After the Funding Flees: A How-To Model for Sustaining the Professional Development School Partnership

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ABSTRACT: The article deals with one of the most important components of a professional development school (PDS) partnership—sustainability without funding. According to Ganesan, Das, Edwards, and Okogbaa (2004), sustainability is one of the most difficult components of actualizing a school–university partnership. The PDS partnership depicted in this article—between a school of education at a historically Black college and university and a low-income Title I elementary school—provides a model for those in PDS partnerships who are seeking ways to empower teachers, students, and administrators through strong collaborations without funding. The model integrates the five National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education standards for PDS partnerships: learning community; accountability and quality assurance; collaboration; diversity and equity; and structures, resources, and roles. This partnership's story illustrates that financial assistance was a resource in establishing the school partnership between the university and the local school district. However, relationships and shared commitments formed the prolonging dynamic that enabled the collaboration to become a lasting partnership among individuals, institutions, and the community. All partners committed to the success of student learning and quality teacher performance in the K–12 segment.

One of the most important components of professional development school (PDS) partnerships is sustainability. The easy part of forming a partnership is the decision to create and begin it when funding is available, but the difficult task is sustaining it once the funding ends, with only the commitment to partner remaining (Ebersole & Schillow, 2007). This article describes the emergence, sustainability, and growth of a partnership between a school of education in a historically Black college and university (HBCU) and a low-income Title I elementary school. The partnership was formed when grant funds were available, yet it was sustained and continued growing once the grant ended—that is, without any additional funding.

Partnership Development

The partnership was established in 2004, through a No Child Left Behind grant secured by the university. The goals of the project were to improve teacher quality, increase preservice teachers' quality at the HBCU, and increase student achievement at the partner school. Many of the partnership classrooms were

staffed by teachers who matriculated through the teacher education programs at the HBCU.

The rationale for beginning the partnership stemmed from the theoretical belief that collaborative partnerships between HBCUs and Title I schools would create effective and diverse field experiences for preservice teachers who were pursuing teaching certificates. In addition, the partners believed that their collaboration could strengthen and increase achievement of the students attending the Title I schools, as well as provide professional development for the teachers of both institutions. To these ends, the original memorandum of understanding between the university and the school district targeted these beliefs by integrating the five National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; 2001) standards for PDSs: learning community; accountability and quality assurance; collaboration; diversity and equity; and structures, resources, and roles. These standards created a shared foundation from which both parties could build a partnership that would embrace common goals and values, all of which should factor into a sustained effort. The NCATE component standardizes the process, given that the council sets the criteria for teacher education programs and their services to the surrounding community of learners. The NCATE standards facilitated sustainability in that the original commitment to collaboration was the key factor in maintaining the partnership without additional funding. A demographic description of the partners helps to better understand and define the uniqueness of this PDS context. Alabama A&M University, located in northern Alabama, is a historically Black university with approximately 6,000 students, offering undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs. Montview Elementary School (Huntsville School District) is a low-income school with 258 K–5 students, among whom 82% receive free and reduced-price lunch. The school has 22 classroom teachers. The racial breakdown of the student population is as follows: 94% Black, 3% White, and 3% other. The partnership between the School of Education at Alabama A&M University and Montview Elementary School, like other PDSs, possesses a unique history consisting of successes and challenges.

Year 1

The following steps were taken to form the partnership for Year 1. The first involved identifying key personnel to design and implement the partnership. Then, all participants, administrators, teachers, and professors met and provided expertise in determining the purpose and function of the partnership. The team members identified professional development needs and identified areas for improvement of student learning. An examination of the previous year's achievement test scores yielded the areas of greatest need (mathematics and reading) and the population presenting the greatest needs (special education). In essence, the team defined the partnership after examining the test scores such that the emphasis for the collaborative became that of improving mathematics and reading scores for the special education population.

The team identified ways to strengthen the programs and materials already in place, and they brainstormed ways to develop the school partnership that was needed in order to attain the goals and objectives and remain in alignment with the existing programs. A graduate assistant worked with the university and the elementary school. An expert consultant conducted workshops, and professors provided training and coteaching after identifying the subject areas in need of expertise. University students assisted the professors in the classroom, and the university classes met at the school. The topics for professional development seminars were selected after examining test scores, which indicated areas of weaknesses and in-service needs for the teachers.

Years 2–4

Year 2 commenced with no additional funding. The reading specialist cotaught classes with the university faculty. An examination of test scores from Year 1 indicated a need for sus-

tained emphasis on reading, mathematics, and the special education population; thus, the team collaboratively defined a commitment to increase the test scores of the special education population. The assessment drove the instruction and partnership work. Special education instructors met the university special education classes at Montview Elementary School in the "smart classroom," a technologically enhanced learning environment, and then spent the day in the various classrooms at Montview with the collaborative education teachers. The entire PDS team—principal, director, faculty, higher education faculty, school of education students, and Montview students—maintained strong commitments to sustained growth.

Year 3 began with the commitment to sustain the partnership and move forward. Year 2 test scores were examined, and the team made a commitment to continue raising test scores in the area of reading and among the special education subgroup during Year 3. Year 4 began after examining the test scores from Year 3. The examination revealed the need for sustained emphasis on reading and mathematics, with continued commitment to improve the test scores of the special education population.

PDS Sustainability Model

The following model depicted the PDS as it related to the NCATE standards.

Learning Community

The initial grant money provided vital professional development for the teachers at the school, with monthly full-day workshops for teachers, including paid substitutes to provide release time. The grant also equipped a smart classroom for the school, with the intent that it would be used by the faculty and students attending the university as a teaching laboratory classroom. Computers, various technological equipment, software, and classroom libraries were also provided to individual classrooms with the initial grant money. The funding allowed the partners to create an ideal 1st-year PDS partnership. End-of-the-year surveys indicated that the partnership had indeed been welcomed and was successful. All parties (university and K–12 educators) committed to continuing the partnership beyond Year 1, and both institutions (higher education and K–12) engaged in planned, ongoing communication. Group meetings—held before, during, or after school at the school site—centered on the effectiveness of the model. The learning community brainstormed methods for improvement and tweaked any areas that were ineffective or were headed in the direction of ineffectiveness.

University faculty became important participants in the classrooms and continually shaped their roles in the project by providing professional development for teachers in the K–12 school in the form of coteaching and mentoring. The university faculty was excited to instruct the methods classes at the K–12 school site. This allowed the professors and university students to have refreshed and real-life contact with K–12 students and curriculum materials. The classroom teachers served as coteachers of the methods classes. Most were eager to participate because they felt such a commitment to sharing the responsibility for preparing highly qualified teachers, and most maintained this eagerness throughout the years.

Accountability and Quality Assurance

University faculty and classroom teachers collaborated to analyze data and test scores, to modify teaching methods and curriculum materials. Together, the faculty and teachers used the data to make assessments regarding student achievement and the continued direction of the project. They used the analysis to emphasize the special education component during the 2nd and 3rd year of the project. University faculty administered informal surveys to assess the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of the participants. Given that self-reported satisfaction alone is not enough to sustain collaboration, examination of test scores became a yearly partnership activity.

This examination revealed progress over the course of the partnership. For example, during the 2004–2005 school year, the school was placed on "school improvement" because of the gap between scores of the special education students and scores of the regular education students. By 2005–2006, the scores were improving and the school was placed on "delay"; that is, the gap was narrowing between the special education and regular education students, as evidenced by the state's annual report card. As for the aggregated population data, there was a 5% increase in reading and an 8% increase in mathematics scores. During the 2006–2007 school year, the school met 13 of its 13 goals and made annual yearly progress. Specifically, the students maintained the reading scores; mathematics scores increased by 6%; and K–3 accountability testing improved. At the end of the 2007–2008 school year, the Title I school was removed from school improvement, and the results of the test scores during the 4 years of the partnership revealed that (1) there was a 26% increase in K–3 reading in 3 years; (2) 81% of fifth-grade students scored at proficient levels or higher on the spring 2008 Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test and scored 74% or better on the mathematics portion of the test; and (3) 100% of kindergarten students benchmarked on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Test assessment administered during the spring semester of 2008.

These increased test scores and performances may have assisted in proving that the PDS partnership was successful and so benefited the students; because of this success, the school sought to continue the partnership, thus its being sustained without funding.

Collaboration

The school's reading coach and curriculum specialist collaborated with university professors to share different angles of knowledge to discern what was the most needed and relevant training for the teachers. The director at the HBCU served on the school's literacy team and leadership team. The school principal provided seminars and presentations for the preservice teachers, guided the director in planning future seminars, and pinpointed areas to strengthen the preservice program.

Each year, the focus of the partnership evolved on the basis of a collaborative analysis of the test scores and the needs of the preservice teacher training program. For example, Year 1 emphasized reading and mathematics, whereas Year 2 incorporated the special education partnership. Years 3 and 4 continued with coteaching in the three areas of reading, mathematics, and special education. Given the ever-increasing emphasis on test scores, schools (particularly, low-income Title I schools) need this type of support.

Diversity and Equity

University professors linked theory to practice by working directly in the classroom. As a result, the teaching repertoires diversified and strengthened. University professors required increased field experience hours from students in methods and materials courses. Preservice candidates and student teachers saturated the school. Various projects related to reading engaged parents and volunteers from the community to spend time in the classroom, working with the diverse population of learners with exceptionalities. As a result, the students at the university engaged in diverse experiences and received additional training through the reading specialist at the school. For example, the students logged more than 2,000 hours at the school during the 2006–2007 school year.

Table 1 displays the extensive investment of time (and, thus, resources) that strengthened the partnership. Other partnerships—not just the Alabama A&M University and

Table 1. Hours Logged by University Field Experience Students

School Year	*Hours*
2004–2005	1,551
2005–2006	1,205[a]
2006–2007	2,000

[a]Fewer university students were at the school during this year, thus the reduced number of hours—but note that the actual hours per student increased.

Huntsville City Schools partnership—may discover that the greater the investment of time in a quality partnership, the more likely that the relationship will be maintained, because the involved parties have created and strengthened existing networks via thousands of field experience hours.

Structures, Resources, and Roles

When the No Child Left Behind grant was written, the K–12 and higher education institutions in this study made a commitment to sustain the relationship, without funding after Year 1. The commitment to the relationship was expressed verbally (in whole-group and faculty meetings) and in writing (in the original memorandum of understanding). With the school district superintendent and the university dean, the PDS leadership team annually reaffirmed the commitment to PDS work and conveyed that commitment to all critical constituencies through various small-group meetings.

University faculty re-created their roles in the project by providing professional development for teachers in the K–12 school, in the form of coteaching. Not only did professional development focus on the improvement of teaching for the classroom teachers, but it allowed the university faculty to have current and recent classroom teaching experience, a necessary requirement for faculty who teach methods courses. With the absence of grant money, the vital shared resource of faculty and K–12 teachers became time—specifically, time spent working at the school or on the project. As the collaborative parties continued through the 3rd year of the partnership and began Year 4, student achievement continued to improve. The morale of the participating teachers increased, as indicated in informal disposition surveys. Preservice teachers received additional field experience opportunities and left the clinical better prepared and equipped for their first years of licensed teaching—that is, according to the supervising cooperating teachers and administrators at the school, as well as an analysis of informal PDS assessment surveys completed at the end of the school year.

Conclusion

Each year of the collaboration presented challenges and successes for each of the main entities involved in the partnership (Table 2). First, the challenges for the university director involved coordinating transportation and being out of the office while at Montview. The successes included enhanced field experiences for university students, prospects for internship placements, and strengthened relationships with the school district. Second, the challenges for the university professors involved curriculum adjustments and following the Montview time schedule. The successes included opportunities to obtain recent teaching experiences through coteaching at the

Table 2. Challenges and Successes Experienced by the Various Roles in the Partnership

Roles	*Challenges*	*Successes*
University director	Out of the university office while at school site	Increased field experience placements
	Coordinating various schedules	Quality experience
University professors	Curriculum adjustments	Recent school experiences
	Scheduling to coordinate with school's time	Opportunity for real-life experiences for professors and preservice candidates
Cooperating teachers and administrators	Having extra personnel in the building	Professional development opportunities
	Learning different methodologies	Coteaching with college professors
Reading specialist	Coordinating all field experience placements	Increased tutoring
	Monitoring tutoring	Individualized instruction in reading

school, with the classroom teachers, and opportunities to expose university students to real classroom situations. Third, the challenges for the principal involved getting teachers accustomed to having extra personnel in their classrooms, having teachers change their methodologies, increasing their openness to collaboration, and locating substitutes during the professional development sessions. The successes included acquiring professional development through partnership with university professors, having university professors model best practices, and offering classroom teachers the experience of coteaching with university professors. Fourth, the challenges for the school reading specialist and teachers lay in (1) coordinating all the field experiences placements between the university students and the various classrooms and (2) modeling and teaching best practices to university students. The successes of increased tutoring and mentoring in individual classrooms resulted in increased reading achievement, particularly in the special education population.

This article provides a model for those in PDS partnerships who are seeking ways to empower teachers, students, and administrators through strong collaborations without funding. This model emerged from a shared commitment to actualize the NCATE standards.

Financial assistance was a resource in establishing the initial school partnership between the university and the local school district. However, relationships and commitments were the prolonging dynamics that enabled the collaboration to become a long-lasting partnership among individuals, institutions, and the community—all committed to the success of student learning and quality teacher performance in the K–12 segment. As mentioned earlier, the grant, as initially conceptualized and written, was based on the NCATE standards for PDSs: learning community; accountability and quality assurance; collaboration; diversity and equity; and structures, resources, and roles. Sustaining the professional development school relationship after grant monies were no longer available took commitment and effort, but it was feasible. As such, we hope that the model described here, between an HBCU and a Title I school, will serve as a useful guide for other institutions that wish to begin similar partnerships. SUP

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