

# *Sustaining a PDS Network Through a Collaborative Leadership Model*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article represents the 28 year history of Professional Development Schools at the University of South Carolina and explains how the network continues to grow and thrive, in part, by the application of a collaborative leadership model. Our goal in this article is to recognize and understand how our continued efforts, as professional development school (PDS) partners, helped grow, change and sustain the Professional Development Schools Network at the University of South Carolina (UofSC) since its inception in 1990. We share our history and describe the context within which we enact our PDS Network of 21 schools in five school districts and most recently a PDS District. Subsequent sections of the article discuss our evolving commitments to the network via our mission, funding, planned events, and assessment.

*While this article touches on all nine required essentials of a PDS, its main focus is on essential #7 - A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration: 1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; 2. A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; 3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; 4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; 5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; 6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved; 7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration; 8. Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and 9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.*

The zeal of a new beginning provides the energy to sustain momentum for a period of time, but what happens when that period of time has passed? Our goal in this article is to recognize and understand how our continued efforts, as professional development school (PDS) partners, helped grow, change and sustain the Professional Development Schools Network at the University of South Carolina (UofSC) since its inception in 1990.

As we grow our PDS Network, we are ever conscious of our past. In fact, our past serves as prologue. With ever-changing University faculty, K-12 teachers, administrators, and superintendents, we work diligently to remember our Network's history in order to to strengthen our future. Most importantly, Bruce Field, former UofSC Executive Director of School-University Partnerships and Clinical Experiences, and Irma Van Scoy (2014), former Associate Dean of the College of Education (COE), remind us that "sustaining a meaningful school-university partnership requires collective recognition of the fact that institutions change over time and that such changes are not an indication of organizational weakness but a symptom of institutional strength" (p. 452).

We frame our understanding of the sustainability of our PDS network through NAPDS essential one, which states that PDS partnerships should include "a comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community" (NAPDS, 2018). In addition, Goodlad (1994) reminds us that the PDS Network is responsible for cultivating and connecting partner schools with teacher education programs to simultaneously renew both K-12 school communities and teacher education programs.

We share our history and describe the context within which we enact our PDS Network of 21 schools in five school districts and most recently a PDS District. Subsequent sections of the article discuss our evolving commitments to the network via our mission, funding, planned events, and assessment.

## **History of the UofSC PDS Network**

Acting on the vision of the Holmes Group (1990) to transform teacher preparation and professional development for practicing

K-12 teachers, the Professional Development Schools Network was developed at the UofSC with the first meeting on October 4, 1990. The early years of the network required the participants to define PDS, recognize the importance of building relationships, engage in school-university action research and mutual professional development, offer on-site or portable university classes, which supported scholarly research and practice, and collaborate by participating in initiatives that grew out of PDS structures (Field & Van Scoy, 2014).

Relationship building is an integral part of sustaining partnerships with university faculty and public schools. These relationships are supported through the Dean's Office, school leaders, including superintendents and building level administrators. The support of these individuals is contingent on a mission and vision that are clear, obtainable and of interest to all stakeholders.

From 2003 to 2005 the network responded to growing and changing needs by revising its mission statement, reorganizing its framework, and clarifying committee structures and roles. In 2005, the PDS Network was redesigned due to changes in undergraduate programs in 2005. This redesign of the network involved the negotiation of PDS Partnership Agreements. Schools committed to agreements that reflected a shared vision of teaching and learning. These three-year agreements include the following commitments: to work as partners toward the simultaneous renewal of both institutions through their involvement with the education of educators, to agree to the commitment levels required for their partnership, and to support the assumptions underlying those commitments (Field & Van Scoy, 2014).

Due to conscious, collaborative planning of stakeholders and a larger community commitment, the network has grown and remained a critical component of teacher preparation programs in the COE, despite changes in leadership and PDS affiliated faculty over the years. With its rich history of PDS and years of network building, the leaders and members collaboratively and intentionally work to sustain a viable PDS Network that contributes to the growth of teacher candidates, professionals in the field, and the practice and research of university faculty. The network is committed to building and strengthening partnerships between the public schools and the university that include embedded field experiences with courses taught onsite at a PDS, enhanced experiences for internships, ongoing professional development for teachers, and publications about and with teachers.

## PDS Network Context

Our organizational structure provides several mechanisms for collaboration, reflection, and regular communication. The entire network is engaged through weekly emails that contain information that benefits the network. In addition, the co-chairs, six elected representatives, meet quarterly to set the theme for the year, plan the meetings and reflect on how network activities can be extended and improved. The Coordinating Council

meets four times a year; each meeting is hosted in a PDS site and connected to the theme for the year. Every three years, our self-assessment and re-application process invites each site to reflect on its operation and implementation. A survey at the end of each year gives each PDS affiliate an opportunity to reflect on his/her role.

We believe that every PDS site is unique and has different needs. The focus for each school during the 2018-2019 school year is listed below.

Lexington Four Early Childhood Center	<i>Supporting Gross Motor, Social-Emotional, and Behavioral Development</i>
Bridge Creek Elementary	<i>Medical, Engineering and Discovery Through Science</i>
Catawba Trail Elementary	<i>Comprehensive School Physical Activity, Health and Wellness</i>
Horrell Hill Elementary	<i>Using Data to Drive Intentional Instruction</i>
Irmo Elementary	<i>Choice Professional Development for Teachers</i>
Killian Elementary	<i>Science Teaching Professional Development and Support</i>
Lake Carolina Elementary	<i>Data Literacy</i>
Meadowfield Elementary	<i>Reading &amp; Literacy through Culturally Responsive Teaching and Paideia</i>
North Springs Elementary	<i>Using Data to Drive Decision Making</i>
Oak Pointe Elementary	<i>Inquiry Based Instruction</i>
Pontiac Elementary	<i>Literacy</i>
Rice Creek Elementary	<i>Reading &amp; Literacy</i>
Blythewood Middle	<i>Creating a Culture of Achievement for All Students</i>
Fulmer Middle	<i>Family-School Partnerships</i>
Hand Middle	<i>Culturally Responsive Teaching</i>
Irmo Middle	<i>Effective Math Teaching Practices</i>
Sandhills Middle	<i>Personalized Learning</i>
Blythewood High School	<i>Freshman Academy</i>
Dreher High School	<i>Teacher Induction, Support, &amp; Retention</i>
Lower Richland High School	<i>Teacher Induction &amp; Support</i>
Dutch Fork High School	<i>Creating a Collaborative Model</i>

During 2017 – 2018, the clinical experiences staff at UofSC placed over 351 teacher candidates in schools and was responsible for securing a total 648 placements for 11 degree programs. Overall, teacher candidates were placed in 110 schools in over 20 school districts. Of those, approximately 175 placements were in 18 PDS schools. These numbers include both students in teacher candidateship I (part-time student teaching) and II (full-time student teaching).

In addition to these practicum experiences, many teacher candidates are part of methods courses taught onsite at local schools. These embedded courses provide opportunities for

undergraduate and graduate students to be immersed in practice as they learn about theory and explore their beliefs about teaching and learning. Weekly classes are held onsite to provide teacher candidates with direct and mentored experiences with children. The UofSC faculty member, who is often the PDS faculty liaison, provides feedback to students in the midst of teaching and provides teaching demonstrations with children. Through working in classrooms across their programs, teacher candidates are immersed in their work with children and draw on these experiences to anticipate student responses, inquire about teaching and learning, and theorize about their own practice. Another benefit of this experience is the opportunity to debrief with content area specialists following embedded teaching experiences in schools. This provides opportunities for classroom teachers, school-based content area coaches, administrators, and/or other school and district personnel to contribute to preservice teacher learning. Teacher candidates begin observing and working in schools early in their programs, placing them in diverse schools across the Columbia midlands area and culminating with a 60-day full-time student teaching experience. Clinical experiences staff work in conjunction with school district faculty and staff, as well as college faculty and instructors, to secure placements for all courses with observation or practicum components.

The COE at UofSC ensures that all teacher candidates have diverse clinical placements throughout their experience. Based on SC School Report Card Data from 2016 - 2017, over 60 schools where UofSC teacher candidates were placed have free and/or reduced lunch rates of 50% or more. Additionally, our programs require teacher candidates to have experiences in different levels of schooling (i.e., elementary, middle, and/or high). Many teacher candidates graduate with experiences in up to 10 different schools counting observations, practicum experiences, onsite methods courses, and internship(s).

## Meaningful Mission

The Mission of the UofSC PDS Network (figure 1) is to establish and maintain “sandboxes” for research and innovation where University and Public School Partners collaboratively investigate student learning, professional development, clinical preparation, and induction to institutionalize best practices across teacher learning contexts.

As one can imagine, a great deal of wordsmithing took place in 2016 as we revisited our mission. Our use of the word “sandbox” required the most discussion. Network members, both K-12 and University, suggested other words including “laboratory”, “space”, and “learning lab”, but in the end, “sandbox” best described the trusting nature of the work, space to play around with ideas and make mistakes and a place to work collaboratively. Another word that invited discussion was “institutionalize”. We originally described PDS as “informing best practice” but chose the stronger word “institutionalize” because it captures the idea that we are commissioned to act upon and disseminate what we learn from though educational

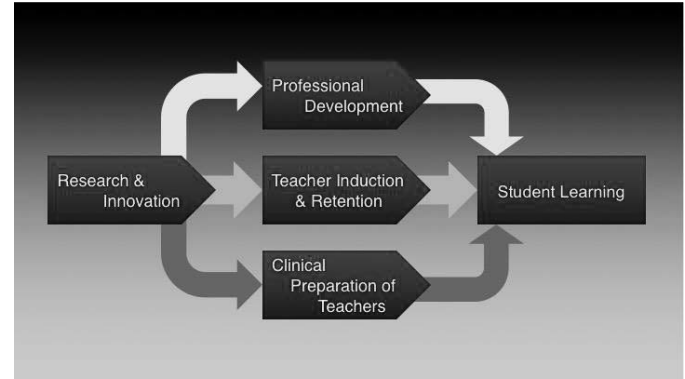


Figure 1. UofSC PDS Network Mission (UofSC, 2018)

innovation and research. We adopted the broad phrase “teacher learning contexts” to include learning within our Network, teacher education practice on a global scale, and everywhere in between.

Network members agreed on four areas of concentration: enhanced student learning, professional development of in-service teachers, clinical preparation of preservice teachers, and the successful induction and retention of new teachers. Once these foundations were established the PDS Network at UofSC was poised to move forward with our new mission statement in place.

## Funding the PDS Network

A commitment to participate in PDS reveals what is valued by both a college of education and participating schools and districts. This commitment comes with a financial obligation from all partners to support our shared mission.

The PDS Network is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UofSC and each K-12 PDS school and is funded through a cost sharing model. Each of the 21 participating schools contributes a partnership fee of \$5,000 per year. In some districts, this fee is paid by the district, and in others it is paid by the individual schools. The principal of Irmo Middle School, Cassy Paschal, explained:

Being part of the PDS Network has afforded my faculty and students a wealth of resources and experiences that could not be obtained through any other partnership. The small fiscal commitment from the school pales in comparison to what my school has gained. If you are seeking to take your school to higher professional development and instructional levels, PDS is the ultimate path.

The COE matches the amount contributed by each school and contributes additional funds per school beyond the minimum \$5,000 agreement. In 2017-2018, the COE budgeted \$12,000 per school and in 2018-2019 the budgeted amount is \$7,857 per school. This funding allows the Network to cover the

stipend of the university faculty liaisons and clinical adjunct faculty and to provide a \$1,000 mini-grant to each participating K-12 school for supplies, materials or needs in support of PDS goals. These funds are also used to send PDS partnership teams to the National Association of Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Conference and the PDS South East Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) Conference. In addition, the funding supports a local educational inquiry conference and an annual PDS Network writing retreat to further encourage scholarship between K-12 and University PDS Network members. The Network also supports eight teachers from PDS to pursue doctoral work through the PDS Fellowship.

## Planned Events

In addition to the conferences and collaborative experiences described above, our PDS Network offers regular meetings for local participants. Each year our PDS co-chairs identify a theme for coordinating council meetings. The professional development offered at these meetings evolves from this theme. In 2017-2018, the theme was *Relational Teaching*. Coordinating Council PD focused on relational classroom management and culturally relevant teaching. The 2018-2019 theme was *Teacher Wellness*. PD topics for the Coordinating Council meetings included preventing teacher burnout, positivity for the teaching profession, mindfulness, wellness in the workspace, and financial wellness. The theme for 2019-2020 is Our Year of Inquiry where we will focus on telling the story of our PDS work.

Starting in Spring 2019, the Network collaborated with clinical experience professionals to host a coaching teacher appreciation event. Every year, this event will recognize an exemplary PDS partnership. This practice was inspired by a recent review of the Nine Essentials and the realization that we needed to improve the reward structures offered by our Network. In addition, our Associate Dean for Research is leading a multi-site research project related to teacher wellness and its impact on effectiveness and retention. To further honor the contribution of PDS affiliates, UofSC hosts an annual local conference. The Spring 2019 conference focused on teacher inquiry.

In addition to these formal initiatives, PDS Network members are continually invited to serve on PDS-related committees, attend COE functions, and write and present about their work with university faculty at regional and national conferences. This level of activity and involvement allows all members of the Network opportunities for meaningful collaboration.

## Self-Assessing our Work

Self-assessment is critical to our growth and success and our assessment practices have evolved over time. Each year, we ask all three members of each school team (administrator, clinical adjunct, university liaison) to complete a PDS Network end-of-year reflective survey. The questions on the survey reflect the job description of each PDS team member and the UofSC PDS mission.

Although every PDS site is unique, all PDS Network sites use data to refine the partnership and ultimately improve student learning in the school. Most schools use teacher survey data to guide the partnership. For example each spring, Irmo Elementary uses teacher surveys to gather data from teachers to plan and/or identify a professional development focus for the following year. The survey builds on the current year's professional development activities to create an ongoing spiral of content and practices. Other schools, such as Blythewood High School, use student achievement data to identify the new year's goals. Faculty at Blythewood found that African American students were under-performing in Algebra I; the PDS Liaison, math faculty, and administrator worked together to develop a plan. As a result, more African American students successfully completed Algebra I and Blythewood High School won the *Nicholas Michelli Award for Social Justice* from the *National Network for Educational Renewal*.

As noted above, every three years each partner school completes a reapplication process. In Spring 2018, six partner schools successfully completed their self-assessments and reapplications to the Network. The PDS co-chairs committee analyzed these re-application data for positive and negative trends and used these data to celebrate successes and make improvements. For example, the data in our reapplication process revealed the need for more whole school PDS involvement.

## Everything Old is New: Sustaining the Model

Our rich history of success relies on committed people and flexibility of the Network to grow and develop as the culture of our profession demands. While all of the practices referenced above support the sustainability of the organization, we simultaneously sense that we are continuously outgrowing the existing model and have recently identified two goals: 1) establish a Professional Development District building on an existing district-wide science improvement model which began in 2018-2019 and 2) expand PDS to a rural district that currently does not have direct access to a college or university.

As we continue to grow and change as a PDS Network, we will continue to look back to our foundation in the Holmes Group and with NAPDS and remember lessons learned. Paul Chaplin, former PDS elementary school teacher and current UofSC PDS teacher educator, summed it up well, stating: <sup>SUP</sup>

“Professional Development Schools changed my life. I got to live into the vision of what the Holmes Group wanted PDS teachers to become - hybrid, one foot in the school and one foot in educator preparation. Many have done what I went on to do. It was extremely powerful in changing what classroom teachers thought about educator preparation and what educator preparation thought about classroom teaching.”



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