

Salisbury University and Snow Hill Elementary: Creating and Sustaining a Rural Title I PDS Partnership

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As authors of a successful 2017 application for “Exemplary PDS Achievement,” we are honored to share portions of the application we submitted. While the data and information included herein focuses on the 2015-16 academic year, the growth of the PDS partnership took place over many years and represents the combined efforts of scores of faculty, staff, and students who bought in completely to the promise of the professional development school movement in a small town school in rural Maryland. We thank the leaders of our school district and our university for their support – both tangible and symbolic – and we are grateful to NAPDS for its recognition.

Highlights of the 2017 Award Application

The narrative application for the Exemplary PDS Achievement Award runs to almost 20 pages, much of which is not terribly interesting or indicative of “exemplary PDS achievement.” In summarizing what makes Salisbury University’s partnership with Snow Hill Elementary School unique, we have excised sections about organizational structure, the MOU, lists of NAPDS members’ names and other boilerplate sections of the application.

The Partnership [Essential 1]

Snow Hill Elementary School (SHES) is one of six PDS sites covered by a memorandum of understanding and a PDS mission statement supporting Salisbury University’s partnership with the Worcester County (MD) Public Schools. These documents address the traditional tenets of PDS: enhancing student achievement, preparing new teachers, supporting in-service teachers’ professional development, and contributing to the understanding and dissemination of best practices through scholarly investigations. It is worth noting, however, that a locally derived corollary to the generic mission statement calls for SHES and the other Worcester PDS partner schools to serve as bellwethers in advancing a co-teaching internship model regionally and throughout the State of Maryland. SHES has been a prominent representative of this cause through local, state and national conference presentations and publications.

SHES is a Title I School in rural Maryland with a student population that is 40% non-white. More than 56% receive free and reduced meals, yet annual assessment scores consistently

rank SHES students among the top achieving Maryland schools with similar demographics. Although these academic achievements have been earned through the efforts of many people, SHES reached Maryland and National Blue Ribbon status soon after entering into a PDS partnership with Salisbury University.

(A note re PDS terminology used in this document: In Maryland, “candidates” are university students enrolled in teacher preparation programs; “interns” are candidates who have entered their final year and are completing a student-teaching internship of 100+ days in a PDS setting. All Maryland internships must take place in PDS settings.)

Shared Resources and Partner Recognition [Essential 9]

At some universities, PDS growth has been stimulated by generous funding allocations or grant-related subsidies. The Snow Hill Elementary PDS has been forced to rely on limited resources and good will to support the PDS initiative. Modest in-kind contributions include the use of school buildings after hours for University classes, shared transportation to professional meetings and conferences, and interns’ use of school supplies for copying, laminating, and the like. University-owned technology may be borrowed for PDS use at no cost. All PDS interns are encouraged to participate fully in district-sponsored professional development days and in-service workshops, including pre-school programs in August. Mentor training and co-teaching workshops are provided at no cost. The University sponsors an Intern-Mentor Forum every January for teaching pairs from its PDS sites. SHES Principal Cooper has graciously provided substitute coverage for participating mentors.

Salisbury University has been able, through the Seidel School of Education, to provide partial support for conference attendance by some PDS partners. Since 2012, five SHES teachers and administrators have received support to attend and present at the NAPDS annual conference. Similarly, Worcester County has provided substitute coverage for teachers attending PDS conferences and has on occasion been able to supply financial assistance.

The 36-site Regional PDS Council of Salisbury University meets every spring to recognize and honor the contributions of its members. Nominated by PDS stakeholders including interns,

the award winners are chosen by a committee reviewing nominations whose identifying names have been deleted. Plaques and certificates are presented for Outstanding Mentor, Outstanding Site Coordinator, Outstanding Supervisor, MSDE Teachers of Promise, the Riall Award as SU’s Outstanding ECED/ELED graduate, and the John Furey Award for ongoing commitment to PDS. Several Snow Hill PDS stakeholders have been honored in recent years in these categories:

- Outstanding Mentor:** 9 SHES teachers
- Site Coordinators:** 2 SHES teachers
- Supervisors:** 2 SU supervisors
- MSDE Teachers of Promise:** 5 SHES interns
- Riall Award:** 4 SHES interns since 2011
- John Furey Award:** 1 SU Liaison

Preparing Educators in 2015-16 [Essential 2]

A brief conversation between the University’s PDS Liaison and the SHES Principal in the late spring of 2015 led to an unprecedented approach to the preparation of pre-service teachers at Snow Hill Elementary the following fall. The SU Liaison proposed a “super-saturation” of teacher candidates and interns with the goal of creating substantive roles for them in the school’s newly implemented Pyramid Response to Intervention (PRtI) program. SHES Principal Mary Anne Cooper’s response was, “Bring it on. Let’s make it work.”

As a result, SU placed 35 candidates (juniors) and 14 interns (seniors) at SHES in 2015-16. (In previous years, SHES would have typically hosted 10-12 candidates and 6-8 interns.) Virtually every classroom teacher in the building had SU students available to support instruction on multiple days each week. Following a September orientation at the school, all candidates and interns were assigned roles in providing daily instruction during the PRtI program’s daily 30 minutes of “reading flex” and 30 minutes of “math flex.” Junior year candidates worked with individual children on specific skills chosen by the PRtI leadership while interns were given their own flex groups to work with as integral members of the grade level teams’ approach to intervention, remediation, and enrichment.

The super-saturation experiment in support of PRtI was reported in a presentation at the 2016 NAPDS Annual Conference. The success of the program was documented by the dramatic increase in the number of children in Tier 1 (on or above grade level): up 51% in reading and up 92% in math school-wide by mid-year in 2015-16.

PRtI Improvement in Reading, Window 1 vs Window 2

| | # at Tier 1 (Fall 2015) | # at Tier 1 (Winter 2016) | % Change at Tier 1 |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Grade 1 | 13 | 30 | 131% |
| Grade 2 | 31 | 46 | 48% |
| Grade 3 | 32 | 39 | 22% |
| School-wide | 76 | 115 | 51% |

PRtI Improvement in Math, Window 1 vs Window 2

| | # at Tier 1 (Fall 2015) | # at Tier 1 (Winter 2016) | % Change at Tier 1 |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Grade 1 | 9 | 26 | 189% |
| Grade 2 | 21 | 39 | 86% |
| Grade 3 | 23 | 37 | 61% |
| School-wide | 53 | 102 | 92% |

Window 1 N = 237
Window 2 N = 240

(A follow-up presentation at the 2017 NAPDS Annual Conference reported similarly encouraging year-end results for 2015-16 and for fall 2016.)

Professional Development [Essential 3]

Professional development is a 2-way street in the Snow Hill Elementary School PDS. Five examples illustrate the variety and impact of how the University helps SHES teachers and how SU candidates and interns benefit from school and district level PD.

- A mathematics professor in SU’s Henson School of Science and Technology has been consulting with SHES teachers for the past two years on techniques and strategies for Common Core math. She facilitates lesson-study sessions with teachers, provides workshops for grade level teams, makes classroom observations, and assists individual teachers with instructional dilemmas.
- SU’s RPDS Coordinator has organized a series of “Power Hour” after-school workshops for mentors throughout the PDS network. These sessions, which are supported by a grant from MSDE, feature teachers from the 36 PDS sites sharing best practices and innovations on topics such as student motivation and improving communication with parents and guardians.
- More than 1000 local educators have been credentialed as “clinically trained mentors” through Salisbury University’s mini-courses and co-teaching workshops. Currently, 15 SHES teachers have completed the training, with newly hired faculty slated for training sessions in the near future. Clinically trained mentors receive a larger stipend when they host interns.
- SU intern supervisors and liaisons from 7 different districts, including many retired educators, were briefed on Common Core, PARCC and other recent changes in Maryland’s public school landscape by a Worcester County PDS principal at a meeting organized by the RPDS Council.
- District-sponsored workshops, in-services, and trainings are open to SU candidates and interns at no cost. Indeed, interns are required to attend all PD activities that their mentors attend. Interns complete a detailed “PD Tracker” form at the conclusion of their internship

that is collated and summarized as part of the University's documentation for MSDE.

Innovative and Reflective Practices [Essential 4]

A supportive leadership at both the district and school level has empowered the SHES faculty and staff to embrace the PDS mission. A strong University presence by faculty and SU students has seized the opportunity to think outside the box and realize the potential of PDS for all stakeholders. Two recent initiatives highlight Snow Hill Elementary's tradition of innovative and reflective practices that began when the school became a PDS in 2002.

- **PDS Super-saturation in Support of Response to Intervention.**

In chemistry, super-saturation occurs when a solvent receives more of a material than it would normally absorb. In a PDS context, super-saturation refers to placing an unusually large number of methods students (candidates) and interns with a PDS partner and providing them with explicit, coordinated roles to play in the school's Response to Intervention initiative. As referenced in the "Preparing Future Educators" section above, the "super-saturation" initiative produced gratifying results and has been extended to a second year. Not only did the pilot program produce gratifying results in terms of student achievement, the effects of stretching a PDS site's "carrying capacity" allowed the partnership to plan strategically for future enrollment growth.

- **First Steps Toward Co-Teaching**

Salisbury University's co-teaching model of mentor-intern interaction can no longer be considered "innovative," as it has been the mode of operation for 15 years at Snow Hill Elementary School. SU and SHES personnel have presented on co-teaching at NAPDS annual conferences since 2005. However, one newer wrinkle on the co-teaching initiative took place on campus in 2015-16 and involved freshmen and sophomores who had yet to even enter the professional teacher preparation program. Three SHES interns played key roles in this undertaking.

The SHES Liaison, a full professor at SU, had teaching responsibilities on campus that involved teaching multiple sections of a foundations of education course, "Learning and Assessment," each semester. Prior to the 2015-16 school year, he invited three soon-to-be senior SHES PDS interns to co-teach a section of the course with him under the "Independent Study" designation. The interns then served as Teaching Assistants throughout the semester, attending all sessions of the course. Throughout the semester the TA's modeled co-teaching techniques in collaboration with the professor. They coached students in preparing co-teaching mini-lessons. Frequently, they offered explicit suggestions about practical applications of co-

teaching based on their own experience as interns in P-6 classroom settings.

The intern/TA's surveyed the pre-program students enrolled in the course early in the semester about their knowledge of and experience with co-teaching. At semester's end, the students were surveyed again to document their attitudes about and their understanding of co-teaching. The very encouraging results of this project were presented in a poster session at the 2016 NAPDS conference. A write-up of the project, co-authored by the Liaison and the interns, has been accepted for publication in an upcoming edition of *PDS Partners* magazine.

Best Practices Shared [Essential 5]

The work of the Snow Hill Elementary School PDS is shared locally, regionally and nationally. Senior year interns share with professional educators and their peers in multiple settings. School officials and University PDS personnel, including interns, make frequent conference presentations and submit articles for publication in the two NAPDS periodicals, *School-University Partnerships* and *PDS Partners*.

A major assignment associated with the final internship experience is the completion of a Student Impact Study (SIS), conceived as a mini-version of the Student Learning Outcome (SLO) investigation required of all Maryland teachers. Interns research, plan, deliver and document the achievement growth of a group of students with whom they work in a targeted academic area. At the conclusion of the SIS project, interns create posters describing their project, its rationale and background research, data collection and analysis. The posters are then shared with professional audiences in multiple settings:

- *PDS site display.* SHES interns mount their posters on science fair boards and arrange them in the school's media center for review by school faculty, staff, parents and visitors.
- *District intern reception.* Worcester County hosts a formal intern reception for all of its interns near the end of each semester. Interns display SIS posters on tables around the perimeter of the room for review and conversation with school officials (central office administrators and principals of all 14 schools in the district).
- *Campus Gallery Walk.* Interns bring their posters and other artifacts of their internship experience to campus for review by ELED and ECED candidates who are in the teacher education pipeline. Besides giving the interns another audience with whom to share, the gallery walk affords future interns a realistic view of what lies ahead in their senior year.
- *Conference presentations.* 21 SHES interns have attended and presented their investigations at NAPDS annual conferences from 2011-2016, with seven more committed for 2017.

When funding is available, the SHES PDS has been able to send teachers and administrators to the NAPDS Annual

Conference to share programmatic innovations and investigations of best practices. Between 2011 and 2016, **four** SU representatives aligned with SHES, **five** SHES teachers and administrators, and **21** interns have presented at the Annual Conference. In addition, four articles written by SHES PDS stakeholders have appeared in NAPDS publications to further disseminate ideas and innovations that had roots in the partnership.

Proudest Accomplishments

The Exemplary PDS Achievement Award guidelines invite the partnership to list its proudest accomplishments at the conclusion of the presentation. The Snow Hill Elementary PDS has been a source of pride for Salisbury University and for the Worcester County Public Schools for many years, as highlighted in four themes:

1. Preparing the Next Generation of Teachers

Central to any PDS mission is the preparation of teachers to meet the workforce needs of tomorrow's schools. The SHES PDS reputation for supporting pre-service teachers is well established on campus, resulting in a steady stream of requests for placements in recent years. With the success of the "super-saturation" experiment – and thanks to the willing and eager support by the entire school community – SHES has been able to accommodate a healthy number of candidates and interns every semester. The quality of the interns who complete their field experiences at Snow Hill can be seen in a number of indicators:

- Snow Hill Elementary interns have maintained a 100% pass rate on Praxis II exams since 2011.
- The Maryland State Department of Education recognizes a limited number of "Teachers of Promise" annually. These are pre-service teachers of distinction who have indicated a commitment to seek employment in a Maryland public school. Since 2011, five SHES interns have received this honor.
- Salisbury University produces approximately 125 Elementary and Early Childhood teachers annually. Of these, about 10% complete their internships at Snow Hill Elementary. In the 15 years that SHES has been a PDS site, the E. Pauline Riall Award, emblematic of SU's top ELED or ECED senior, has been won by a Snow Hill intern eight times, including four of the past five winners.

2. An Incubator for Innovation

From the outset of its tenure as a PDS in 2002, SHES has been a supportive environment for innovation and the cultivation of promising ideas. Initially, as Salisbury University was developing its co-teaching model for internships SHES was a testing ground for the techniques and strategies that

ultimately became standard practice throughout the University's regional PDS network. Ultimately, the SU co-teaching model "went national" concurrently with – but with less fanfare than – the St. Cloud State University co-teaching model. SHES stakeholders were part of NAPDS presentations in the early 2000's that made co-teaching internships an important innovation in teacher education. In 2007, four SHES representatives were part of the famous "21 in 21" co-teaching session at the Las Vegas conference that established the all-time NAPDS record for conference session attendance and led to the University of South Carolina awarding the partnership its "Spirit of Partnership" honor. MSDE asked Salisbury University to carry the co-teaching message to other Maryland universities and SHES PDS representatives Outten, Elburn, Connors, and Gasior made presentations on the topic at state and regional meetings.

More recently, the SHES PDS pushed the limits of a PDS site's carrying capacity with its "super-saturation" pilot in 2015-16 that produced dramatic growth – helped by intern and candidate involvement – in the school's Response to Intervention program. The tradition of efficient co-teaching at SHES paved the way for the SHES faculty's immediate acceptance of a large number of candidates and interns playing meaningful roles in delivering RtI interventions, remediation and enrichment. In a similarly innovative vein, PDS Liaison Connors advanced the co-teaching initiative on campus in concert with three Snow Hill interns by modeling co-teaching in a freshman/sophomore level educational foundation course.

3. Voices on the National Stage

The activities of Snow Hill Elementary PDS stakeholders at the national level since 2011 may be hard to match:

- 10 current NAPDS members;
- 31 SHES PDS stakeholders who have attended and presented at NAPDS conferences from 2011-2016;
- 13 NAPDS concurrent session presentations involving SHES representatives;
- 11 NAPDS student poster sessions featuring SHES interns;
- 6 students-only panels at every NAPDS annual conference from 2012 to 2016, led by SHES interns.
- 7 SHES presentations accepted for the 2017 NAPDS annual conference

4. Fulfilling the "Tenth Essential"

As a panel of interns pointed out in 2016 at the annual conference in Washington, DC, the NAPDS list of essentials neglects to state explicitly that student achievement and well-being should be the non-negotiable goal of every PDS. Through 15 years' commitment to co-teaching internships buttressed by careful university support, SHES has served well the primary stakeholders of the PDS enterprise: the 400+ students enrolled at SHES. Snow Hill's National Blue Ribbon designation, its

ranking year in and year out near the top of all Maryland schools with similar demographics, and the impressive results in the “super-saturation” initiative testify to the fulfillment of this tenth “essential.” ^{SUP}



If anyone would like copies of documents or other information related to the award application, the Snow Hill PDS or SU's PDS program, please feel free to contact any of us:

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