

# *Behind the Scenes: Our “Exemplary PDS Achievement” Award*

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**ABSTRACT:** Salisbury University's partnership with Snow Hill Elementary School and the Worcester Elementary Cluster was one of five PDS partnerships recognized by the National Association for Professional Development Schools for “Exemplary PDS Achievement” in 2011. Keys to the application which led to the award included linking data related to intern performance and student achievement to the “Nine Essentials” of professional development schools, as developed by NAPDS in 2007-08. Other factors include documenting the level of engagement by PDS site faculty in local, statewide and national PDS initiatives and the judicious use of text features to highlight the application submission.

“Data – give them data.”

That was the advice I received from a reliable source within NAPDS when we inquired about what the committee might be looking for in selecting the “Exemplary PDS Achievement” award winners in 2011.

So, we gave them data: student achievement data from the Maryland School Assessment program that coincided with PDS involvement and intern performance evaluation data compared to Salisbury University peers in other PDS sites. The numbers were impressive: Snow Hill Elementary School, a rural Title I school with more than 50% FARMs (students receiving “free and reduced meals”), had earned a National Blue Ribbon designation because of steady improvement in student achievement and now ranks at the top of all Maryland elementary schools with similar demographics. Interns placed in the Worcester PDS cluster – including Snow Hill – scored from 9 to 16 points higher on the five broad categories of performance when compared to interns in other PDS sites.

I would like to think that it was more than quantitative data that earned the award, however. All of us involved in the Worcester Elementary Cluster believe the “buy-in” among school faculty and administrators was exceptional. We were able to point to the number of

mentors who had voluntarily completed clinical training, the more than 20 Worcester PDS teachers who had served as adjunct faculty in recent semesters, and the 15 NAPDS presentations made by Worcester PDS personnel since 2006.

As we were drafting our submission to the awards committee, I happened to observe an intern teaching a lesson about “text features” in a fifth grade language arts classroom. It occurred to me that the 20-page application we were writing was pretty tedious in its current state, so we tried to make optimal use of text features in the final version we submitted. Our data was displayed in easy-to-read tables and charts. We solicited brief quotes from key stakeholders and inserted them in text boxes. Different fonts and bullets highlighted important information whenever possible. We divided the presentation into sections tied to the “Nine Essentials” and made sure to link and cross-reference items to the appropriate essential in the narrative. Throughout the presentation, we tried to hold to the advice that less is more, and we cut unnecessary or repetitive verbiage so that our final submission wound up being less than the 20-page limit.

Our award was given to Snow Hill Elementary School and the Worcester Elementary PDS Cluster in partnership with Salisbury University.

That's a mouthful, and it represents the somewhat complicated PDS arrangement that has evolved over the past decade or more. Maryland is the only state that currently mandates that ALL student teaching internships must occur in PDS sites. As a result, we do not have the luxury of consolidating our resources in a few targeted venues. Instead, our teacher education program that produces about 250 candidates annually needs to maintain a network of 35 PDS sites spread among seven county school districts. Since our region is largely rural, many of these sites are small schools located a considerable distance from campus. In order to provide candidates a cohesive and yet extensive internship experience, the Worcester County PDS has evolved as a cluster of five elementary and middle schools, serving grade levels from PreK to grade 6. Snow Hill Elementary (PreK - 3) is one of the anchor schools in the cluster. We opted to feature it in our submission because it had an uncommon

level of PDS involvement by teachers and excellent student achievement data.

Receiving the award has been gratifying and deeply appreciated by PDS stakeholders. Our university president was so excited with the news of the award that she invited just about every VIP in the state of Maryland to attend our annual PDS conference on campus. We took full advantage to represent the acrylic obelisk at ceremonies on campus and at a Board of Education meeting. Primarily though, the award is an acknowledgement of hard work by many, many people over time. We are grateful and proud to have been recognized. <sup>SUP</sup>



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