

Queens University of Charlotte – Myers Park Traditional Elementary School Partnership

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As a single college and a single school, we were thrilled to receive the honor from the National Professional Development Schools' Conference, the *Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement*. It did not escape our notice that we were the only winner that was not a consortium of schools. Even though entering as a small comprehensive university and single elementary school for the award was a long shot, we knew what we were doing was special and in the true spirit of the PDS movement. Receiving the award was such an honor and it was also confirming and energizing! Knowing that there are other small colleges and schools that want to partner and do great work, we hope that the story of our journey will help you to achieve success in your partnerships. Great work can be accomplished with little budgets and big dreams and desires for increased student achievement. The focus of our partnership was excellent teacher development that centered on learning as a community of teachers (both pre-service and in-service). What we found was the one key ingredient that you must have for success is a team with passion and no fear of perspiration to put initiatives in place.

Queens University of Charlotte and Myers Park Traditional School (MPTS) are neighbors and share property that is a vital part of the

atmosphere on both campuses. There is also a significant institutional history between Queens and MPTS. Our relationship goes much further than staff to staff. MPTS parents consider Queens to be a vital part of MPTS' success just as Queens considers MPTS as an asset to its program. Many MPTS teachers have received degrees from Queens and we have become a part of their Masters in School Leadership Program. Numerous MPTS staff are mid-degree at this time.

The PDS component was initiated two years ago and now includes ongoing professional development with Queens' professors and MPTS faculty. This is the component on which we founded our growth in relationship to a PDS and how we measure our success of working as a team. We work on issues that are essential to student success and develop staff initiatives that will enable in-service teachers, future teachers, and the Queens' faculty to learn about the best way to conduct schooling. The unique component of our program is our collaboration as a professional learning community that determines professional development activities based on data and teacher surveys. Everyone has much invested and we are all fully devoted to the relationship.

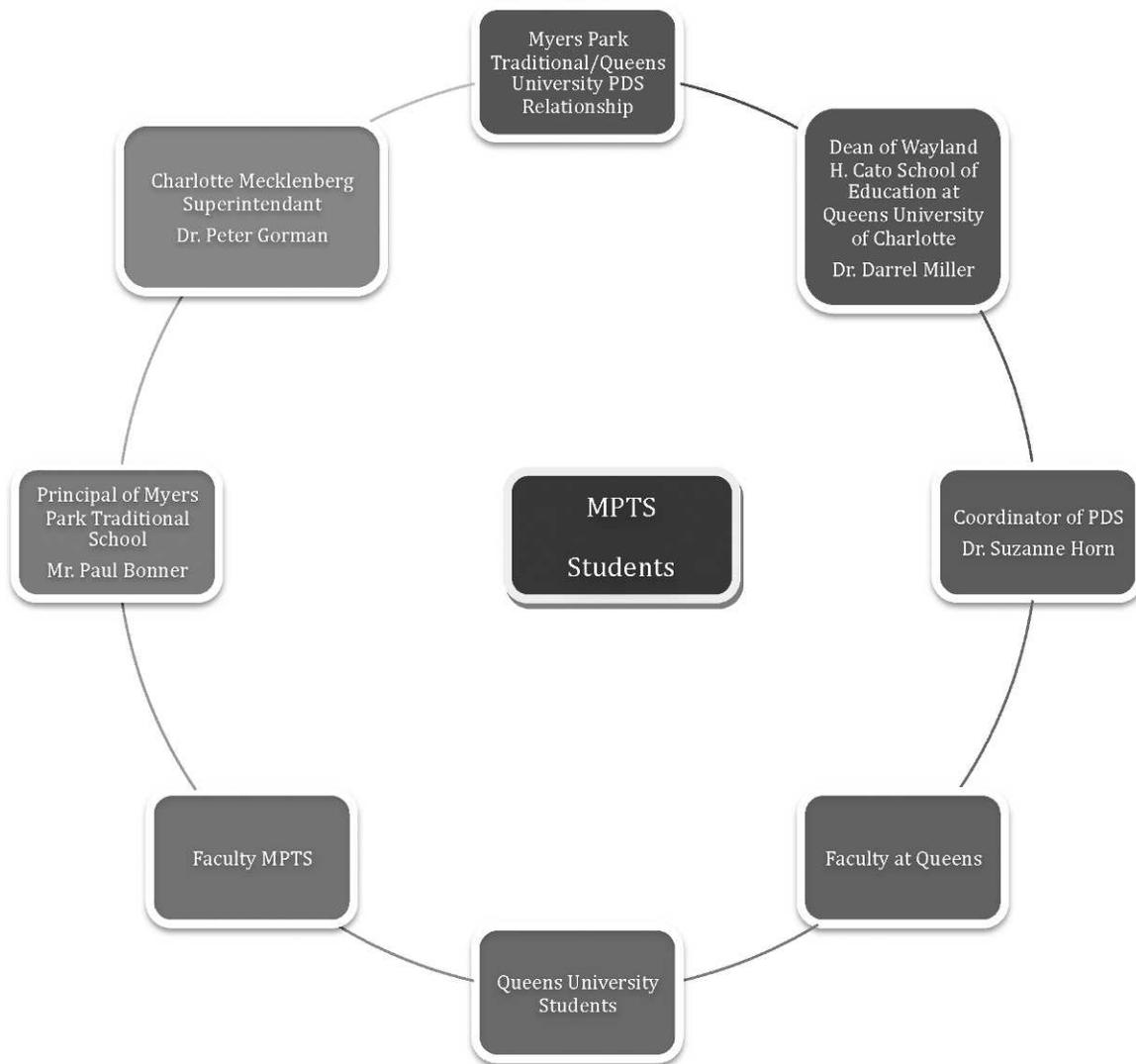


Diagram of Relationship's Organizational Structure

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure between Queens University of Charlotte and Myers Park Traditional School is professional and collaborative. In the first year of forming the PDS, a steering committee of MPTS and Queens' faculty was created to guide the relationship. That steering committee is still in place today. All decisions for the partnership are made through the committee with the faculties of both campuses being polled. At the start of the partnership a needs assessment survey was given to the faculty of MPTS and a survey of what needs could be addressed based on our talents was given to the

faculty at Queens. This survey was the topic of discussion at a steering committee meeting and then a full discussion with the full faculty of the following year's staff development needs. If a large decision to be made, the whole faculty of each school meets and discusses the issue. The relationship encourages collaboration, reflection, and regular communication among participants.

Dedicated Resources

In addition to property and facilities, MPTS students and Queens' students benefit from our



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partnership. Queens uses MPTS as placement for student teachers to learn their craft. The pre-service teachers serve as America Reads tutors, complete clinical experiences, work with at-risk students in reading, and assist students struggling in Language Arts with word study tutoring and students struggling with reading comprehension with intense tutoring sessions. These activities introduce Queens' students to the realities of teaching and the fact that not all students are motivated or successful without additional efforts put forth by the student and their teacher. Queens' students also benefit by having clinical teachers and cooperating teachers who are highly qualified in best practices. Queens' students are invited to all events, such as parent reading night, that are held at MPTS. While this arrangement does help Queens students meet their volunteer and clinical requirements, it also benefits MPTS students. They have the advantage of working with a tutor to receive extra help in areas in which they are having difficulty. Students with a need at MPTS are also given the opportunity to participate in a three-week summer tutoring session for remediation in literacy skills. These additional trained adults in the building have helped contribute to MPTS students' increased success.

County staff development required during periodic teacher workdays throughout the year does not always meet MPTS teachers' criteria for productive, relevant, and meaningful staff development. Because of this, the faculty of Queens and MPTS have been working together

to ensure that teachers at Myers Park have what they need and want with regard to staff development opportunities. MPTS staff produces topics and responds to inquiries regarding wanted and/or needed staff development classes and Queens faculty respond by providing staff development classes in those areas for MPTS teachers at convenient times throughout the year.

In addition to providing Myers Park's teachers with relevant, wanted staff development courses, Queens allows faculty from MPTS the opportunity to pursue undergraduate and graduate courses tuition-free. This has benefited many teacher assistants who have earned their teaching degree and many fulltime teachers who have earned their M.Ed. in Literacy or in the new Master of School Administration program. Teachers from MPTS also take courses of interest from the education schedule as a non-degree seeking students to enhance their knowledge of specific topics.

Summary of the Work of the Relationship

Throughout the 2008–2009 school year, Queens University of Charlotte and Myers Park Traditional Elementary School have worked together to enhance the experiences of both current and future educators. Queens' students, both undergraduate and graduate, work with MPTS staff and students for observation



opportunities, tutoring experiences, student teaching, field studies, work study, and professional development. Queens' professors have volunteered over 50 hours of staff development hours to work with MPTS faculty on best practices. MPTS faculty have stayed after school hours to participate in that staff development, and have devoted their time with Queens' faculty to parent teacher nights, end of grade test nights, parent tutoring, and other programs to further involve parents in their child's learning.

During the school year, teachers at MPTS volunteer their classrooms to be used for observation purposes. Pre-service teachers from Queens are able to enter these classrooms and to obtain a close view of how a classroom works. These opportunities allow for the future educators to see "in action" some of the strategies they have previously read about in textbooks. In most cases, the Queens' students

interact with students and teachers to receive a more "hands on" experience of how a classroom should be run. Without these observations, pre-service teachers would only know how to manage a classroom from the perspective of a text, rather than through first-hand experience.

The partnership that Queens and MPTS share has also opened the door for more tutoring experiences. Many students at MPTS benefit from their Queens' tutors. This is another excellent outlet for the pre-service teachers to experience a taste of the teaching field. Queens' students are placed in various grade levels to work with a wide variety of students. Tutoring sessions include reading weekly stories, finishing class assignments, starting homework assignments, planning and implementing lesson plans, teaching in all content areas, read alouds, preparing for tests, practicing math facts, working with at-risk readers and students behind in Language Arts.

Many of the Queens students are able to provide multiple sessions within a week's time. This helps many MPTS students to increase achievement levels so that they are able to learn material and also helped them to pass the end of year assessments.

One very unique opportunity given to students from both Queens and MPTS was the creek water sample testing conducted at a nearby creek. Science students from Queens were paired with third graders at the Little Sugar Creek and together the groups gathered water samples. Groups then searched their water samples for various living organisms. At a later date, students were reunited to sort and classify their findings. The elementary students were engaged in this activity and admired and questioned the Queens students. In turn the Queens' students answered the various questions and assisted the elementary students in making sense of what they were doing and why it was important. Since the experience was an extension of a science class at Queens, not all of the students were teacher education students. This shows that the PDS relationship reaches beyond the School of Education at Queens University of Charlotte and into the content areas of the college. We found this outreach exciting.

Without the Queens and MPTS partnership, many opportunities for professional development would have not been possible. During the 2008–2009 school year Queens' professors offered workshops on a range of topics created by the staff at Myers Park. One of those workshops included "Closing the Achievement Gap." In this workshop, MPTS staff members shared their own strategies on which they have been working. They also received research-based strategies that were gathered and presented by graduate students from Queens. These graduate students were education majors working on their Masters in Literacy degree. Both groups involved were able to walk away from the workshop with a wealth of new knowledge about the students who were on the lower end of the "achievement gap" and handful of strategies that were easily implemented in the classroom.

Professional Development Provided on a Regular Basis

Professional Development is decided upon mid-year for the following year. First, both faculties are surveyed about topics that they would like to explore the next year. Once all of the topics are gathered together, they are then compiled together in a second survey and discussed in the steering committee. This survey is then presented to the MPTS elementary school faculty and all of the responses are discussed. Once the faculties of both schools have a chance to discuss the staff development opportunities, the staff development is decided upon and a schedule is created. Teachers may then sign up for them. The staff development is offered on a variety of topics. It is also offered at a variety of times throughout the year.

At the MPTS staff retreat, in the beginning of the school year, participants are able to sign up for professional development courses that will enhance their knowledge of curriculum and teaching. During the 2008–2009 school year, teachers at Myers Park Traditional School had the opportunity to participate in 10 different professional development courses facilitated by professors at Queens University of Charlotte. Courses were developed by Queens' faculty based on a survey of needs given to the teachers the prior year. Professional development courses began in August and were conducted throughout the school year. Some courses were single workshops and some were presented in multiple parts. Participation was voluntary. Some examples of topics are as follows: *Math Strategies—Examining what we are doing—What Works and What Doesn't*; *Working With Parents to Enhance Reading Skills* (session for Kindergarten teachers and First Grade Teachers); *Creating Active Academic Tasks*; *Examining Active Teaching* using the book, *Worksheets Don't Grow Dendrites: 20 Instructional Strategies that Engage the Brain* by Marcia L. Tate; *Organizing a Parent Night with the Focus of Helping Students Study at Home*.

Professional development opportunities were offered during the 2009–2010 school year. Some topics were repeated because the faculty requested that they be offered again for those

who did not participate the first time. New topics were also added based on teacher needs. In this year, technology courses were offered on how to apply multiple programs to the educational setting and how to differentiate instruction in the classroom.

Innovative and Reflective Practices

The staff development program in itself is innovative. In the program that we developed as a team, all members participate voluntarily. Teachers could attend all staff development meetings, or none, if they choose. The exciting thing about this staff development model is that the development a faculty member receives is customized, personal, relevant, supportive, useful and on-going. In a majority of the sessions there are only four hours of meeting in the 10 hours of time attributed to a topic. Teachers spend the rest of the time using the researched strategies in their classroom and reflecting on how the strategies worked for them and adaptations that need to be made. They then come back to the group and share what they found in their classrooms. Queens' students are in these classrooms as clinical students and student teachers so that they can observe the best practices performed in the elementary classroom. Also, they learned that in the teaching profession, continuous learning and modifications to teaching are the norm.

As professors, we take what teachers are doing in their classrooms and weave it into our instruction and assignments for our students. As a specific example, students taking Diagnosis and Corrective Reading Techniques at Queens were paired with MPTS second grade students who were struggling with reading. All of the MPTS students were assessed on their reading level. Queens' students reassessed and discussed any differences they found using the Qualitative Reading Inventory assessment with the MPTS teacher to discover why the discrepancy occurred. With the MPTS teacher, they formulated a tutoring plan. This plan was supported by best practices that MPTS teachers used and that were taught at Queens University of Charlotte.

The Queens' students create weekly tutoring lesson plans, reflected on each tutoring session, as well as the overall experience.

We have seen the results of our interactions in students' scores at MPTS. In 2007, students' composite score of at grade-level or exceeding grade level was 76.5%. In 2008, it rose to 83.5%. We considered this an incredibly successful gain. MPTS students were not the only students to benefit from the partnership. Queens' students have commented in Queens' faculty course evaluations that the clinical experiences were helpful in preparing them to work with students in general, as well as with struggling students.

Best Practices Examined and Shared

As in our reading and diagnosis class, we also completed a similar project in Queens' Language Arts. A Queens and MPTS faculty member modeled best practices. The Language Arts students use these methods in tutoring and whole class instruction. The MPTS teacher gave feedback. We all modeled and discussed the methods in the classroom at Queens and MPTS. This relationship benefited MPTS students who were behind as they were receiving one-on-one tutoring and places more teaching adults in the building. It benefited Queens' students as they learn best practices. Both faculties benefit as we reexamined and reevaluated our methods through the process.

Accomplishments of the PDS

The Professional Development School is proud of many accomplishments. Through the collaboration of Queens University of Charlotte and Myers Park Traditional School, MPTS achieved High Growth, and was named a School of Distinction after the 2008–2009 school year. MPTS had not met High Growth in over 8 years, and many attributed the success to the partnership with Queens University of Charlotte. From the 2007–2008 school year to the

2008–2009 school year, the achievement gap in the Math End of Grade testing at Myers Park Traditional closed by 16%. Through the implementation of the PDS, the teachers at Myers Park Traditional were given opportunities to improve their practice and were given strategies to help close the achievement gap. Through this work, the Queens’ professors also had an opportunity to pause and reflect on what they were teaching future teachers as best practices. It is quite apparent that the work done by Queens’ faculty and students and MPTS faculty has had a significant impact on the students. Raising the End of Grade test scores and earning the honor of School of Distinction was the tangible proof of this work.

By becoming a Professional Development School, the MPTS staff became more open with sharing ideas and strategies to help all students in the school to succeed. The resources provided by the faculty of Queens prompted much discussion among the MPTS and Queens faculty about how to help students become successful learners. These discussions in turn benefited Queens’ students in their future teaching. It was also been beneficial for them to be in an environment where team planning and using

innovative practice, rather than what had always been done, is important and the team takes pride in this attitude.

What the Future Holds

As any partnership, we are grateful for our successes, but always look to the future for goals. We have decided as a partnership that our future goal is to align the curriculum to be more in accordance with the traditional school philosophy and in doing so closing the achievement gap at the school. Although we have made strides in closing the achievement gap, it is not completely closed and as a team we think this is vital. As a group we will plan how these goals will be accomplished. ^{SUP}



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