year is the ‘intern’ opportunity to put the planning, teaching, and assessment skills they have learned into practice with real students within the span of one full academic year. Interns, teachers, and administrators have reported that graduates of the ESU PDS program seem more like second or third year teachers, rather than beginning teachers in their own classrooms. Former PDS graduate and current teacher, Courtney Shepherd, expressed that the strengths of the PDS program are “being in the classroom for a year” and “attending the classes that apply to what you are doing.” Courtney emphasized that “the whole experience would not be PDS if you took something out.”

### Mentor Teachers

In addition to the extra assistance PDS interns provide in the classroom, having an intern gives mentors the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices as they respond to intern questions and assess the intern’s instructional skills. Interns bring new ideas and approaches into their PDS classrooms. Don Coffman, principal in the Circle School District, commented, “Our mentor teachers work closely with the interns and we all learn and grow personally and professionally as we help train the [interns] teachers.”

### ESU Faculty

ESU professors benefit from the opportunity to visit PDS sites and collaborate with teachers and principals; they observe theory applied into practice. Examples of current practices observed in the PDS schools can add to the content provided to interns. Dr. Gerry Coffman, Professor of Reading, observed, “The class discussion is rich in the Emporia Area methods courses as interns bring in the perspectives of all the districts and the variety of implementations such as MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) and Common Core.”

### Community College Partnerships

The mission of our PDS program expanded when we began the community college partnerships. The partnerships make the transition to the ESU teacher education program more accessible to future teachers by meeting students in their local areas and neighborhood schools. The community college partners are located in or near urban areas, which increases the diversity of the public school students our interns work with in their PDS sites. Dr. Jackie Vietti, former President of Butler Community College commented,

One of our most proven educational partnerships is our BEST (Butler and Emporia Students to Teachers) program with Emporia State University. Specifically essential for place-bound and working students, BEST allows students to complete their associate degree at Butler and continue on to get their Bachelor of Science in elementary education from Emporia State without leaving the Butler campus.

ESU won the Best Practice Award for Collaboration with Community Colleges in 2008 from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education for the BEST Program with Butler Community College.

### Other Institutions

University and public school faculty members from Nebraska, Indiana, South Dakota, and Mississippi have spent time observing the ESU PDS programs and collaborating with ESU faculty, mentor teachers, and principals, regarding implementation of their own PDS programs. ESU faculty members have frequently presented about our PDS program at state and national conferences.

ESU faculty traveled to Montana to present to the State Department of Education. ESU faculty and administrators also assist other programs as they begin and enhance their own PDS programs. In the process, they gain additional ideas to continue to improve our own program. Dr. Matt Seimears, Chair of the Department of Elementary Education/Early Childhood/Special Education at ESU is teaming with faculty from Millersville University, George Washington University, University of Virginia, and Ohio University to do a collaborative study of our PDS programs.

### Collaboration: Essential to Program Success

Collaboration, reflection, and regular communication are the cornerstone of Emporia State University’s Professional Development Schools. This is essential given our large network of partnerships with 45 Professional Development Elementary Schools and three community college partnerships in three different regions. Emporia State University’s PDS Policies and Procedures book is available online for all interns, principals, mentors, and professors to assist with the shared vision.

With such a large PDS program, collaboration and communication within the department is crucial for continuity and success of our program. To facilitate this process, a Department Leadership Coordinator (DLC) cohort has been formed. Representatives from each program in the department meet monthly to share needs and concerns of the program, as well as represent departmental programs. This assures our monthly faculty meetings, which include over 40 members, are used to solve leadership challenges and grow program initiatives. Information is disseminated to PDS sites through our site

coordinators to implement any changes decided at the university level.

Reflective practice is modeled in our program with data systematically collected from all stakeholders including interns, alumni, and employers of our graduates. Data gathered includes rate of employment, satisfaction with our program, and suggested changes. Feedback collected from building principals, elementary teachers, university coordinators, and PDS directors collaboratively enhance and improve instruction within the program.

## Preparing Future Educators

Our P-12 teachers and administrators are valuable partners with university faculty in the development of PDS interns. All involved parties collaborate and plan to make experiences beneficial for the intern, mentor and classroom students. Experiences such as these help students be more fully prepared to teach. Many are hired by the district in which they student-taught which results in later opportunities to work as mentors for the PDS partnership. The internship experience includes the following aspects:

- Interns spend a full year in the classroom under the guidance of the mentor teacher and university site coordinator. They observe and participate in all activities related to the classroom, from classroom preparation in the fall to state testing in the spring, including parent teacher conferences, family nights, and professional development. During the internship, interns also complete field assignments, observe, deliver lessons and manage the classroom as well as complete a Teacher Work Sample in Block 3.
- Building principals observe and conference with interns at least once each semester.
- Mentor teachers and interns conference weekly. PDS coordinators make weekly site visits to communicate with interns, mentors and building administrators.

## Technology Integration

ESU consults with districts to assess their needs and the needs of our interns. One example of this collaboration centered on discussions of technology skills and proficiency. The districts were either beginning or getting ready to implement projects requiring an increased technology use in their classrooms. In addition, faculty considered studies and reports in the state that indicated a need for interns to proficiently use technology in the classroom. These ongoing discussions led to increased technology training for our students.

In 2013, the ESU PDS program began a technology initiative called Hornet Connected Learning. The initiative required that all elementary education majors come to classes with an iPad. The first steps of Hornet Connected Learning concentrated on training the university PDS faculty with an iPad Air and a MacBook Air. Apple initially provided in-house

training to prepare faculty to teach with technology. This training utilized the SAMR model to emphasize that faculty need to go beyond the substitution level and work towards using technology for modification in their courses. Faculty also attended weekly user groups meetings and held Pedagogy Days to share what they were learning and to ask questions. PDS faculty further collaborated with content areas such as Instructional Design Technology, special education, art, math, reading, science, social studies, and music.

To include student input to the initiative, the creation of a Student Advisory Board occurred. One of the goals of the initiative became to eliminate expensive textbooks. Faculty wrote and adopted eBooks to enhance instruction. A second achieved goal included an orientation for students as they began using the iPads in their coursework and in their field experiences. They have continued access to tutorials to assist with iPad training.

## Professional Development

All mentor teachers, administrators and university faculty in the PDS program have successfully completed the Mentor Teacher Training Program developed by ESU with collaboration from participating districts since 1989. The required training program includes the history and guidelines of the PDS program as well as the roles of mentor teachers, interns, building administrators, and university coordinators. The training also includes assessments used in the program, including an overview of the Teacher Work Sample. Time is devoted to helping new mentors learn effective communication strategies for providing feedback to interns.

In 2009, training for beginning mentor teachers changed from a face-to-face format to an online training program offered each summer for the convenience of prospective mentor teachers. Prospective mentors complete seven training tasks using text developed by ESU faculty, *Working with Student Teachers: Getting and Giving the Best*, (Morehead, Lyman, & Foyle, 2009). During the summer of 2014, 60 new mentor teachers successfully completed the training. Twenty-six received online training and 34 at our new PDS sites trained face to face.

PDS coordinators and directors provide follow-up training for mentors as the needs of the mentors and interns dictate. Feedback from district administrators led to additional advanced mentor training with such topics as working with struggling interns and conferencing with interns. Online assistance is also available to provide additional information for mentors and administrators about supervising PDS interns.

## Innovative and Reflective Practices

Three examples of innovative and reflective practices that demonstrate enhanced student learning are literacy portfolios, Teacher Work Samples, and Hornet Connected Learning.

During Block 2, all PDS interns complete a literacy portfolio, which is a performance assessment that demonstrates the intern's ability to use a variety of assessment tools, analyze and apply the results to instruction with diverse learners. The interns learn how to conduct reading assessments, use the data analysis to provide instruction based on the students needs during their methods coursework and then practice administering them with students in a classroom setting. Each intern works with two students, primary (K-2) and intermediate (3-6), at their PDS site who are struggling with reading.

Since 2000, the Teacher Work Sample (TWS) has provided important evidence of how intern has enhanced student learning in his or her Block 3 PDS classroom as a performance-based assessment evaluating the degree of impact the intern has on students' learning. Each intern teaches a multiple week instructional sequence and completes seven factors which include: describing the learning context and instructional adaptations, construct appropriate instructional goals at different levels based on Common Core State Standards, create an assessment plan to measure student understanding before, during, and after teaching, analyze and reflect on the instructional design and learning gains of the students.

With the new iPad initiative, Hornet Connected Learning, our PDS interns learn how effective utilization of technology in classrooms with guidance from their methods instructors. As the technology use increases in classrooms across the country our interns will be better prepared to use it as an integrated teaching tool. Interns begin to use the iPad as a way to deliver content, help increase student engagement, and connect with others (students, parents, and colleagues). Emporia State University has a rich tradition in innovative and educational practices and Hornet Connected Learning is another way we are preparing our interns to meet the demands of the classroom, as they become professional educators.

## Future Outlook

Throughout this journey, our partnerships have evolved, yet they continue to provide an exemplary model for producing future

generations of educators in the state of Kansas, the nation, and even across the world. Many of our graduates become teachers in our PDS partnership sites, and some, due to our new endeavors of study-abroad, have the opportunities to work with students in schools outside the United States. No matter where they go, we are certain that the partnerships formed through our PDS sites, community colleges, and dedicated faculty and mentor teachers have contributed to their success. Our PDS graduates are "those who can" change the world, one child at a time. <sup>SUP</sup>

## References

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