

Baylor University and Midway Independent School District: An Exemplary Partnership

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ABSTRACT: The National Association of Professional Development Schools recognized the partnership between Baylor University and Midway Independent School District as one of three partnerships to receive the 2017 Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement. This Professional Development School partnership began in 2009 and places the utmost value on our combined commitment to engage in research, impact PK-12 student achievement, employ reciprocal professional development, and prepare teacher candidates to be leaders in their field.

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

The Baylor University/Midway Independent School District (MISD) Professional Development School partnership was honored to be one of three PDS partnerships that received the 2017 Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement. Baylor University and MISD place partnership work at the heart of decision-making and each partner accepts as common purposes the four facets of Professional Development School commitments: teacher/faculty professional development, research, improved academic success of PK-12 students, and teacher candidate preparation.

History

Given the long-standing history of many PDS partnerships, the Baylor University/MISD PDS partnership is relatively young. Although Baylor has been preparing teacher candidates in the PDS model since 1999, the formal PDS partnership with MISD has only been in existence since 2009. Midway High School

(MHS) completed an extensive application process to become a PDS in 2009, and was joined by Midway Middle School (MMS) and Spring Valley Elementary School (SVES) in 2014. The partnership has emerged as a strong, visionary system that impacts the learning and development of PK-12 students, teacher candidates, and in-service teachers and staff in the Central Texas area. The School of Education at Baylor University seeks to prepare educators for leadership in a changing world. Similarly, MISD shares a vision of innovation, commitment, and excellence in K-12 education. The investment of time, money, and personnel of both Baylor University and MISD reflect the commitment to bridging teacher education and classroom outcomes, as well as the true meaning of joint decision-making in an effort to advance the profession of teaching and learning. Together, these two entities provide a powerful PDS partnership that seeks to enhance student learning through teacher quality at all levels.

Table 1. PDS Partnership Participants

Partnership School Principal	The instructional leader of a Partnership campus, who upholds the goals and policies of both MISD and Baylor and, with the University Liaison and Site Coordinator, facilitates communication between the two entities.
Clinical Instructor (CI)	The teacher in a Partnership school qualified and identified to work in conjunction with Resident Faculty members to implement clinical preparation of junior Teaching Associates associated with field-based university courses and other program requirements.
Mentor Teacher	The teacher in a Partnership school qualified to Mentor and facilitate senior Interns in assuming the teacher role, demonstrating attainment of state and professional standards and program competencies, and completing other program clinical requirements.
Resident Faculty	A university-based faculty member who teaches field-based courses and supervises course-related clinical requirements in Partnership schools.
University Liaison (UL)	A university-based representative with primary responsibility for facilitating communication and interaction between the University and a particular Partnership school campus.
Site Coordinator (SC)	A school-based Partnership representative who holds broad responsibility for preservice teachers/ candidates as well as facilitates Partnership operations at a particular Partnership campus.
District Liaison	A MISD-based representative who fosters professional development in the Partnership and serves as the official MISD Partnership liaison.
Director of Professional Practice	A university-based representative who supports the work of all Partnership schools, fosters the development of new Partnerships, and serves as the official University Partnership liaison.
Intern	Senior preservice teachers who serve a one-year Internship on one campus with the same Mentor teacher.
Teaching Associate (TA)	Junior preservice teachers who participate on the assigned PDS campus for at least two hours each day.

Governance

The formal governance roles of faculty and personnel at Baylor University and the three Midway ISD schools has been extremely important to the efficient oversight and implementation of the partnership. The formal roles of the participating members of the Baylor/MISD partnership are described in Table 1. Addressing broad policy and operations, the *Oversight Council* includes the Dean and Associate Dean of the Baylor School of Education, as well as the Department Chairs of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Psychology, the MISD Superintendent, the MISD Assistant Superintendents of both Curriculum and Instruction and Human Resources, the MISD PDS district liaison, and the Baylor Director of the Office of Professional Practice (OPP). The *Coordinating Council*, which meets at least twice each semester, advises the Oversight Council and is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and assessing partnership initiatives and practices on all three PDS campuses. Members of this Council include the Director of OPP, the MISD district liaison, PDS principals, university liaisons (UL), and site coordinators (SC). The *PDS Steering Committee* at each campus, composed of Baylor faculty, Midway campus teachers, district and campus administrators, and one or more community and/or parent representatives, also meets at least twice each semester to discuss current issues, set goals for the growth of the partnership, and communicate ideas to strengthen the campus partnership. Partnership goals are addressed in all three Campus Improvement Plans (CIPs), as well as the district level Midway Academic Strategic Team (MAST) plan, each of which is publicly accessible on the campus websites. The roles held by various

university faculty and campus personnel differ slightly, depending on the teacher candidate certification level field experiences; hence the terminology describing those roles is prescriptive to the different field experiences.

Partnership

With so many individuals participating in the partnership, communication among participants has been an essential key to success. Successful organizations often have a structure in place that allows for regular communication from the “top down”, however, the Baylor/MISD partnership thrives on “bottom-up” communication where all input is equally valued. Key communication at the senior teacher candidate level occurs between intern, mentor, and intern supervisor, and at the junior teacher candidate level this occurs between the teaching associate (TA), clinical instructor, UL and/or resident faculty. These individuals form the core for collaboration and reflection within the PDS partnership, as they are the participants who are actively involved at the campus level on a daily basis and who most directly impact teacher candidates and the PK-12 students within the district.

Aside from the incidental costs of personnel in pursuing partnership goals as part of their regular duties, some Baylor faculty carry major partnership roles as part of redefined positions by serving as university liaisons. The site coordinator is a half-time position on each partnership campus and is equally funded by the school district and Baylor. The formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement calls for a variety of other equal-share funded items as well. Teachers

receive a stipend for working with and mentoring TAs and interns in their classrooms. Funding for professional development and resources are provided to each partnership school on the basis of the number of teacher candidates placed on that campus. MISD absorbs costs associated with the additional expenses on school campuses, including photocopy and paper use, as well as technology requirements such as the provision of iPads for interns and TAs.

Successful clinical preparation of teachers in partnership with a school district requires resources that go beyond the provision of dollars or basic personnel. Purposeful allocation of time and space, as well as money and materials, is critical. The investment of time and energy by university and school district leadership from the level of UL through the Oversight Council, in coordination and joint planning, demonstrate a critical investment in the partnership by lead individuals in both organizations. Leadership attendance at partnership events similarly demonstrates a high degree of commitment and support. Principals regularly join mentors and clinical instructors at trainings and workshops; such as co-teach training, professional development associated with action research, and the secondary certificate clinical instructor and TA workshops. Each campus also provides a PDS room to accommodate quality instruction and professional development for Baylor and MISD partnership participants.

Involvement of the school principals has been vital to the success of the partnership. Despite the daily demands on his/her time, each campus principal meets with the UL and SC informally on a weekly basis and formally at least once each month. All principals have an open-door policy for communication with ULs and SCs concerning partnership issues. The majority of the communication, reflection, and planning occurs at these “lower levels”, which is a testament to the success of the partnership. Ideas for professional development, improvement of clinical experiences, and strategies for advancing P-12 student achievement most often arise at the campus level. These ideas are then communicated up through the organization to the PDS district liaison, the Coordinating Council, and finally the Oversight Council, where the decisions concerning resource allocation and major changes in the partnership are made. Baylor School of Education faculty who do not work directly with teacher candidates are also kept informed, as PDS issues are often discussed at School of Education (SOE) and Curriculum and Instruction faculty meetings. The teacher education courses that prepare the teacher candidates are also impacted by ongoing PDS discussions.

Principals at MHS and MMS coordinate campus master schedules in an effort to increase capacity for additional TA placements on each campus. The principals changed common PLC and conference period schedules so that both first and second periods (the time for TAs to be on campus) could be utilized in content areas that resulted in more candidate placements, primarily in mathematics and English/Language Arts. In addition, the MISD campuses are involved in a 1:1 Technology Initiative, where all students in grades P-12 have

individual access to an iPad throughout the instructional day. The PDS partners recognized the need to provide learning opportunities for teacher candidates on the appropriate use of instructional technology to assess and differentiate the learning experience; therefore, each TA and intern is provided a district iPad to utilize during classroom instruction and professional development for the entire academic year.

Professional Development

The partnership recognizes the importance of reciprocal professional development and invests in every opportunity to provide *all* stakeholders with opportunities for professional growth. Interns report to their yearlong clinical placement before academic year begins, giving them the opportunity to attend professional development provided by the district and prepare them for state mandated changes and district initiatives that may affect their classroom instruction and clinical experience. This extensive commitment allows interns to experience the dynamics of an entire school year, as they build relationships with students and impact academic success. From August through April, interns spend *four full days each week* in assigned classrooms with mentor teachers, guided by intern supervisors and other university and public school personnel who support them in co-planning, co-teaching, and the performance of other duties of a classroom teacher. The mentor teachers also benefit from partnership sponsored professional development.

There are several key initiatives that have been instrumental to our success; not only as a partnership, but also to all stakeholders involved. One of the biggest initiatives our partnership has undertaken is the implementation of the St. Cloud University Co-Teach Model. Unlike the traditional teacher candidate preparation model, this model allows interns to immediately partner with their mentor teachers to provide smaller student-teacher ratios in the instructional process. Interns engage with the co-teach model from the first day they report to the campuses. In this model, both the teacher candidate and mentor teacher work collaboratively to promote his or her own professional growth as well as improve student achievement.

Another highlight of our partnership is our Action Research Professional Development and the culminating Action Research Symposium that serves as a capstone experience for Baylor interns. Mentors participate in a professional development opportunity to learn about the action research process in order to engage in collaborative research with their intern. The goal of this experience is to involve both interns and mentors in developing an overarching question connected to instructional methods or student achievement and then conduct research surrounding this question to best inform their practice. Interns and mentors gather and analyze data before sharing findings at the Action Research Symposium held in the spring semester. The goal is to share the research findings with *all* stakeholders, allowing all professionals involved to learn from research conducted in the actual classrooms of MISD and to adapt and

adjust practices to enhance the success of all P-12 students in the district. On each PDS campus, interns present their individual Action Research work at the campus levels before the Action Research Symposium at the university level occurs. Both events remind faculty of the reflective nature of education and the need to ask questions to inform practice and improve student learning.

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework is also utilized district-wide to impact success on a large-scale level. The design is tailored to offer experiences for campus teachers and interns to deepen their understanding of student learning and increase their knowledge and implementation of best practices. Topics for the PLCs, which meet daily at MHS and MMS and weekly at SVES, include data analysis, technology, lesson planning (including differentiation), student intervention, and teacher-led professional development. Interns and mentors disaggregate data, explore technology tools, collaborate on instruction, and engage in professional development in order to effectively impact student learning. At MHS and MMS, all interns and TAs are integral members of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Best practices and the utilization of technology are discussed and all experiences are valued. For example, one intern at MMS shared a mathematics lesson using a Nearpod technology application and was so well received that she was asked to present the instructional tool at the next campus faculty meeting. In another example, a TA at MHS shared a formative instructional approach during a PLC meeting and the entire English/Language Arts department implemented the project for all such classes. At SVES, the PDS team ensures the TAs are paired with master clinical instructors and are immersed in the culture of instructional technology as they work to gain strong pedagogical skills in English/Language Arts and Social Studies content areas. Like the interns, each TA on all MISD campuses has access to an iPad and learns to utilize technological applications to differentiate instruction in order to build a strong skill set to use with 21st century learners. SVES created an Instructional Technology Series to increase teacher candidates' self-efficacy to use instructional technology to assess and differentiate the learning experiences for their students. After attending one of the annual technology showcases at SVES, the district Executive Director for Technology, made this observation, "Seeing how teachers [Baylor teacher candidates] are using technology is vital to helping the technology department make appropriate decisions for the classroom."

In addition to the campus-level professional developments, Baylor University hosts content-specific opportunities for all stakeholders through reading, mathematics, science, technology, and gifted education academies and workshops in order to improve professional practices. Baylor University also provides TxBESS (Texas Beginning Educator Support System) training for mentors who host teacher candidates in order to support key characteristics in providing effective feedback for developing teachers.

While the PDS campuses provide the above-mentioned common experiences, each PDS site creates experiences tailored to the interns and TAs assigned to each campus. For example, the UL and SC at MHS design campus culture talks, as well as PDS coaching sessions, to enhance the understanding TAs have of the range of campus and district resources. They also schedule monthly after-school meetings of mentors and interns, organized around a yearly theme and dependent upon the needs of the partnership. In support of the Co-Teach Model, the mentors and interns engage in both Foundations and Pairs Training, followed by monthly meetings designed to problem-solve and reflect on innovative practices related to the Co-Teach Model.

School Community

The Baylor University/MISD PDS partnership shares the understanding that preparing future educators is the responsibility of each and every participant and that teacher candidates need to be directly engaged in the school community. Each PDS campus encourages interns and TAs to participate in school events by providing both opportunities *and* resources for their successful integration into the culture and community of the school. Site coordinators communicate information concerning school events, spirit days, parent events, and community events several times each week to teacher candidates so that they are consistently informed of ways they might enhance positive relationships with parents and students. MHS, for example, provides free tickets for any TA or intern who wishes to attend home football games in the fall semester. Both interns and TAs on each campus attend Parent Night at the onset of the school year where mentors and clinical instructors introduce them as co-teachers, providing MISD parents with a greater understanding of the integral roles Baylor teacher candidates have in their child's education.

MISD also has a strong history of hiring Baylor University interns who have completed internships on their campuses. The principals at each of the three PDS sites offer a mock interview to every Baylor intern placed on their campuses. The principals interview their campus interns as if each was an applicant for a teaching position and then provide feedback to assist the intern in improving their interview skills. Many teacher candidates have returned for actual interviews and subsequent employment by these same principals. Due to the relationships established and the opportunities to engage in the campus communities, principals and staff have been able to actually see these teacher candidates in action and know they will be effective within the campus community.

Looking Ahead

We are certainly proud of the accomplishments our partnership has made thus far and have shared these accomplishments through presentations and scholarship at local, state, national and international conferences. Baylor/MISD has shared more than thirty presentations at NAPDS conferences since 2013;

however, we do recognize the need to continue in our quest for excellence. The impact on teacher education and K-12 education is only beginning for this partnership. While we are pleased with the strides made with the Co-Teach Model during the intern year, MHS and MMS are currently conducting research to measure the effectiveness of this model at the secondary level. This research will help close the gap in ascertaining the effectiveness of co-teaching at the secondary levels.

Finally, we are proud that our PDS model serves as an example to campuses nationwide and internationally. The Baylor University and MISD partnership is proud to be an exemplary model and strives to continually keep the nine essentials of Professional Development Schools as the guide in our decision-making. We feel that this commitment is ours as professionals and we hold this commitment to a high standard as we empower one another to not only impact our community, our state and our nation, but also our world. ^{SUP}