

**You Matter: PDS Partners Collaborating to Recruit More Diverse Teacher Candidates**

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**Abstract:** In this article the authors describe how their PDS Partnership collaborated to hold recruitment events to intentionally recruit more diverse teacher candidates. The authors discuss the beginning of the partnership and the specific aspects of the recruitment programs.

**KEYWORDS:** educator preparation, equity, Professional Development Schools, PDSs, recruitment of teacher candidates, school-university partnerships, teacher education

**NAPDS REVISED NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:**

Essential 1. A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.

Essential 4. A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.

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When racial tensions erupted within our PDS partner high school, our long relationship and weekly interactions allowed our university to directly address needs as they arose while cultivating a shared commitment to improving equity in schools through greater diversity in the teacher pipeline (NAPDS Essentials 1 and 2).

**Context: Feldman's Story**

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) began establishing a relationship with Mt. Hebron High School (MHHS) in 2002, and when I (Feldman) agreed to be the university liaison in 2013, I did not really realize what I was getting into. I was a graduate assistant working on my Ph.D. with no knowledge of what Professional Development Schools were--all I knew was that I missed the high school classrooms where I had taught for 10 years, and this position seemed like a good way to get back into schools. With two UMBC alum working as site liaisons, the PDS partnership had many structures in place to develop a thriving relationship. Each week I looked forward to my visits to the school to interact with interns, mentors, and other school personnel, and I quickly realized the exciting potential of the PDS model to mutually benefit both the school and the university.

As I worked at MHHS during those early years, I had begun to notice several important details. Opened in 1965, the school had a long-standing tradition of excellence with many alumni coming back to teach there. I also noticed that the demographics of the school had been shifting, becoming more and more diverse, but the makeup of the faculty was not keeping up with that shift. Knowing that the school had often hired its own in the past, I was interested in finding ways to recruit students of color to come back and teach at their alma mater.

When a series of racial incidents rocked the school community in 2016 and put it in the headlines of local and national media outlets, we had an opportunity to bring university resources in to support the school in new ways. While recruiting more diverse faculty for the school was still a long-term goal, more immediately I brought in faculty of color from the university to speak with students in various clubs and events at the high school. We even invited Dr. Freeman Hrabowski, our university president, to come speak to the entire faculty and student-body about the importance of valuing diversity and recognizing the unique opportunities their school offered to prepare them for leadership in our global society. We paired his presentation with a school-wide lesson I designed to encourage everyone to reflect on and discuss the changes they would like to see in their school and how they could each play a role in improving school climate and valuing the amazing diversity they had available to them in their school. I then read through the student responses to the lesson and shared themes with school administration.

The following year, I decided to build on these initial short-term endeavors to work toward the long-term goal of building a pipeline of teachers of color to come back to their alma mater to diversify the faculty there.

**Review of Research**

The demographic data is clear: as diversity increases in our nation's schools, moving towards a majority of students of color, the demographics of our teacher workforce is not keeping pace with that change (Bond et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). During desegregation, highly qualified and effective Black teachers from segregated schools were pushed out as jobs were duplicated and White parents resisted having teachers of color for their

children (Goldstein, 2015). The end result was a mostly White teacher workforce that persists today with 84% of teachers being White (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020).

While it is important not to essentialize teacher candidates based on their skin color nor perceived stereotypes about the strengths of different races (Brown & Thomas, 2020), the research on the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce is also clear. Students benefit from having teachers that look like them (Hrabowski & Sanders, 2015; Goldhaber, Thaber, & Tiem, 2019; Bond et al., 2015). Teachers of color tend to have higher expectations for students of color which can lead to higher achievement (Ferguson, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995), and teachers of color act as role models and advocates, helping students of color feel more connected to school (Neal, Sleeter, & Kumashiro, 2015).

Human resource departments aware of the need for increased diversity may be eager to hire diverse teacher candidates, but there are few teacher candidates of color enrolled in teacher preparation programs (Goings & Lewis, 2020), and unfortunately, overall enrollment in teacher preparation programs continues to decrease across the country (Sutcher et. al., 2018). The barriers to recruiting and retaining teacher candidates of color have long been documented (Burant, Quiocho, & Rios, 2002; Carver-Thomas, 2020), but there is research to suggest the benefits of programs specifically designed to provide financial, academic, and relational support to teacher candidates of color (Carver-Thomas, 2020, Hrabowski & Sanders, 2015). Unfortunately, some of these programs have also proven to be unsustainable (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019). While there is promising work being done with grow-your-own programs in which districts partner with universities to recruit and prepare teacher candidates to return to their district, no such programs are currently in place in our partner district. However, our PDS relationship and the Sherman Scholars program opened opportunities that would not otherwise have been available for the university and school to partner in the work of diversifying the faculty in this particular partnership.

## **You Matter Recruitment Events**

### **You Matter 1.0**

I brainstormed our first event in 2018, entitled *You Matter: Why We Need Diverse Teachers*, through long conversations with a school counselor and district office colleague. While our main audience would be students of color, we wanted to bring together various other stakeholders to take part in the conversation. We invited three main guest panelists: one was the Prince George's County Public Schools Teacher of the Year, co-founder of MEN of PGCPSS and the other two were Black students studying to be teachers as part of UMBC's Sherman Scholars Program--a scholarship and coaching program for teacher candidates planning to work in urban settings. We publicized in the school through posters and sent personal emails to various faculty and central office employees, including human resource personnel. I also invited teacher candidates interning in the building to participate.

As I designed the event itself, it was important to me that we engaged high school students as active participants rather than passive observers. I wanted them to have a voice and share their ideas, so that we could learn from and with them. My goal was that even if they did not pursue teaching themselves, that they would become advocates for the profession as citizens in the future.

Unsure of how many students or faculty would attend, I came up with two plans for how to run the event. If it was a large group (>10 students), we would split into heterogeneous tables

with a mix of students and school personnel to engage in small group discussions facilitated by teacher candidates, followed by the panel discussion. If we had a smaller number of participants (<10 students), we would sit around one table and engage in a round table discussion where all stakeholders and panelists would engage the same questions together.

Whether multiple small groups or one round table, the discussion questions would be the same. I planned to start with a small packet of charts and graphs about the changing diversity of student populations, the continued lack of diversity in the teacher workforce, the decline in people seeking teaching credentials, and the salary scales for their district. We would use this data as a starting place to engage with the following questions:

1. Look at the data--what do you notice?
2. What makes a great teacher?
3. Why do you think it is important to have teachers of color?
4. What do you think are the barriers to having more teachers of color?
5. What solutions can you think of for recruiting more teachers of color?

Before we got to the last question, we would share research to affirm their beliefs about the importance of teachers of color and the potential barriers to recruitment as well as inform them about the historical roots of the representation gap. We would then engage the guest panelists to answer the following questions as well as any questions raised by the students:

1. Who are you and why is the issue of teacher diversity important to you? Why do you think it is important to have diverse teachers?
2. Why did you go into education and why do you think others should consider it?
3. What do you think are the major barriers to recruiting and retaining diverse teachers?
4. What are some potential avenues for removing those barriers? Share what you and your organizations are doing.
5. What can the rest of us do to advocate for teachers and teacher diversity?

On the day of the event, we had 6 students of color show up to the media center, so we pushed 4 tables together and gathered with our 6 students, 3 panelists, 1 administrator, 3 guidance counselors, 3 interns, 2 HR representatives, 2 other district representatives, and the school's Black Student Achievement Program (BSAP) Liaison for a total of just over 20 participants. We only had 6 of our desired audience of high school students, but we still had a varied group of stakeholders ready to engage in a rich conversation about this topic. As we looked at the data and talked through the discussion questions, we surfaced many interesting ideas, some of which we did not expect, that bring a useful student perspective to existing research.

Some of the ideas surfaced affirmed what we already knew from research on the topic. For example, students valued having teachers that looked like them and who could connect with them on a deeper level because of racial and ethnic affinity. However, some of the ideas that surfaced were unexpected, such as students and Sherman Scholars sharing about parents disapproving of the idea of their becoming teachers. Teaching was perceived as being low prestige, low pay, and even unsafe.

Even with the low turnout of students, there were several positive outcomes of this event. Much of the conversation centered on panelists, interns, central office employees and others sharing why they became teachers and how they saw teaching as a means of engaging in social justice work. This helped everyone there to be able to better articulate why students of color should consider teaching as a profession. Guidance counselors commented that they had been unaware of some of the scholarship opportunities available at our institution and said they would be more mindful of how to better support students who might be interested in teaching. The HR representatives organized a day-long event the following year specifically inviting teacher candidates of color to tour the district and interview for positions in the county. We do not know if our event inspired that event, but we do know that our discussion likely informed their work in some way and that our local event was now part of a larger district movement.

While we all benefited from the rich conversations at this first event, I still desired to engage with more high school students about the issue. I knew from my own research that many teachers go into the profession because of their relationship with or the recommendation of a particular teacher (Feldman, 2018). Somehow, we needed to connect with students on a more personal level, but as a university representative, I did not have that sort of relationship with students. I had an idea to have classroom teachers nominate students in their classes to attend, so that students knew that someone saw potential in them to be a great teacher, but I needed someone in the school to help me bring this plan to life. One of the individuals who shared their experience as an educator of color during our first event was Cheryl Grimes, the school's BSAP liaison. This was my first time meeting Grimes, and she became a powerful partner in our next endeavor to implement this event.

### **You Matter 2.0: Grime's Story**

In the spring of 2018, I (Grimes) was in the second semester of my first year as the Black Student Achievement Liaison at Mt. Hebron High School. As I worked to build relationships with students, staff and parents, one thing was becoming very clear, the school was on the cusp of great change. The air was thick with unresolved emotions regarding a 2016 racial incident against Black students that led to a student walkout, and it was common to hear Black students and their families share frustrations concerning staff behavior they viewed as biased and discriminatory and an apathy regarding racial incidents at the hands of non-Black students. And while MHHS's student population was becoming increasingly diverse, the staff was not. All the while the new school principal sought to unify our school community. It was in this climate that I received Feldman's invitation to the first You Matter event, but my excitement fizzled when despite emailing families about the event, I only counted 6 students in the room.

The goal of the Black Student Achievement Program (BSAP) is to close achievement gaps evident in the patterns of data between Black students and the student population at large. As previously mentioned, data supports that Black students perform better and feel more connected in classrooms led by Black and Brown teachers; therefore, the You Matter event aligned with my own goals for Black student achievement. This event would plant seeds that could lead to the increase of teachers of color, students would learn about impactful programs at UMBC expanding their access to pathways of success, and our students would feel seen and heard leading to feelings of connection and acceptance in our school community. But how do we get them in the room?

Feldman and I agreed to use a more personal approach to increase student participation for the event in the spring of 2019. While we wanted to encourage more students of color to become teachers of color, getting them into the room to hear the speakers and the data needed to come first. Therefore, I suggested offering food, a powerful motivator for any group of high schoolers, which UMBC was able to provide. After sending an email to all of our teachers, explaining the event and requesting them to nominate students they saw as future educators, I followed up by meeting each student individually to discuss the event, who nominated them and to give them a personalized paper invitation. I met with Black student clubs to discuss the event and why it was important whether they were interested in teaching or not. I highlighted the need for them to be fully informed as future voters and policy makers, so that they could better advocate for diversity in schools as adults. Additionally, I leveraged my relationship with our ESOL department staff to urge more of our Hispanic students to attend. Lastly, I hung flyers, emailed parents and arranged school announcements to cover all our bases. We urged students to RSVP, but allowed all interested students to attend--the only caveat, we urged them to stay for the entire event.

All of this led to over 30 students attending along with MHHS and BSAP staff members and our school's PTSA president. We even ran out of food and UMBC swag because turnout was higher than expected. We were thrilled about the turnout and enlightened by the powerful conversations that took place among students, staff, and community partners. White mentor teachers and interns appreciated the opportunity to learn from students of color about their experiences and needs, and the PTSA president even mentioned that she would be thinking about how to promote the ideas shared to help parents be more open to encouraging their own children to consider teaching.

### **What We Learned**

During this second event, interns and mentors worked as table facilitators and took notes on the ideas shared by the students at the table. Their perspectives on why diverse teachers are important was again consistent with the research, but they also had many creative ideas for addressing the barriers to recruiting more teachers of color. They focused a lot on shifting the narrative away from the negatives of teaching and highlighting the positives in order to dispel the perception among students and parents of teaching as low prestige, low pay, and unsafe. Here are a few themes and ideas that emerged from their table notes:

- Why is it important to have diverse teachers?
  - Teachers need to better represent the diversity of our students.
  - Students need to see people that look like them in our schools.
  - Students are better able to relate to teachers who look like them and know their cultural perspectives.
  - Students of color feel more comfortable and less isolated when there are teachers that look like them and understand their experiences.
  - Representation turns students on or off to opportunities for future careers in certain subjects.
  - Diverse teachers offer opportunities to learn about different cultures and perspectives.

- All students (including White students) need to learn from people from diverse perspectives—people with whom they share a racial, cultural, or linguistic background, but also people who are different from them.
- Having diverse colleagues will make all teachers better at what they do.
- Diversity brings fresh perspectives, different teaching styles, and new energy to teaching.
- Having more diverse teachers will encourage more students with diverse backgrounds to consider teaching as a career.
- What can we do to increase diversity in the teacher pipeline?
  - Highlight positive teaching stories rather than negative stories about teaching in the media.
  - Help students realize that teaching is the best way to have an impact on others' lives.
  - Have students encourage peers who excel or enjoy certain topics to consider teaching.
  - Ensure that teachers are paid according to their education, but also make sure that people realize that some districts do pay teachers well.
  - Try to remove the stigma of teaching as a low paying, thankless job.
  - Make sure teachers enjoy their work and express their love of teaching to students rather than emphasizing the negatives so that students are discouraged from considering teaching.
  - Avoid overemphasizing STEM and business jobs and undervaluing teaching because teaching provides greater opportunities to change people's lives on a day-to-day basis.
  - Provide opportunities in high school like Teacher Academy for students to explore the profession and get college credit for teacher education coursework.
  - Respect teachers of color to help retain them in the profession.
  - Introduce friends to teaching opportunities and meetings.
  - Teachers should identify students who have the natural dispositions for teaching and encourage them to consider it (rather than discouraging them from teaching).
  - Create and publicize scholarship programs (like Sherman Scholars) that help support teacher candidates, provide extra experience, and lower the cost of college.
  - Provide mentors for young teachers of color who can help them to navigate the profession as an under-represented group in the profession.
  - Vote for people who support teaching.
  - Subsidize housing for teachers.
  - Increase student, teacher, community interaction.
  - Have districts provide information and programs to guide students if interested in teaching.
  - Explain different paths to becoming a teacher affordably.
  - Create incentives and fast-track programs to motivate entry into the profession.
  - Hire teachers who are passionate and inspire passion.
  - Give students Teacher for the Day Opportunities to try teaching.

- Teachers should share their experience as teachers and love of teaching so that students would consider it.

Beyond the ideas shared with us during the event itself, we also learned something important about how to best leverage our PDS partnership to advocate for our profession and for greater equity in our schools. The university was important in bringing in panelists, developing the program, providing food and swag, and providing scholarship and practical advice about pursuing education, but we could not have connected with high school students without our partners in the school building who could use their relationships with students to personally invite them to the event.

### Looking Forward

While the table notes provided us with some data, we realize now that we should have had an evaluation available for students to fill out immediately to better assess the impact the event had on their interest in pursuing a career in education. This is something we will certainly include in future events. We also hope to do more long-term follow-up with participants to see if any of them do pursue a career in education; however, we are hopeful that even those who do not end up teaching will grow into citizens who support teachers as parents and voters.

We are also excited that in 2019, the district held several meetings with us to scale up this event for more high schools in the district. Representatives from other universities will do similar events at their PDS partner schools and each university plans to adopt other non-PDS high schools to hold the events there. While the district is planning to make this a more general teacher recruiting event (not just for students of color), we were vocal in our meetings that BSAP and Hispanic Student Liaisons should be part of the planning team at each school to ensure emphasis on equal representation of students of color at the event and that diversity still be part of the conversation. This endeavor was put on hold by the pandemic in 2020, but everything is in place to bring it back and make it happen in 2021.

This experience highlights the importance of PDS partnership in meeting the needs of both K-12 schools and universities, accomplishing the work of advocating for our profession, and cultivating greater diversity in the teacher pipeline. We are excited to continue this work together in the coming years.

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