

What's Next? Beyond the Basics of a Partnership

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ABSTRACT: Much has been written about school-university partnerships including their general intent to positively impact student learning through the continuous professional development of classroom teachers. This article, which offers an in-depth description of the growth of a school-college partnership, follows the development of a partnership between a school and a college of education from what could be described generally as a partnership to a true PDS model. Here we analyze an effort undertaken to build and strengthen the partnership between the school and the college within the framework of the "Nine Essentials" of the National Association for Professional Development Schools. We present the school-college partnership's joint philosophies, emerging structure, and resulting outcome. The outcome of the six-month collaborative project was the emergence of a partnership model aligned with the "Nine Essential" components and an established and mutually beneficial research agenda.

NAPDS Essentials 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; #7A 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; #9/Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Introduction

If the ultimate goal of schooling is to maximize student learning, it is clear that Professional Development Schools (PDSs) can promote this goal by focusing attention on

high-quality teaching. Much has been written about the impact of PDSs and their inherent goal to improve student achievement through the continuous professional development of classroom teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Culan,

2009). Indeed, as Culan (2009) succinctly states, “the best way to improve teaching and learning is through collaborative work that we do in PDS schools” (p. 7). Forming cross-organizational partnerships, including district-university partnerships, is generally intended to improve teaching and positively impact student learning in this manner (Hora & Millar, 2011; Jacoby, 2003). Specifically, cross-organizational partnerships provide multiple opportunities for practicing classroom teachers to connect theory and practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). The same effect can be achieved with pre-service teachers when school-university partnerships intentionally thread clinical practices, early and often, throughout teacher preparation programs. This practice affords teacher candidates an opportunity to apply professional understanding by connecting theory and practice (Cozza, 2010). When looking across this literature, it becomes increasingly clear that student learning is improved when partnerships focus on the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers.

With this research providing the incentive, the Teacher Education Program at the College has worked with three area school districts for early field-based clinical training of teacher candidates for over three decades. These field-based clinical experiences occur throughout the pre-service teacher preparation program at the College, including a placement designed intentionally to allow pre-service teachers the opportunity to support students with disabilities and culminating with the capstone student teaching experience in the teacher candidate's senior year.

Recently, one of the schools with which the College partners for clinical field placements (hereafter referred to by the pseudonym P. Henry Middle School) requested the opportunity to work more intentionally and extensively at enhancing and strengthening the partnership. While some schools are aware of the benefits of PDS relationships in theory, the leader of this partner school has

seen the benefits of partnership regularly materializing in practice within the School. This highlights for the school-college partners the distinction made by the Executive Council of the National Association of Professional Development Schools (2008) between strong partnerships, on the one hand, and a true PDS partnership on the other. The principal's desire to build a relationship, which more closely resembled the PDS model, led us to use the “Nine Essentials” (NAPDS, 2008) to evaluate where our relationship stood so we could more successfully determine the next steps in our partnership's development.

At about the same time that the principal of P. Henry Middle School was seeking to build a deeper, more sustained and mutually beneficial relationship with our college, the grants officer at the College prompted the education department to look at a grant opportunity that would help build the bridge between the two institutions. The school-college partners eventually decided to collaborate on an extensive grant proposal, with the intention of using this process to build the partnership between the College and P. Henry Middle School.

The goals of the grant were two-fold. First, the proposal called on the School and College to conduct collaborative research on an educational issue identified by the school. School leaders chose to address concerns over students' writing performance. Second, the proposal called on the school and college to enhance the existing partnership. The grant proposal, therefore, created an avenue for the College and the School to evaluate and attempt to elevate the relationship in an effort to equalize benefits to both parties. The grant proposal process, described in greater length below, served to articulate the parameters of the partnership including the governance structure and communication system, in an effort to establish a research plan.

This article, which offers an in-depth description of the growth of a school-university partnership model, follows the

development of the PDS model relationship between the College and P. Henry Middle School. We would like to underscore the fact that this paper elaborates on the College's relationship with leaders in one school building within one of the three districts with whom the college regularly partners. This focus on the School rather than the district was made intentionally and factors significantly in the implications discussed at the conclusion of this article. We present outcomes and lessons learned from engaging in a collaborative inquiry with a partnership school—a discussion we believe will be useful to this journal's readers.

Below, we describe the process of grant writing within the framework of the Nine Essentials of PDSs as outlined by NAPDS. First, we discuss the existing clinical foundation in the school-college partnership. Then we turn to the conceptual framework outlined in the Nine Essentials summary (2008). Next we expand upon the Essentials and present findings from our analysis as to how well the existing school-college relationship addressed these. We conclude by highlighting the challenges and benefits of enhancing partnerships within the PDS model framework.

Clinical Practice Foundation

Clinical practice has been an integral component of the teacher education programs at the College. There are several intentionally recurring themes, which serve as core concepts, in each of the existing clinical placements at the College. Core concepts include reflective practice, guided and progressive lesson plan development, and developmental feedback. In addition, guidelines for clinical placements at the College require pre-service teachers to experience varied grade levels and diverse settings, including an urban, suburban, and/or Catholic school placement. Clinical placements are carefully orchestrated so that when the teacher candidate reaches her/his culminating student teaching experience, this final

student teaching experience will be within her/his preferred grade level and with a cooperating teacher whose certification matches the credentials sought by the student teacher.

This focus on high quality and diverse clinical experiences has been enriched by feedback from practitioners on the College's Teacher Education Advisory Board. The Board includes educators and administrators from partner districts as well as alumni, students, and faculty from the college. Programmatic changes have been made based on input from the Board, aligned with PDS best practices and the vision of school leaders. For example, clinical field experiences, which initially were not connected to specific courses or evaluated for credit, were embedded in coursework. Clinical experiences were extended in both the number of required hours and in the number of required experiences. The underlying reason for these recommendations was to enrich the connection between theory and practice. The field placement coordinator position was converted from a staff position to a faculty position at the college. The role shift allowed the added responsibility to connect theory and practice between coursework and the clinical experiences. In each of these instances, input and feedback from partnerships has been a significant component of our programmatic vision and revisions.

Historically, teacher candidates at the College had multiple field experience opportunities in surrounding communities with the expectation that these experiences would take place in Catholic, urban, and suburban settings. Relationships with area districts could be characterized as long-lasting and geographically expanding. In the last two years the teacher education programs at the College have experienced significant growth in student enrollment, and the need has arisen to expand partnership sites further. Generally, the longest-lasting relationships have been with a single urban district, a suburban district, and several Catholic schools. These

diverse settings are described in the section below in more depth.

Given the Catholic mission of the College, Catholic schools number among the many field placements available to teacher candidates, and teacher candidates are encouraged to choose this option for clinical placements. Six area Catholic schools have partnered with the College and were selected by the College as sites based on student preference, geographic location, proximity to the campus, and/or academic rigor. All six of these Catholic schools were recognized as Catholic institutions by the diocese, but two were run by private organizations. The three high schools, one middle school, one K-6 elementary, and one PK-8 elementary school were located in four different communities. All of the partner Catholic schools draw their student populations from diverse socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. The Catholic partner schools offer academic programs within faith-based learning communities and have extensive technological capabilities.

While “diversity” may not be the first word that springs to mind when one thinks of New Hampshire, the demographic profile of the College’s urban partner district typified what one might find in urban areas across the United States. The fifteen-member Board of Education oversees 21 schools and employs over 1,700 staff members who serve more than 17,250 students (MSD History, n.d.). While the students were predominately White, the partnering urban district was significantly more racially diverse than New Hampshire as a whole with about four times the state average of both Hispanic/Latino students and Black/African American students (Census QuickFacts, n.d.). The partnering urban district claimed significant linguistic diversity as well. Students who spoke languages other than English at home numbered over three times the state average (Census QuickFacts, n.d.). Meanwhile, the partnering urban district fell well below the state average in terms of both average

education level and poverty level (Census QuickFacts, n.d.).

Similar to many urban districts throughout the nation, the partnering urban district was not faring well under the *No Child Left Behind* framework of testing and accountability. All 21 public schools in the partnering urban district were listed among the New Hampshire Department of Education’s “Schools in Need of Improvement” for failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (Schools in Need of Improvement, n.d.). Many of these schools had been on this list for up to five to seven years consecutively. Two points, therefore, were evident: first, the partnering urban district possessed a rich and diverse community profile; second, this urban district needed to identify an educational reform model that would better serve the community.

Finally, a suburban community that borders the College campus was the home of the partnering middle school on which we focus in this article. The district office, located in Hillsborough County in southern New Hampshire, serves a town that has a growing population of over 22,000, a relatively large district in the rural state of New Hampshire. According to the District Superintendent’s projections, during the 2012–2013 school year the district would provide instruction for over 4,400 students. The district has three K-4 elementary schools serving close to 1,500 students, a grade five/six intermediate school and a separate grade seven/eight middle school both serving roughly 775 students, and one high school serving over 1,300 students. Students in this suburban partner district represented a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, relative to other districts, this district was an affluent community. According to New Hampshire Department of Education’s (2011) “Equity Plan,” this district listed 3.3 % of its total residents with income levels below the poverty level; the state-wide poverty level was 8.5%. The typical education level within this partner district easily sur-

passed the state average with many adults employed in technical professions.

Methods

The goal of the study on which we report in this article was to answer the question, “How does the existing school-college partnership align with the ‘Nine Essentials?’” To help guide this partnership, the College and the P. Henry Middle School wanted to develop a shared vision. The partnership first agreed upon the Nine Essentials as the conceptual framework, and determined together that these criteria defined quality attributes of a partnership to which both parties aspired.

Although the Essentials have a deep theoretical and empirical base (Brindley, Lessen & Field, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust & Shulman, 2005), this literature is not reviewed here. Rather, we focused on the Nine Essentials as the conceptual frame that structured the discussions and shaped the questions germane to this study. Doing so allowed key players in the partnership the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in the relationship, and to set goals for further collaborative work. To ascertain whether the partnership aligned with the Essentials, including the degree and quality of alignment, the partnership engaged in what Hill and colleagues refer to as consensual qualitative research and analysis (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). The questions of central importance to this study were: “Does the existing school-college partnership align with the Nine Essentials?” and “How can the partnership be improved in terms of fidelity to each of the Nine Essentials?” We identified the contexts and key participants for the research as well as appropriate data sources as defined below.

Context and Participants

The participants in this study were school-based teacher leaders and administrators and

college faculty. The school-college relationship was initially established in 1981 as the district became a placement site for teacher candidates in the College’s Teacher Education Program. In the initial relationship, P. Henry Middle School provided the College’s pre-service teachers with a setting for both an initial field experience at the beginning of teacher candidates’ preparation and a capstone student teaching experience. The College placed students in this district’s schools for clinical practice with the specific intention of connecting theory and practice in a local, relevant, and exemplary setting. As this relationship progressed, the principal at P. Henry Middle School assumed the additional role of serving on the College’s Teacher Education Advisory Board in 2006. Since then, the partnership between the College and P. Henry Middle has strengthened tremendously.

Most recently in 2012, the principal of P. Henry Middle School invited the Education Department at the College to work collaboratively to examine and expand more systematically both their practices and relationship. The desire to enhance the school-college partnership was embedded in the common belief that building partnerships affects educational change (Jacoby, 2003). The partners were interested in and committed to researcher-practitioner collaborations, and for this reason they decided to use the grant writing process as a springboard to deepen the college-school collaboration.

The structure of the grant proposal required that the research team define and clarify roles for all participants involved in this study. As such, we established the school building leader and college research faculty member as the two co-principal investigators for the study. In this role, the co-principal investigators worked as the chief points-of-contact, facilitating the school and college research team. A school-based teacher leader and a second college faculty member joined the study as co-researchers. We also called

upon the expertise of the district-wide English language arts coordinator, a building-level reading and writing specialist, and the two middle school professional learning communities (PLCs) comprised of four English faculty members each. The district assistant superintendent signed on to provide district-level support, student performance data on writing assessments, and other pertinent district-level administrative data.

Data Collection

Over the course of the year, the research team met about once a month for an estimated total of over 20 hours to discuss the structure of the partnership in light of highlighting the Nine Essentials and enhancing the partnership. School and college leaders reported their anecdotal perceptions of the school-college partnership in the context of these meetings. For the purposes of this study, meeting minutes were reviewed through the lens of relevant literature, and findings were generated as a result of this process.

The first five Essentials are clustered under the broad category “philosophical underpinnings” and the remaining four Essentials were clustered together as the “logistical requirements” of a PDS (p. 3). For that reason, rather than treating each Essential individually in the “Findings” section below, we evaluate the strength of the PDS partnership between the College and the P. Henry Middle School within these two broad categories.

Findings and Discussion

It was initially clear that developing this grant proposal would align well with the PDS Essentials because the request for grant proposals (RFP) required many aspects of the relationship to be developed, defined, and clarified. For example, the RFP required that the educational issue be identified as a high priority by the school for improving student

achievement. This was critical for parties because, as Culan (2009) notes, “continuous learning for staff, whether preK-12 or university, is necessary to ensure success for all students, preK-20” (p. 10). Moreover, the RFP called for both parties to clarify roles and responsibilities within the partnership, to develop research aims as well as a research plan, and to determine a specific course of action for developing the partnership. Faculty at the College saw this RFP as the perfect avenue to fortify the relationship and to root our collective work in both a shared mission and current evidenced-based practices. The grant proposal process further strengthened this existing partnership by formalizing the current collaborative team and expanding that team to include additional key members that broadened the scope of the collaboration to a truly district-wide level. Each of these requirements spoke directly to the PDS Essentials.

Philosophical Underpinnings: Comprehensive Mission and School-College Culture

One advantage that the school-college partnership had going into this work was an existing shared vision as well as a predetermined purpose. The existing relationship shared a common mission to enhance our collaborative work to improve student learning. To clarify, key stakeholders in the School and the College have embraced a common philosophy engrained in the PDS model as described by Darling Hammond (2005) who states:

The PDS is an undertaking of schools and schools of education to create places in which entering teachers can combine theory and practice in a setting organized to support their schooling; veteran teachers can renew their own professional development and assume new roles as mentors, university adjuncts, and teacher leaders; and school university educators togeth-

er can engage in research and rethinking practice (p. vii).

The key collaborators in the College and School further determined that the relationship between the School and the College were defined by this common philosophy, which underscores a commitment to practice-based inquiry and continuous learning by both the district staff and the College faculty.

The partners were, and continue to be, interested in and committed to researcher-practitioner collaboration. Enhanced student achievement is at the heart of inquiry-based practice and the desire to enhance the school-college partnership is embedded in the common belief that building partnerships effect educational change (Jacoby, 2003) and the established goal of practice-based inquiry (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Steps were taken by the core research team over the course of the grant development project to strengthen and deepen the partnership in these ways regardless of funding.

The key to the success of a partnership is a common definition and agreed upon structure. Myers and Price (2010) state “the differing perspectives with which each member of the collaborative approaches teacher education challenge the partnership arrangement” (p. 81). The fact that the partners had shared perspectives was a strength heading into the research process. The school partners had a common understanding of what the college partners intended to accomplish and the grant proposal process required the school-college team to explicitly delineate those as goals of our proposed project. Cochran-Smith and Donnell (2005) outline some common goals and parameters of this type of collaborative research. First, they assert that the school should be the site for inquiry. Additionally, they note that practitioner inquiry, and specifically action research, is often aimed at “altering curriculum, challenging common school practices, and working for social change by engaging in a continuous process of problem posing, data gathering,

analysis and action” (p. 504). Both parties agreed that the central and preliminary goal of this partnership was to establish a strong culture of shared learning and growth through practice-based inquiry. This common mission was articulated in a memorandum of understanding (Appendix).

Meanwhile, the partners responded to the RFP with a proposed shared investigation, which both partners agreed must be practitioner-generated and practice-based. As Cochran-Smith and Donnell (2005) note, shared investigations must “arise from the discrepancies between what is intended and what occurs” in professional practice (p. 509). Examples of these discrepancies occur not only between education theory and education practice but also within the professional development relationship as well.

An example of a discrepancy uncovered in the context of the grant proposal development process was the realization that while the College intended for the partnership to be a collaborative and mutually beneficial venture, the most tangible benefits of the partnership were gained by the College. Both the School and the College acknowledged this was the most pronounced weakness of the relationship and needed particular focus if we were to become a true PDS model partnership. Moving forward, the district and college agreed that restructuring the relationship to more closely reflect the PDS model should be a primary goal.

In some ways, the College had worked to integrate school personnel in the preparation of student teachers as a form of professional development. For example, the school leader had increasingly served as a guest speaker for the College community beginning in 2006. Also, beginning in 2007 the College hired several district practitioners as adjunct faculty to teach methods courses to pre-service educators.

Yet despite these overtures, the team agreed that the relationship between the School and the College should be more

reciprocal and should accomplish the following objectives: provide professional development opportunities to a broader range of current school educators, foster a joint school-university faculty investigation of education related issues, and improve the education of K-12 students. Through monthly meetings and electronic communications over six months, specific goals for enhancing the relationship toward a true PDS model were clarified. Long-term goals for the partnership include establishing mechanisms for shared professional development, refining the process of mentor selection, and engaging in frequent practice-based inquiry into curriculum and assessment issues within the school community.

When the college participant in a PDS partnership focuses more on the district's needs and goals, as this grant's proposal process compelled us to do, we found the shift created a "ripple effect," whereby more leaders in the K-12 district heard of the interesting work and were eager to participate. We explore the impact of this ripple effect further in the "implications" section of this article. It was evident that the philosophical underpinnings of the partnership had to speak to the goals and long-term vision of both parties in the partnership. Our partnership's focus on shared practice-based inquiry and continuous learning were distilled in the grant writing process, and benefitted not just the College and P. Henry Middle School personnel but the students as well.

Logistical Requirements: Structure of the Partnership

An initial step to successful partnering is to define the structure and purpose of the partnership. Hora and Millar (2011) describe three main partnership structures in educational settings: limited, coordinated, and collaborative. The basis of the differences in the partnership structures is the manner in which decision-making and functionality are determined by the partnership. In a limited

partnership, services are delivered to schools by colleges, and decisions are made unilaterally. This type of unilateral decision-making is prevalent in many K-12 to college partnerships and is exemplified when, for example, colleges provide curriculum and professional development materials to K-12 district leaders and to schools (Hora & Millar, 2011).

Prior to working on this project, our school-college relationship might well have been defined as a "strategic alliance" (Hora & Millar, 2011, p. 102) or a "coordinated partnership." Each partner made decisions independently toward a common goal. Although the governance structure was loose, decisions about obtaining our common goal of high-quality teacher preparation were made independently, and the benefits of the partnership were one-sided.

The most ideal structure for a school-college partnership conducting a joint research project is the collaborative structure. The collaborative structure fits "when partners share a problem they believe can be addressed only if multiple organizations work together shared governance model" (Hora & Millar, 2011, p. 103). Cochran-Smith and Donnell (2005) note that true collaboration is a key element of action research, but that this requires the practitioner to take on the role of a researcher. They caution that while research is highly valued in the university context, this is rarely the case in elementary and secondary schools. In schools, the most valued and rewarded work is the work of practice (p. 509). The foundation of our work was to build a strong partnership using expertise of both parties to determine a shared vision, purpose, and path for the research (Snyder, 2005).

Both the College and the School agreed that a democratic decision-making process would be utilized. PDS research indicates that collaborative decision-making in school-university partnerships is key to creating and sustaining partnerships (Robinson & Darling-Hammond, 2005). Meanwhile, Cochran-

Smith and Donnell (2005) caution that having practitioners take on the role of researcher “contrasts with conventional research on K-12 teaching and teacher education where practitioners are the topics of study, the objects of someone else’s inquiry, or the informants and subjects of research conducted by those outside the situation” (p. 508). This is particularly critical in light of the fact that, as is usually the case with practitioner inquiry, the knowledge generated is intended “primarily for application and use within the local context in which it is generated” (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2005, p. 508). Without constant attention to the equality of voices in the partnership, the application of the knowledge generated from this study might appear unilateral, whereas it is intended to represent a collaborative endeavor.

To ensure that this potential pitfall of one-sided focus and attention was proactively addressed and prevented, both the College and the School agreed that there must be clear and open lines of communication at all times. It is clear that “communication systems underlie almost every aspect of partnership operations and functions” (Hora & Millar, 2011, p. 142). The district-college partnership had already considered and developed communication systems that would be efficient and meet the needs of the research team. These same systems of communication from the relationship-building process continued through the grant application process as well. The research partnership established a system of communication and regular meeting times with a clear research plan and agenda. Additionally, the team established an articulation agreement expressing the common mission, goals, roles, and responsibilities of all involved (see Appendix).

The roles and responsibilities delineated in the articulation agreement were a direct outcome of the experience of the political realities when collaborating within distinct cultures. Navigating among the complexities

between the two institutions was at times demanding, requiring participants to be flexible, diplomatic, and politically savvy. Each institution functioned within its own political structure. Other than the necessary, but non-constricting oversight from the institutional review board (IRB), in most cases, the College personnel functioned rather autonomously.

Meanwhile, the public school personnel functioned within and were keen to respond to the public and the school board. For example, one of the classroom practitioners in the partnership revised the preliminary grant application to ensure that the curricular challenge – a longstanding challenge for the district, which was described at length in the grant application – was framed in the most positive light. School partners were required to acquire permissions from the superintendent and ultimately the school board to participate in and conduct action research. This is understandable given the political context within which both the superintendent and the board of education function as well.

In addition to some of these structural constraints, the logistics of communication and gathering all of the parties together during the academic year was a challenge at best. While classroom teachers are at the heart of practitioner research, identifying mutually available times with a classroom teacher can be trying, and requires commitment from the building principal and other administrators. Of course, without the involvement of these practitioners, legitimate practitioner research cannot take place.

Implications

In this section, we describe in greater detail the lessons we learned by moving beyond the basics of a partnership, including new insights about what colleges can offer, and surprisingly what few extra resources are required for a big return on the investment of time by the school-college partners. We found that the

small boost given to our relationship by the shared aspiration to apply for a grant took on a life of its own both in its effects across the district and in terms of the College faculty's own professional development.

We worked to move beyond the basics of our partnership – where “the basics” included asking practitioners to join the clinical faculty of the College, and offering a smattering of professional development opportunities. We were then able to move toward a more complex, sustained, and invested project requiring focused and longitudinal research-based inquiry. At that point, our lofty goals to function more as a true PDS model partnership came sharply into focus and quickly within our reach. The budding partnership has since built considerable momentum. Initially, as mentioned in the introduction, we planned to strengthen our relationship with one building within the district – rather than the whole district – with the intention of expanding the PDS model partnership to other schools within the same district. Moving beyond the basics of the partnership had the unanticipated consequence of piquing others' interest within the district, and establishing the potential of expanding the PDS model to include other schools within and outside P. Henry Middle School's district.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship was perceived initially by the college as uneven and non-reciprocal. The Nine Essentials provided the frame, and the grant proposal writing process provided an incentive to drive the College's thinking toward what more the College could bring to the table in terms of resources, knowledge, and skills. For example, because school leaders were contemplating how to tackle concerns over students' writing performance, the College faculty were able to offer syntheses of research on writing outcomes and writing curricula, including meta-analyses of the impact on student performance of these multiple and diverse writing programs.

One member of the research team expressed gratitude when the College faculty

were able to identify and share these scholarly resources. Another school district leader noted, with measured enthusiasm, that it could only benefit his practice to have several minds working together on the statistical analyses of longitudinal student performance data on standardized writing tasks within the School and across the district generally. When viewing the existing partnership through the lens of the Nine Essentials, the imbalance of rewards of the initial partnership became clear. We were then able to move the partnership to a more equal status.

What also quickly became clear was that partner members representing both the College and the School needed to possess both a very clear understanding of the political contexts of their own institutions, and a healthy respect for the complexity of the others' political contexts. Our partnership had the good fortune of having many seasoned education leaders who recognized the fact that these complex terrains require a clear vision and cautious movement. In some regards, each entity within the partnership had some degree of autonomy within their institution, and likewise had a similar degree of constraints. Moving beyond the basics of a partnership required that all players wield some degree of political diplomacy, know-how, and savvy.

Given the uneven nature of our younger and less-developed partnership, it was critical that the College faculty work to build school partners' trust in the College. This included building a sense of trust that the partnership was sustainable and could be mutually beneficial. This also required building trust that the College partner was not simply at the school for the data, and the opportunity having access to such data would provide for the College faculty to apply for a prestigious grant award. Or, that the commitment of the College faculty to the partnership would erode if and when the grant did not materialize.

To that end, the College was keen to work in good faith, and to date without funding, to

ensure that the PDS partnership would persevere and thrive even in the absence of financial support from a grant provider. Scheduling regular and recurring meetings for key players to check in, to contemplate next steps, and to look ahead to on-campus professional development workshops that bolstered the school-college partnership goal of collaborative inquiry-based practice all served to ensure the partnership would continue to move beyond the basics.

A final lesson learned from our deliberate effort to deepen the PDS partnership stemmed from the sheer excitement and fulfillment that came from regular productive meetings with others who share a passion for the work we do. Both the College and school partners routinely commented how much we looked forward to our meetings, during which we were able to exchange new information from our perspectives on the teaching profession as well as new reflections on our shared work and current events in the field. Taking our professional relationship to a higher level was rewarding for all in the sense that our work became less insular. Practitioners in the school felt as though it was an opportunity to hear about and respond to current research and theory in the field, and faculty members at the college gained a better understanding of how theory and research are translated in practice. Furthermore, the members of the practitioner-based and middle school-bound PLC, which had been researching the issue of early adolescent writing development, felt as though they were suddenly able to have a district-wide impact and beyond. The shared work opened doors for all giving additional credence to a partnership, which – until now – had appeared only to demonstrate potential.

Conclusion

We hoped that the process of transforming our school-college relationship – from what could once be described as a “strong” relationship to a true PDS partnership –

would provide us with a springboard to enter into more meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with other area districts. For example, as was mentioned in the introduction, the bordering city to the college has an incredibly diverse population with significant strength and some significant challenges. We hoped that piloting a deeper research-driven relationship with an area district with significant resources might help us to learn lessons about procedure and implementation that we could then generalize to a district with limited resources. In other words, rather than weighing down the already burdened district with additional meetings, work, and demands on their time, the College could be more efficient about what we could do for the district and what we, in turn, hoped to gain from working with the district.

Recently, we took steps toward generalizing this process to other partner districts. Subsequent to this work with P. Henry Middle School, we submitted a new grant proposal, which could serve to benefit the area urban district as well as other districts in Southern New Hampshire. This grant proposal—which focused on the civic education of area adolescents across school districts and teacher training on civic interventions with the goal of civic and school renewal in Southern New Hampshire—highlights the strengths of the Institutions of Higher Education, and makes clear what the IHE can do to support and enhance learning and teaching in these partners schools. These strengths were perhaps not as clear to the IHE previous to the pilot effort undertaken and described in detail in this paper.

The college faculty, school administrators, and practitioners involved in this work contributed to and benefited from this enhanced relationship and collaborative project. Furthermore, because the school district does not have any other research partnerships in place, fostering a partnership between the college and the school provided a significant opportunity for solidifying a long-term re-

search relationship that filled an existing void for the School. The outcome of the six-month collaborative project was the emergence of a PDS partnership model aligned with the Nine Essentials and an established and mutually beneficial research agenda. SUP

Appendix

Memorandum of Understanding

Professional Development School (PDS)

This memorandum of understanding is entered between The College Department of Education and P. Henry Middle School for the 2012–2013 school year.

Vision of the Partnership Network:

To create a dynamic and sustained university-school district partnership that will promote simultaneous renewal of the College and schools with a focus on student learning and educator preparation through the engagement of collaborative learning communities involving district and college students and faculty.

Mission:

The mission of the college-district partnership is simultaneous renewal and support of P-16 (preschool through college) education, practicing educators, and educator preparation.

Goals:

1. Increase the achievement of all students.
2. Provide high quality academic and clinical training for teacher candidates through intensive internship opportunities.
3. Provide a powerful mechanism for the simultaneous professional development among K-12 educators, higher education faculties and teacher candidates.
4. Increase the application of research-based practices in classrooms and schools.
5. Support efforts to achieve the strategic goals of the School system's strategic plan.

College:

- Maintain a College commitment to a three-year partnership.
- Provide access to the Coordinator of Clinical Practice to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Provide access to Coordinator of Clinical Practice to facilitate professional development.
- Support grant opportunities for school and college faculty to implement and gather data on research-based practices to support instructional improvements.
- Assess needs for and facilitate delivery of professional development.
- Provide mentor training and support.
- Collaborate to determine extent to which the Partnership is working and report annually to both college and school stakeholders.

Professional Development School:

- Maintain a school-wide commitment to a three-year Professional Development School partnership.
- Educate entire school community on the goals and initiatives of the Partnership incorporating the vision into the everyday work and mission of the School, development at the district, school, and/or grade levels, etc.).
- Facilitate diverse clinical experiences
- Provide an identified School Liaison (teacher or school leader) to help facilitate partnership-related activities, including activities such as assisting with placements and supervision of college students, and communicating with school and college faculty.
- Participate in action research projects and collaborative professional development, including mentor training and assessment.
- Support, supervise, and assess pre-service teachers in clinical experiences throughout the educator preparation program.

- Collaborate to determine extent to which the partnership is working and report annually to both college and school stakeholders.
- Encourage and allow teachers and teacher candidates to implement innovative practice to meet the needs of diverse learners in the School.

Terms of Agreement and Termination:

- This agreement addresses cooperation in the College-P. Henry Middle School Partnership.
- This agreement is in effect for three years (2012–2015) and subject to annual review.
- Termination of the agreement may be initiated by either party through written notice at least 45 days prior to the end of the School district semester and is subject to completion of the entire semester.

Professional Development School Principal Date

District Assistant Superintendent or Designee Date

Director of Teacher Education, The College Date

Clinical Coordinator The College Date

Adapted from the Memorandum of Understanding partnership network developed by Winthrop University, GA www2.winthrop.edu/netscope/pds.../MOU_PDSgeneric.pdf and from the Howard County Public School System, Maryland www.hcpss.org }

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