

Minnesota State Mankato P-20 Professional Development School Partnership: The Cornerstones of 25 Years of Success

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ABSTRACT: Minnesota State Mankato's partnership with eight Professional Development School districts, encompassing fifty-four P-12 sites, and post-secondary programs involved in educator preparation including Elementary, Secondary, Special Education, Leadership, School Counseling, and Arts & Sciences content, was one of five PDS partnerships recognized by the National Association for Professional Development Schools for "Exemplary PDS Achievement" in 2012. The mission of this multi-district, long-standing partnership is to interconnect, sustain, and enrich learning communities of students, staff, faculty, and citizens from the university and P-12 schools who foster human development, professional growth, and optimal learning opportunities through research, reflection, and practice. This article highlights four special components of our PDS network, which we consider some of the most essential contributors to or examples of our successful quarter century of PDS partnership.

A common theme running through the activities, values, and goals of our long-standing PDS partnership, which have enabled the partnership to develop and thrive, is a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practices by all participants. Just as the Danielson Framework and NCATE standards provide a continuum for reflection and aspiration so, too, does our partnership continuously look to ways that we can learn, grow, and create new models for a new time. The twenty-five year history of our partnership, which consists of a university and eight K-12 school districts, is a testimony to the collaborative spirit that has worked to launch multiple shared ventures between P-12 settings and Minnesota State Mankato. The network

has evolved from sharing field placements and faculty consultants to constructing multi-layered systems that embed best practices through every facet of education. Our PDS has woven the history of its partners into an enduring framework of support and excellence. We now have active learning communities within and among our entities. We practice coaching and reflection intentionally with teacher candidates. We pursue high-level trainings to equip faculty for changing climates. We collaborate with teachers, professors, administrators, and students to identify needs. We think beyond our current reality, and construct new possibilities.

It is this innovative spirit that inspires our best and evokes great pride in our partner-

ship. It is this innovative spirit that captured the eye of the Archibald Bush Foundation in awarding a multi-million dollar grant to transform teacher education. It is this innovative spirit that compels us to ask the critical questions and seek the best solutions. In the following, we will highlight four special components of our PDS network, which we consider some of the most essential contributors to or examples of our successful quarter century of PDS partnership.

The People that Connect us: Teachers-on-Special-Assignment (TOSAs)

The Teacher-on-Special-Assignment/Graduate Teaching Fellowship program aims to meet the needs of partner districts and the university by releasing P-12 master teachers from their classroom duties for a minimum of three years to work directly between the university and the partnering school district. In place of the master teacher, a newly licensed teacher assumes full classroom teaching responsibilities in the school district as well as receiving a premier fellowship at the university to pursue a graduate program. This program's sustained twenty-five years of success is becoming known regionally and nationally as an exemplar in P-20 resource sharing and innovation.

Currently we have nineteen TOSAs working in our PDS system. They function in many roles. In addition to mentoring their replacement Graduate Teaching Fellows, TOSAs assume a half-time university role by advancing the Professional Development School model, teaching courses in the College of Education, leading seminars in best practices along with university faculty, and/or supervising teacher candidates. TOSAs work in partnership with the Office of Field and International Experience to help coordinate pre-service placements in P-12 schools. Additionally, TOSAs work with their districts to lead the development of new teacher induction programs, in partnership with the Center for Mentoring and Induction, and provide leadership for curriculum development, staff development, and/or assessment and

research within their home district for the remainder of the appointment.

The Graduate Teaching Fellowship component of this program has received enthusiastic support from both schools and participating Fellows over the past 25 years. Research consistently shows that beginning teachers who have an opportunity to be part of a mentor/new teacher induction program significantly exceed their non-mentored peers by attaining earlier skill and comfort level in the classroom, developing more positive feelings for their profession, and remaining longer in the profession. Since its inception, over 200 Fellows have launched their teaching careers through this program with over 90% of those Fellows being offered continued full-contract employment with the partnering school district. Over 75% of the exiting Fellows complete their graduate programs, many finishing within two years of the completion of their Fellowship year.

Though the TOSA/Graduate Teaching Fellowship program is one component of many within our Professional Development School (PDS) model, it is one that continues to receive regional and national recognition as an innovative collaboration in financial and expertise resource sharing across the P-20 continuum. This model of resource sharing has extended to our recent partnership with the Archibald Bush Foundation.

Sense of Urgency and Innovation

One of the greatest strengths of our PDS partnership is that we are a highly nimble system. Based on our long history, which allows high trust and communication, we are able to respond, in significant ways, to current critical questions and dilemmas in education from local levels to state and national arenas. This ability to stay highly relevant and continue to advance the education profession stems from the process of interaction and decision-making within our PDS partnership.

To be more specific, our PDS partnership engages systematically in strategic planning processes to assist our partnership in focusing its energy, to ensure that members of the

partnership are working toward the same goals, and to assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. We conduct this planning process through the PDS "All-Hands" venue, a strategic planning opportunity that occurs every five years. The partner institutions have implemented this process to evaluate needs and effectiveness of our efforts in light of the PDS partnership's mission and its focus through group/needs assessments.

In addition to this formal strategic planning process, the eight PDS districts and Minnesota State Mankato have engaged in shared innovation, discussion, and reflection through such activities as Professional Learning Communities (formal and informal), professional conferences, shared committee work, blended roles, and hands-on learning opportunities. For example, Minnesota State Mankato and its partners send a large delegation of partners to the annual PDS National Conference (co-sponsored by NAPDS). The conference attendees are supported by our Center for School-University Partnerships (CSUP). Our members regularly present at the conference as well as engage in scholarship within the PDS. For example, research conducted by faculty members on the impact of the 2004-2007 PDS Learning Communities resulted in a published manuscript in this very journal. The article, "Professional learning Communities in partnership: A 3-year journey of action and advocacy to bridge the achievement," was published in the May 2009 issue of *School-University Partnerships*. Research conducted by faculty members on the impact of professional development and leadership by early childhood administrators who participated in the 2004-2007 PDS Learning Communities yielded another published manuscript "Professional development of early childhood administrators within a Professional Development School (PDS) learning community."

The significance of these shared experiences, combined with an eagerness to accelerate such efforts, inspired Minnesota State Mankato to apply for and receive a grant from the Archibald Bush (co-founder of 3M) Foundation in December of 2009. As part of the Founda-

tion's "Goals for a Decade" mission, Minnesota State Mankato reorganized its efforts to focus practices on a more transformational model. With the energies of its partnering P-12 districts, the Minnesota State Mankato PDS has been maximizing resources to effectively recruit, prepare, place, and support teachers. These efforts complement the Nine Essentials of NAPDS and reach multiple areas of P-12 and higher education. As one of fourteen higher education institutions participating in the Bush Foundation's Network for Excellence in Teaching (NExT), Minnesota State Mankato has established milestones to meet long-term goals extending to 2020. Many newly established practices blend and build upon successful programs already in place. Others are entirely new to our PDS partnership. We collaborate as partners in all aspects of this transformational effort and our work for the grant has deepened our already strong connections within our PDS partnership.

People Can Do Great Things: People in a Supported System Can Change the World

What characterizes our partnership as a very distinct example of the PDS model is our investment in people. With intentionality and conviction, we collaborate as a PDS system to establish strategic priorities and ensure that human capital is targeted to address the greatest needs. Below we describe some of the examples of structures that have been put in place to provide our members with the support to grow and work efficiently together:

The Center for School-University Partnerships (CSUP) serves as a liaison between P-12 institutions and post-secondary programs involved in educator preparation with a focus on developing and supporting partnerships between the college and schools/communities. CSUP serves to unify the partnership through advocacy, leadership, and service; establishes and maintains a credible voice of the partnership in regional and state policy making, advocating for high quality in student learning; and strengthens programs and partnerships,

through recognition of their efforts; and builds their capacity to prepare educators who can teach every child effectively.

The PDS Leadership Institute, in its third year and second cohort, is the signature initiative designed by and for our PDS partners to support multiple learners as educational leaders. The strategic planning by the PDS Governance Council and the PDS Design Team worked to develop a common shared professional vision of educational leadership within the 21st century framework. The participants of the PDS Institute are P-12 teachers, administrators, and university faculty from various colleges. The institute sessions are inquiry-based and focused on learning. The ultimate goal of the 18-month PDS Institute is on helping participants to view themselves as leaders, becoming instruments of change for their organizations, and extending the learning community while growing capacity for leadership within their organizations.

The Center for Mentoring & Induction (CMI) maximizes the capacity of school districts to implement best educational practices that produce high levels of achievement in teaching and learning. CMI works with school stakeholders to help all teachers and educational leaders become more confident, capable, and effective practitioners, in part by offering professional development experiences that are based on sound educational research and delivered in a format that supports a professional community of practice. CMI also provides collaboratively developed consultation and contracted services to meet school district initiatives and specific needs for continuous improvement, uses web-based support strategies for school partners via e-mentoring and other on-line learning systems, and promotes cost-effective management of human, material, and fiscal resources that support teachers, mentors, coordinators, principals, instructional coaches, and other personnel.

Minnesota State Mankato and its PDS partner K-12 districts joined the national organization of Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in forming the AVID/PDS Alliance in 2011. The Alliance implemented the AVID model during spring 2011. AVID

impacts elementary through postsecondary students and is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. The AVID program advances student learning (in both P-12 and pre-service teaching settings via tutorial experiences), uses research-supported methods of effective instruction, provides meaningful and motivational professional development, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change. In April 2011, the AVID/PDS Alliance was named a "promising practice" by the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities (MnSCU) system as a newly developed intervention to address college readiness and developmental education innovations. Starting in Fall 2012, we will launch the AVID Teacher Preparation initiative, where we as a PDS system commit to preparing our pre-service teachers with AVID instructional strategies during course work and field experiences, even before students enter their first teaching jobs.

We're All in This Together: Equal Investment and Commitment

One of the key traits of our partnership which has enabled us to be successful over a long period of time is the mutually shared commitment to the partnership by the PDS K-12 partner schools and the university. A PDS Governance Council, consisting of the school superintendents of the seven partner schools as well as the Dean of the College of Education and the CSUP Director, governs the PDS network. The governance council meets monthly to discuss various issues related to partnership, whether tied to financial cost sharing, specific needs of the various partners, vision of the partnership, or specific concerns.

The sustainability and vitality of the PDS Governance Council structure continues to maintain "leading" status according to the NCATE standards for "Accountability and Quality Assurance." Under the leadership of the PDS Governance Council, we continue to see PDS partner institutions playing a larger leadership role in their communities, while continuing to shape the discussions of changes in policies and practices. These meetings find the PDS partner institutions providing leader-

ship in shaping the discussion about public accountability.

A critical part of our sustained shared governance is resource sharing. An example is the structure that has been established for sharing the costs associated with our TOSA-program. According to this formal agreement, the university pays 65% toward the cost of the Graduate Teaching Fellowship while the partnering PDS K-12 school district pays 35% toward the cost of the Fellow. In addition, the Teacher-on-Special-Assignment remains on a district contract for 1.0 FTE salaries plus benefits (maintaining her/his current lane/step on district contract). Each Teacher-on-Special-Assignment receives a full complement of professional development experiences from the university at no charge to the district (i.e., related to supervision, co-teaching, mentoring and induction, partnership development, as well as registration and travel reimbursement to attend the PDS National Conference and approximately \$700 in professional development funds to use at their discretion for resources/technology/training). In turn, the Fellow receives advising and support services from the Center for School-University Partnerships and academic departments for their graduate school experience, and are welcomed as a full-fledged member of the faculty, with all the rights and responsibilities of the cooperating site's teaching staff, and included in the district's "new teacher support/mentoring" program.

Like our collegial PDSs across the country, our teacher candidates are making an impact on K-12 student achievement while in their preparation phase. Our PDS partnership has given them opportunity early in their university experience to become contributing members of the K-12 school community, all the while being supported by a community of professionals working together at the university and in K-12 settings. Minnesota State Mankato candidates are not simply preparing for their future in teaching - they are teaching our future right now. While the stakes for education continuously rise, our teacher candidates need to be better prepared and ready sooner to take on the responsibility of making a difference. This is only possible when teacher candidates are

surrounded by professionals who model effective teaching and who are knowledgeable mentors and trained co-teachers. This sense of community is at the heart of our PDS partnership and continues to guide our work into the future so that our teacher candidates can dream big and stay hopeful while remaining relevant to the real world of education. ^{SUP}



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