

A Special Partnership: The Towson-Waterloo-Ilchester-Bellows Spring Elementary Education-Special Education Professional Development School

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ABSTRACT: The 2010 Professional Development Schools National Conference recognized the professional development school relationship between Towson University with its dual certification major and the Howard County Public School System for its outstanding collaborative accomplishments, naming the Towson-Waterloo-Ilchester-Bellows Spring PDS as a recipient of the **National Association for Professional Development Schools Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement**. In this article, the author describes the work of this *special* school-university partnership, emphasizing the collaborative efforts, and based on the NAPDS' Nine Essentials of PDS work.



FIRST TERM (Fall)	(17 credits)
MATH 323 Teaching Math in Elem School (3)	
MATH 324 Supervision Observation/Participation in Elementary School Math (2)	
BIO 303 Biology or Life Sciences (3)	
PHSC 303 Earth-Space Science (3)	
SCIE 376 Teaching Science in Elem School (3)	
SPED 425 Formal Tests & Measurements (3)	
SPED 441 Curriculum Meth of Instruction (3)	
SECOND TERM (Spring)	(18 credits)
ELED 363 Language & Literacy Internship (3)	
ELED 320 Foundations of Writing and Other Language Arts (3)	
ECED 201 Intervention and the Young Child (3)	
SPED 413 Assistive Technology (3)	
EDUC 417 Children's Literature (3)	
ELED 323 Principles/Practices of Instruction in Read & Language Arts (3)	
THIRD TERM (Fall)	(15 credits)
EESE 475 EESE Internship I (3)	
ELED 311 Child & the Elementary School Curriculum & Assessment (3)	
ELED 429 Principles/Practices of Assessment in Reading & Lang Arts (3)	
SPED 429 Curriculum/Methods of Classroom Management (3)	
SPED 469 Collaboration Teaching in Elementary Schools (3)	
FOURTH TERM (Spring)	(15 credits)
EESE 476 EESE Internship II (12)	
EESE 485 EESE Internship Seminar (3)	

Figure 1. Professional Education Courses in the Elementary Education - Special Education Major

At the request of the Maryland State Department of Education, Towson University created an Elementary Education-Special Education (EESE) undergraduate major leading to dual certification, which serves as a model for other Maryland Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). This unique major is a collaborative program between the Elementary Education and Special Education departments. Prospective students apply for the four-semester program toward the completion of their general education requirements [see Figure 1 for professional course of study]. Towson University, with its long history of teacher education, graduates not only the largest number of general education teachers in the State, but, due in great part to the EESE major, now graduates the largest number of special education teacher candidates, too. EESE is the fastest growing major in the

College of Education and one of the fastest growing majors at the University.

Because of our experiences and successes in creating one of the first neighborhood school Special Education PDSS in the country almost 14 years ago, Towson University and the Howard County Public School System again partnered to develop a unique PDS for the EESE major, known as the TWIBS EESE PDS, with Waterloo Elementary School, Ilchester Elementary School, and Bellows Spring Elementary School. We are currently in our 6th year, with 19 TWIBS EESE PDS interns slated to graduate in May 2011. Although interns in each of our large cohorts are able to complete their general education rotation internships in one of our three "anchor" schools, most of our interns complete their special education rotation internships in other Howard County schools, which we refer to as our PDS "satellite" schools.

Background on the EESE Major

In Maryland, there are four types of special education certification: vision; hearing; multiple/severe needs; and, Generic Special Education, with a choice of three age/grade levels. At Towson University, we offer majors in Generic Special Education. Undergraduate students major in one of the four programs, or tracks, within our Department of Special Education. Our special education teacher candidates are required to choose a concentration for their coursework and field experiences in either the Infant/Primary (birth to grade 3), Elementary/Middle (grades 1 to 8), Secondary/Adult (grade 6 through adulthood), or Integrated Elementary Education-Special Education (leading to dual Maryland certification in grades 1 to 8 of special education and grades 1 to 6 of general education) track. All four of the special education programs at our IHE have been accredited/approved by the National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the Maryland State Department of Education. One of the most subscribed to programs in the Department is the integrated Elementary Education-Special Education major, which has more than quadrupled in enrollment since its inception in the 2005-06 academic year. There are currently five cohorts of EESE seniors, including two cohorts at off-site campuses. Due to the rapid growth in the EESE major, Towson University now graduates the largest number of special education teacher candidates in the state of Maryland.

Description of our EESE PDS

The interns in the EESE program follow a 16-week, two semester (fall and spring) academic year. During the final PDS year, interns complete what we refer to as an A-B-B-A rotation wherein they spend eight weeks in general education and eight weeks in special education during both semesters. For this rotation sequence, interns are placed in a general education setting, or “A” placement, two days per week for the first eight

weeks of the fall semester and then move to a special education setting, or “B” placement, two days per week for the remaining eight weeks. When they return after winter break for the spring semester, they start back attending their special education (B) placement fulltime, five days per week and remain there for another eight weeks. Finally, they end their professional internship year by spending the last eight weeks of the spring semester in their general education (A) placement fulltime. We feel that this rotation sequence is beneficial because it allows interns to become familiar with classroom routines prior to the fulltime internship and also provides opportunities for them to see growth in their students over an entire school year. It should be noted that, given such large EESE cohorts (up to 24 interns per year), half of the EESE interns begin in general education for Rotation A while the other half begins in special education for Rotation A, with all switching fields (to either special or general education) for Rotation B.

Challenges in Preparing Special Educators via a PDS Model

Because Towson University graduates such a large number of teacher candidates each year, we are required by law to provide a professional development school experience (rather than the traditional student teaching placement). Preparing special education teacher candidates using a PDS model is more challenging than preparing general education teacher candidates.

In our experience as PDS partners for the EESE program, we have faced numerous challenges while building and maintaining our learning community that specifically relate to our interns’ special education experiences. One such challenge has been finding sufficient numbers of qualified and available special educators to serve as mentor teachers in any one school. A second challenge has been ensuring that interns get intensive, extensive experiences with students across a variety of disability categories and in settings that follow the least restrictive environment continuum. Thirdly, because of the large number of satellite

schools that we use in order to provide adequate numbers of special education mentors, we have found it difficult to establish a sense of “community.” Finally, enticing non-tenured university special education faculty members to get involved in PDS work has been yet another challenge. [For a more in depth description of these challenges and specific strategies that we have developed and found to be effective for overcoming them, please read Sargent, Gartland, Borinsky & Durkan, (2009).] Despite the challenges, our TWIBS EESE PDS is successful in preparing highly qualified, highly effective, dually certified teachers equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach *all* students. What follows is a further description of this *special* school-university partnership, emphasizing the collaborative efforts, and based on the NAPDS’ Nine Essentials of PDS work.

NAPDS Essential 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.

Towson University and the Howard County Public School System are widely recognized PDS leaders in Maryland, at the higher education and local schools levels, respectively. Each has been involved in the PDS movement in preparing general education teacher candidates for almost 20 years. As such, each has engaged numerous stakeholder representatives to develop mission statements:

*The mission of the professional education unit at **Towson University** is to inspire, educate, and prepare educators as facilitators of active learning for diverse and inclusive communities of learners in environments that are technologically advanced.*

*The mission of PDSs in **Howard County** is to employ the collaborative resources of P-12 and higher education to:*

- promote the achievement of rigorous standards by all students;
- support high quality academic and clinical training for teacher candidates by providing intensive internship opportunities;
- provide a powerful mechanism for the simultaneous renewal and professional development of P-12 and higher education faculties;
- serve as centers for the identification and documentation of best practices in teaching and learning through inquiry, research and reflection;
- support efforts to achieve the strategic goals of the school system’s strategic plan.

Towson University and Howard County agreed to collaborate so that Towson’s first EESE PDS cohort would be hosted in Howard County elementary schools. When we created our collaborative mission statement, we wanted to encompass an inclusive sense of the partnership that reflects all stakeholders’ contributions and responsibilities to both school-aged children and PDS interns:

The mission of the Towson-Waterloo-Ilchester-Bellows Spring (TWIBS) Elementary Education Special Education (EESE) Professional Development School (PDS) is to become a community of learners where student achievement and accountability are maximized through a collaborative partnership among all stakeholders.

Thus the goal of our TWIBS EESE PDS is to increase the achievements of ALL students and prepare an increased number of teachers who are experts in content as well as evidence-based strategies for students with disabilities. We re-visit our mission often, encouraging all participants to live up to the mission everyday.

NAPDS Essential 2

A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community.

The school staffs of our TWIBS EESE PDS incorporate the interns as full participants of the school community from the start. The interns begin their PDS year typically two weeks prior to the start of the Towson academic year, allowing them to spend the first week when teachers

return alongside their mentor, readying for the new school year and engaging in professional development. The interns also are there the following week, when children return for their first week. This is, of course, a hallmark of the PDS experience, getting to spend quality time, developing a relationship with the mentor teacher as well as being “behind the scenes” to see just what goes into opening a school year. Although interns bemoan the fact that their summer is cut shorter than non-education major friends, they rave about what they learned those first two weeks during program evaluations.

During the teachers’ first week back each academic year, interns are given the same school handbooks, resources, and materials all teachers receive, including coveted school spirit wear! The interns go to all the meetings their mentors do that first week, including briefings on new curricula, policies, forms, and procedures. They also read the cumulative files of each student on their mentor’s caseload as well as any Individualized Education Programs and 504 Plans. The interns see the mentors toil through schedule setting, especially challenging when trying to fit in all the specialized instructional hours their special education mentors teach across grades. They see their special education mentors starting to forge new collaborative relationships with general education teachers with whom they will co-teach. The interns also spend time setting up classrooms, ensuring sufficient numbers of furniture, texts, and other instructional materials and supplies. A highlight for the interns is meeting the students and their families at Open House, typically one afternoon at the end of the teachers’ first week. The mentors are wonderful about introducing interns as partners in the students’ education.

Depending on which day the teachers start back in August, we hold a Mentor-Intern Tea the day before the teachers’ contracts begin, as an additional opportunity for mentors and interns to meet-and-greet and mingle. The mentors give up part of their “last day off” in order to make the interns feel welcome and allay anxieties. Additionally, the Towson faculty in charge of the PDS year meets with the interns the day before teachers begin, which serves as an

orientation to their PDS Year. At that meeting, the principal and assistant principal in whose school the orientation is taking place will meet the interns and provide a welcome and overview of the school. Often they will talk about the collaborative nature of our partnership and recount the successes of the EESE graduates they have hired from our TWIBS PDS. A representative from the Howard County PDS Office will also come to provide the interns with badges and information about such things as dress code, email and social network policies between students and teachers, and access to electronic curricula.

Interns attend professional development sessions throughout the year with their mentors, including those on differentiated instruction, cultural proficiency, and designing quality inclusive education. The interns are welcomed at Back-to-School Nights, parent-teacher conferences, and school-based family nights (e.g., Math Night, Literacy Night, and Game Night). Interns are also active participants in various team and school meetings, such as School Improvement Teams, Individualized Educational Programs, and prereferral meetings as well as County meetings, such as Special Education Team and Instructional Leadership meetings. Throughout their PDS Year, interns realize just how committed to the preparation of future educators their school staffs are and feel embraced by their active engagement in the school community.

NAPDS Essential 3

Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need.

Professional development occurs regularly for both PDS IHE and school faculties. When either Towson or Howard County brings in nationally-known education speakers, faculties from our PDS are invited to participate. Additionally, Towson’s field experience office, the Center for Professional Practice, holds regular meetings for IHE faculty, for site liaisons, and for principals, providing information, materials, and, often, lunch or dinner.

Based on needs assessments, Towson offers on-site graduate classes at drastically reduced

costs for school staff. Not only is this more convenient and tailor made to meet teachers' needs, but reasonably priced. The courses may be taught by fulltime Towson faculty or Howard County staff hired as adjuncts.

Howard County also regularly provides professional development opportunities for IHE and school faculties. A countywide mentor training is offered annually. Bi-monthly meetings of the various IHE Coordinators who have PDSs in Howard County are held, where information, promising practices, and materials are shared. The Howard County PDS Program also brings site liaisons together two to four times per year for professional development opportunities.

Professional development specific to our TWIBS EESE PDS also occurs. Towson has provided sets of professional books for school-based book clubs on topics such as differentiated instruction, brain-based strategies, co-teaching between general and special education teachers, and teaching students who are different from their teachers. Towson faculty and interns are always welcome to participate. As a TWIBS EESE PDS, we hold community-wide professional development sessions. For example, based on a needs assessment last year, it was determined that three afterschool workshops would be held, one at each of the anchor schools with all staffs and interns invited to all sessions. The topics were: Communicating With Parents; SharePoint Technology; and, Classroom Management. Teachers at our TWIBS EESE PDS served as workshop presenters.

NAPDS Essential 4

A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants.

In order to provide improved and enhanced educational opportunities for the children attending our TWIBS EESE PDS, IHE and school faculty work together to identify evidence-based practices and teach interns to employ them appropriately. TWIBS EESE PDS teachers regularly guest lecture in the interns' classes and Seminars and alert us to county-wide opportunities that come across the Howard County intra-

net. Additionally, school faculty members assisted IHE faculty in creating EESE syllabi and assignments as well as monitoring tools, such as the informal and formal observations forms. We review, reflect on, and refine these at various governance meetings.

Given the collaborative nature of our general and special education PDS, mentors and Towson supervisors work to provide each intern with on-going opportunities to see co-planning and co-teaching during the Fall semester in preparation of engaging in those collaborative activities during their fulltime internship in the Spring Semester. We ensure the intern gains proficiency in co-teaching with the mentor, with other interns (purposefully placing an intern with a special education mentor and an intern with a general educator who co-teach), and co-teaching with the mentor's co-teaching partners.

TWIBS EESE PDS interns engage in a minimum of 20 hours of service learning as a way of giving back to the schools. Interns' service learning activities are often tied to School Improvement Plan goals and include assisting in Homework Clubs, creating tutoring programs, collecting and organizing student data, working with families of English Language Learners, and providing games and packets for December and summer vacations, based on students with disabilities' individualized plans.

Interns also complete an action research project, aimed at decreasing student behaviors interfering with achievement (see Gartland, 2010). These Positive Behavior Support Plans are often so effective that they are continued as part of students' Individualized Education Programs.

NAPDS Essential 5

Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants.

TWIBS EESE PDS IHE and school faculty and interns engage in and routinely reflect upon promising practices for professional development as well as to strengthen our PDS. PDS participants share our work through many

venues. Interns will often present data from action research or service learning projects in class, at School Improvements Team meetings, and at the annual Maryland PDS Conference. Mentors present at Steering meetings, Summer Strategic Planning Institutes or guest lecture in interns' classes. Because of the general education-special education collaborative nature of our PDS, representatives have presented on numerous occasions at the meetings sponsored by the Maryland State Department of Education.

TWIBS EESE PDS participants have made several presentations annually at the Professional Development Schools National Conference since our PDS's inception and have included a numerous individuals representing a variety of PDS roles: interns, mentors, school site liaisons, IHE PDS faculty and PDS supervisors, PDS administrators, and Howard County PDS Office representatives. In addition to presentation at NAPDS conferences, TWIBS EESE PDS representatives have presented at other national conferences, including those sponsored by the Council for Exceptional Children, Council for Learning Disabilities, and Teacher Education Division. The topics have ranged from how to start a collaborative general-special education PDS to increasing student achievements based on data from interns' action research or service learning to sustaining PDSs when key personnel change.

NAPDS Essential 6

An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved.

Towson University and the Howard County Public School System have a formal, signed agreement entitled the *PDS Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU). This MOU is a written articulation of the collaborative partnership between the two entities. The mission of the partnership is to employ the collaborative resources of Pre-K-12 and higher education to:

- Create a collaborative culture and governance structure to guide the work at each PDS site.

- Provide enhanced preservice experiences through the integration of theory and practice in clinically based teacher education program.
- Provide needs based continuous professional development, such as courses, conferences, and workshops for inservice teachers and administrators through on-site PDS related activities.
- Provide for inquiry into and refinement of effective practices in teaching and learning.
- Maximize student achievement.
- Disseminate promising practices and structures to the education community.

Further, the MOU delineates goals in five areas: culturally diverse settings and exceptional learners; professional standards; representation; placements; and, reporting and evaluation. The MOU between Towson University and the Howard County Public School System is reviewed and updated, when necessary, every three to five years.

NAPDS Essential 7

A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration.

As is evident from the graphic representation (see Figure 2) and description of our TWIBS EESE PDS above, a unique characteristic of the major is that it is a collaborative venture. Towson faculty members from the Elementary Education and Special Education departments have had to work closely to develop and implement this integrated major. Ongoing reflection, evaluation, and refinements occur, necessitating continued collaborative efforts. Each year, co-teaching by TWIBS EESE PDS IHE faculty members representing the two departments has occurred as a way to model collaboration for our interns. Co-teaching has occurred since the inception of our PDS, with the *Collaboration and Elementary School Curriculum and Assessment* courses. Currently, both Fall and Spring semester seminars are co-taught.

Similarly, faculty members in our three anchor schools in both general education and special education have had to increase their level of collaboration in order to shape the TWIBS

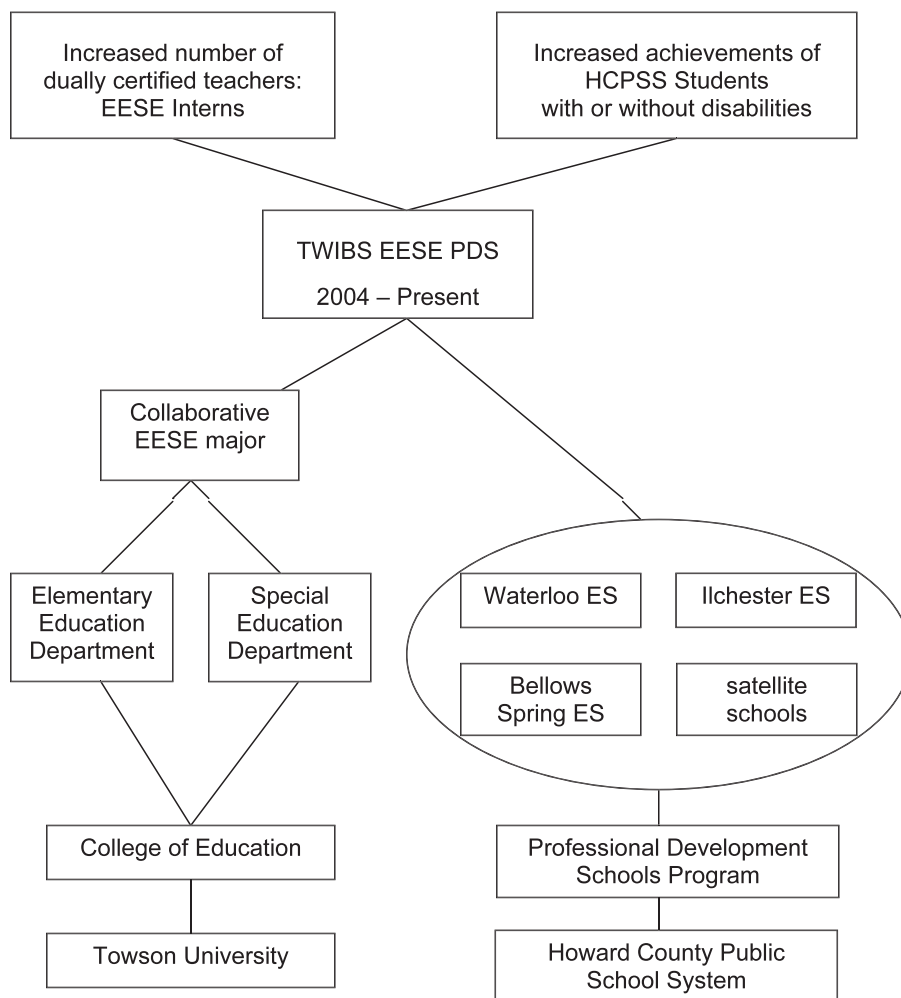


Figure 2. A Diagram of the Relationship's Organizational Structure

EESE PDS. A course specifically designed for this dual certification major, *Collaboration in the Elementary School*, emphasizes collaboration through co-teaching. School faculties have increased their co-teaching in order to provide interns opportunities to co-teach with mentors and fellow interns, with positive results for interns and students.

The TWIBS EESE PDS governance structure provides opportunities for regular communication, in which all stakeholders' opinions are valued. Management meetings, involving the three principals, Howard County PDS Program representative, and IHE PDS liaison are held every other month. Steering Committee meetings also occur every other month, in the months different from Management meetings. Although

Steering Committee meetings are open to all (including mentors at our satellite schools, as another way to create PDS-wide community), we have established a set committee to include mentors (both general and special educators), teachers who are not mentors, an assistant principal from each of the three anchor schools, parents, the three site liaisons, and both the Elementary Education and Special Education IHE faculty members. We hold Mentor meetings when necessary, with at least one early in the academic year and Mirror Mentor meetings when necessary, with at least one at the start of the Internship II semester. At this Mirror Mentor meeting, interns attend, too, so that the intern can meet with both of his/her mentors so the triad can plan the semester. Additionally,

TWIBS EESE PDS holds a Summer Strategic Planning Institute typically in June to assess the achievements of the past academic year and plan for the next. Steering and Management members attend and, this too, is open to all PDS-wide community members, including interns. Each year, the Howard County PDS Program surveys the mentors to ensure their voices are valued on a number of issues, including governance. We use those data to plan for the upcoming year or make mid-year adjustments. Finally, in order to avoid unnecessary meetings, we use our TWIBS EESE PDS email listserv regularly and are starting to use wikis.

NAPDS Essential 8

Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings.

We articulate formal roles in our TWIBS EESE PDS, aligned with the Maryland State Department of Education's 2003 *Professional Development Schools: An Implementation Manual*. We have an IHE PDS liaison who oversees the PDS as well as serves as the Special Education University Supervisor for Internship I and II special education rotations for all interns. Similarly, we have an Elementary Education University Supervisor for Internship I and II general education rotations for all interns. Each of the three anchor schools has a school-based site liaison who often will serve as a mentor teacher, too. Additionally, we have a representative from the Howard County PDS Program, who serves as a liaison from the County.

There are also opportunities for boundary spanning. For example, TWIBS EESE PDS principals and teachers have served as Towson University adjunct professors. Also, a site liaison on family leave served as an instructor for our TWIBS EESE PDS courses. Another mentor teacher on leave became our TWIBS EESE PDS Elementary Education University Supervisor.

Informal roles are also evident such as when the University personnel provide materials and guidance on new federal and state special education policy and practices. Additionally, there have been several opportunities when we

have been called upon by other Howard County schools or states to consult about PDS. The Maryland State Department of Education also calls upon TWIBS EESE PDS personnel to act as advocates for dual certification programs, working with other IHEs.

NAPDS Essential 9

Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Towson University and the Howard County Public School System share a variety of resources, including space and money. The TWIBS EESE PDS has been fortunate to be able to have a dedicated PDS classroom since its inception. The interns are getting a more authentic experience by having their Towson University classes taught on-site. We are able to regularly call upon PDS teachers and administrators as well as County specialists to come speak as guest lecturers, decreasing guests' travel time, maximizing instructional time for interns.

In terms of sharing monetary resources, Towson and Howard County provide mentor stipends, supplies/materials, and food and workshop wages for mentor meetings and portfolio reviews. Howard County pays the stipends for each school-based site liaisons while Towson provides the IHE PDS liaison a 3-credit release once in either the Fall or Spring semester. Towson has provided travel money for the NAPDS conference to interns, mentors, and IHE faculty. Howard County has also provided travel money for mentors to attend the NAPDS conference.

Towson and Howard County have pooled resources to provide mentor breakfasts, mentor appreciation gifts, and professional development materials as a way to formally recognize mentors. Additionally, the 2007 Towson University College of Education Alumna of the Year Award went to one of our TWIBS EESE PDS mentor teachers. As the case with many Colleges of Education, we sometimes struggle over what PDS activities "count" in University Promotion, Tenure, and Merit decisions even though PDS involvement is essential for many Towson faculty.

Our Proudest Accomplishments

The TWIBS EESE PDS embraces the NAPDS Nine Essentials and clearly has earned the title of Professional Development School. We are proud of our PDS and its many accomplishments. Because of the unique nature of our PDS, we know there is no other PDS in Maryland like ours. We are proud of the contributions we make which increase the achievements of all of our TWIBS EESE PDS students, including those with disabilities. The ongoing data indicate that our EESE PDS is having a positive impact of the academic achievement and social-emotional/behavioral outcomes of the children in our PDS.

We are proud of our TWIBS EESE PDS graduates, many of whom are hired as either general educators or special educators by Howard County Public School System. We are also proud, only six years into our TWIBS EESE PDS partnership, to see how many graduates are still teaching in the same school in which they started, have earned leadership positions in their schools, and how several are serving as mentors and/or site liaisons in our TWIBS EESE PDS.

We are, of course, tremendously proud that our accomplishments were recognized at the 2010 Professional Development Schools National Conference by naming the Towson-Waterloo-Ilchester-Bellows Spring Elementary Education-Special Education PDS as a recipient of the **National Association for Professional Development Schools Award for Exemplary Profes-**

sional Development School Achievement. The award reinforces our collaborative work in our *special* school-university partnership. ^{SUP}

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