A TALE OF TWO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS:
JUDIA JACKSON HARRIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
AND
FOWLER DRIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction
The Professional Development School District (PDSD) is marked by a partnership between the College of Education (COE) at the University of Georgia (UGA) and the Clarke County School District (CCSD) with the opening of Judia Jackson Harris (J. J. Harris) Elementary School in 2009. In 2011, the CCSD and the COE expanded their partnership to include the entire school district, including Fowler Drive Elementary School. There are now over a dozen PDS schools in the CCSD.

The PDSD partnership mission is four-fold:
1. Prepare teacher candidates in a clinically rich environment;
2. Provide professional development for students at all levels;
3. Foster collaborative inquiry directed at the improvement of practice; and
4. Provide opportunities for enhanced student learning.

Context
The PDSD partnership consists of different organizational units. These include:

- The UGA College of Education Office of School Engagement (OSE)
- The CCSD Associate Superintendent for Instructional Services and School Performance
- The PDSD Executive Committee
- The PDSD Coordinating Council
- The School-Based PDS Steering Committees
- The UGA College of Education PDSD Collaborative

All of these units include representatives from both the CCSD and UGA at different levels to plan and manage PDS issues and initiatives.

There are four models for schools within the PDSD. Each model has a different level of PDS engagement.

- Model 1 schools participate in the PDSD through interaction with a district-wide Professor-in-Residence (PIR) and/or the OSE.
- Model 2 schools include all of the above, as well as the placement of COE pre-service teachers in classrooms for fieldwork and/or student teaching experiences.
- Model 3 schools include all of the above as well as one or more COE courses taught on-site by COE faculty.
- Model 4 schools have all of the above, plus a PIR, which is a COE faculty member who contracts for a period of 2-3 years to be at the school 50% of the time during the academic year.

This document is a summary of the final report, which serves to: (1) support the organizational units of the PDSD collaboration; (2) provide information related to supports for and challenges to providing PDS learning experiences; (3) advance PDS goals focused on facilitating a culturally responsive environment and continuous school improvement; and (4) document how PDS practices are embedded in the everyday activities of schools.

Study Design and Questions
A multiple case study design was used for this study. Two Model 4 elementary schools—J. J. Harris and Fowler Drive—were selected as case study schools. The primary questions that guided this study include:
1. What are the major practices and procedures used to implement the PDS model at J. J. Harris and Fowler Drive?
2. What are the main challenges to and sources of support for the PDSD collaboration?
3. How is the relationship between the PDSD collaboration and student learning perceived by the stakeholders?
4. How does the PDSD collaboration influence the organizational culture and climate (norms, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, openness to PDS collaborative opportunities) of each school as perceived by stakeholders?
5. What are stakeholders' recommendations for school or student improvement?

Study Data Collection Methods
Data collection activities were conducted during the spring of 2015 in relation to PDSD partnership goals. These activities include:

- Six interviews with the COE OSE director, a district administrator, as well as PIRs and principals from both case study schools.
- Four focus groups with pre-service teachers and mentor teachers from both case study schools.
- Analysis of documents, including written responses from fifth grade students from both case study schools (35) and other communications (written and online) deemed relevant to the study.

Key Findings
CASE 1: JUDIA JACKSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FINDINGS
Introduction and Context
J. J. Harris Elementary School opened as a PDS in 2009. The school serves over 500 Pre-K-5 students. As a Title 1 school, the majority of students (95%) receive free or reduced lunch and have limited English proficiency (50%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Ethnic Identification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6%</td>
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Teacher population reported: 49 teachers, 37 with advanced degrees and an average of 9 years of experience.

Major Practices and Procedures
The majority of stakeholders (principal, PIR, mentor teachers, pre-service teachers) identified two key practices that advance the school’s PDS goals:

1) Inclusive professional learning.
   Stakeholders reported it is beneficial to student progress when mentors and pre-service teachers work together, participating in professional development activities, teaching rounds, reflecting, and common planning times. Inclusive professional learning is perceived reciprocal as COE pre-service teachers receive assistance with classroom pedagogy and professional development support beyond the classroom from mentor teachers, and mentor teachers learn new theories and
instructional strategies from COE pre-service teachers.

2) **Multiple adults in classrooms.** Stakeholders reported students have a rich learning experience enhanced by the availability of additional adults in the classroom. In addition to COE pre-service teachers and mentor teachers, other adult support for J. J. Harris students include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), special education, early intervention program (EIP) and gifted teachers.

### Main Challenges to PDSD Collaboration

Key challenges identified by J. J. Harris stakeholders include:

- **Balancing support for mentors and pre-service teachers.** The principal and PIR reported ongoing challenges to find ways to balance support for mentor teachers’ readiness for increased responsibilities of working with pre-service teachers and increased mentor teacher workload, while simultaneously maximizing the experience of COE pre-service teachers.

- **Tensions of multiple adults in classroom.** Stakeholders reported that multiple adults physically over crowds classrooms and poses additional responsibility to manage the instructional classroom team while providing a productive professional experience for pre-service teachers.

- **Barriers to additional professional development.** Stakeholders raised concerns about the level of professional development available within the PDSD partnership. Stated concerns include uneven support from UGA for professional training needs within the school, the “one sided” nature of professional development opportunities for mentor teachers, and the limitations to COE pre-service teachers’ attendance at some teacher training opportunities due to limited funding and available parking.

- **Practice of inquiry.** J. J. Harris stakeholders may be challenged with insufficient time to direct toward research practices due to the intensity of external demands. Stakeholders’ responses also revealed varied understandings and practices of this task. The most common forms of inquiry practiced involve critical reflection.

### Sources of Support and PDS Collaboration

J. J. Harris stakeholders identified three critical sources of support that enhance the PDSD partnership and contribute to the school’s professional development goals:

- **The role of the PIR.** The PIR serves a key role supervising COE pre-service teachers, serving as liaison between the COE and J. J. Harris, seeking and providing needed resources and support, and collaborating with the J. J. Harris administrative team (the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach).

- **The faculty and administrative teams’ advancement of professional development.** Stakeholders identified the willingness of faculty to work together as a major professional support mechanism in the school. Professional learning opportunities are also advanced
by the supportive efforts of the J. J. Harris administrative team.

- **COE pre-service teacher teamwork.** Pre-service teachers reported the benefits of a strong collaborative peer-initiated support system as they learn from and provide assistance to each other in and outside of the classroom. Pre-service teachers reported learning from each other and Block 3 students reported being in a classroom with a student teacher was a strong form of professional development.

**Organizational Culture and Climate**

Stakeholders described the climate at J. J. Harris as comfortable, engaging, and collaborative. COE pre-service teachers also described the inviting and inclusive nature of J. J. Harris. Fifth grade students reported playing with their friends and participating in physical education activities as most enjoyable.

**Recommendations**

- **Ideas offered from J. J. Harris stakeholders**

  - *Training for mentor teachers.* Good teachers are not necessarily good mentors. The PIR recommended training initiatives to prepare teachers for the role of mentor.
  
  - *Consistent start date for all UGA students.* Rather than being optional, it is recommended that UGA students begin their field experience at the same time as J. J. Harris faculty, prior to the beginning of the school year.

- **Ideas generated from the study**

  - *Further develop student teachers’ classroom independence.* COE faculty and the administrative team could actively continue to explore ways to enhance the curriculum such that student teachers increase their capacity to manage a classroom independently.
  
  - **Further develop pre-service teachers’ capacity to help J. J. Harris’ students move toward more independent learning goals.** COE faculty and the administrative team could further assist COE pre-service teachers with problem-solving skills and independent learning strategies to use with students.
  
  - *Continue to enhance and structure the Block 3 field experience.* The administrative team is encouraged to continue investigations toward a more meaningful and productive Block 3 experience.
  
  - **Clarify understandings of inquiry.** J. J. Harris stakeholders expressed varied understandings of the practice of inquiry. Stakeholders are encouraged to seek a common understanding of the practice and to determine if any, all, or some of the approaches currently employed are considered inquiry.
  
  - **Actively encourage and further investigate the peer-professional development of pre-service teachers.** J. J. Harris is encouraged to more visibly acknowledge this self-directed support system and further examine its contributions to teacher preparation and student achievement.
  
  - **Reaffirm UGA students’ knowledge of PDSD goals.** It would be beneficial for UGA students to have more knowledge of the overarching PDSD partnership and its goals.
CASE STUDY 2: FOWLER DRIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Introduction and Study Context

Fowler Drive (Fowler) Elementary School initially opened in 1965. In 2011, Fowler became a PDS. The school serves over 400 students (Pre-K - Grade 5). The majority of students (99%) receive free or reduced lunch.

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Teacher population reported: Over 30 teachers, including those with advanced degrees (17) and over 10 years of teaching experience.

Major Practices and Procedures

Fowler stakeholders highlighted the following key practices that advance PDS goals:

- **Co-teaching between mentor and COE pre-service teachers.** The cooperative instructional strategies implemented by two or more adults (mentor and student teachers) in the same classroom are beneficial to COE students, mentor teachers, and students.

- **Strong relationships among Fowler students and teachers (pre-service and mentor).** The positive interactions between Fowler students and teachers (pre-service and mentor) are perceived to offer far-reaching impacts for the future success of students.

- **Pre-service teachers embraced by mentors as educators.** The mentor teachers embracing COE pre-service teachers within the school community, beyond co-teaching, was perceived as beneficial for pre-service teachers’ professional development and the success of Fowler students.

Key challenges to PDSD Collaboration

Fowler stakeholders lauded the benefits of the PDSD collaboration, but also identified the following gaps:

- **Disconnect between Fowler’s curriculum and COE pre-service teachers’ activities.** Mentor teachers perceived a lack of synchronization between COE pre-service teachers’ field assignments and the PDS curriculum timeline, sometimes resulting in difficulty to incorporate assignments into the curriculum.

- **Lack of communication among mentors, pre-service teachers, and COE faculty.** Mentor teachers reported a need for a better line of communication between the mentor teachers and the COE faculty, and to synchronize the current staggered start dates for COE students entering the practicum.

- **Overwhelming demands placed on mentor teachers.** Stakeholders expressed concern for mentor teachers being overwhelmed, at times, managing the personalities of students, in addition to instructional responsibilities.

- **Varied conceptualizations of inquiry.** Inquiry at Fowler is primarily perceived as reflection. Yet, this conceptualization of inquiry is carried out in a variety of ways across Fowler stakeholder groups.
Sources of Support and PDS Collaboration

Fowler stakeholders identified the top three sources that they rely on the most to advance PDS goals at the school.

- **The role of the PIR.** Stakeholders perceived the PIR’s role as “extra support in the building.” Other roles mentioned included a collaborative relationship with the principal, supervising and monitoring pre-service teachers, and serving as a part of the Fowler leadership team discussing and planning long-term goals.

- **Professional development of Fowler faculty.** The principal reported efforts to encourage learning opportunities, streamlining training to support PDS goals, and supporting co-training of mentors and COE pre-service teachers.

- **COE pre-service teachers providing assistance to each other.** Pre-service teachers reported the benefits of strong collaborative peer-initiated support systems as they learn from and provide assistance to each other in and outside of the classroom.

School Culture and Climate

Fowler stakeholders described the school’s climate as cohesive, respectful and friendly. The COE pre-service teachers reported feeling welcomed and noted that they receive a pleasurable and professional development experience at Fowler. The majority of students indicated using school computers/laptops stood out as a significant positive experience at Fowler.

Recommendations

**Ideas offered from Fowler stakeholders**

- **Broaden the scope of learning opportunities for Fowler students.** The PIR suggested expanding the scope of learning for students by way of more travel and field trips.

- **More opportunities for professional development from COE faculty.** Mentor teachers expressed a desire for more direct feedback from COE faculty.

**Ideas generated from the study**

- **Resume monthly meetings between mentors and COE student teachers.** Continue the monthly meetings with COE student teachers to foster increased communication.

- **Closer synchronization between UGA student and PDS curriculum.** Continue improving the coordination between COE student assignments and the PDS curriculum, by increasing communication with COE faculty.

- **Clarify understandings of inquiry.** Fowler stakeholders’ responses expressed varied understandings and practices of inquiry. Stakeholders are encouraged to seek a common understanding of inquiry to determine if any, all or some of the approaches used are considered inquiry.

- **Actively encourage and further investigate the peer-professional development of pre-service teachers.** Fowler is encouraged to glean additional insights on their current peer-initiated support system and its unique contributions to enhancing teacher preparation and student achievement.
Lesions Learned

This section offers a summary of eight lessons learned and insights gleaned from the findings of both case studies.

1. Utilize inclusive professional learning practices. It is beneficial to student progress and professional engagement when mentors and pre-service teachers work side-by-side, participating in professional development activities, co-teaching, reflecting, and providing small group instruction and so on.

2. Maintain communication networks. Three-way feedback loops (mentor/pre-service teacher/COE faculty) are particularly useful to clarify and maintain understandings of what is expected from the overall PDSD collaboration and specific partners.

3. Synchronize pre-service teacher experiences and school curriculum. Merging of pre-service field experiences with the curriculum is critical for schools to attend to the specific goals of their school improvement plans and provide clinically-rich experiences for COE students.

4. Consider readiness and workload of mentor teachers. Mentors play a significant role in promoting the development of pre-service teachers. Because of this, mentors themselves need support specifically tailored to address their mentoring tasks and readiness to serve effectively.

5. Support peer-professional development of pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers at both schools have organized themselves—without formal direction from the university or school—to work collectively in support of their own professional development. This can be a particularly fruitful practice with positive impact on their pedagogy and retention in the field.

6. Continue to reaffirm the four-fold PDSD mission. Understanding the overall PDSD mission is important to maintain a commitment to the PDSD collaboration, beyond the specific goals of an individual school. The PDSD four-fold mission needs to be continuously reviewed and reinforced among school stakeholders.

7. Collaboration between the PIR and the administrative team matters. The propensity for meaningful professional learning experiences is increased when the PIR and administrative team partner in meaningful ways to support key PDSD practices.

8. Basic barriers hinder core PDS work. Limited funding, parking, or the inability of schools to compensate mentor teachers hinders co-learning opportunities between mentors and pre-service teachers. Locating creative ways to include pre-service teachers in professional learning and compensate mentor teachers can further demonstrate how professional learning is valued and sustain the PDSD four-fold mission.

Additional insights:
Overall, the case studies illustrate nested partnerships (i.e., principals and PIRs, mentors and pre-service teachers) within the larger university-school district partnership. Building on the aforementioned lessons learned, the PDSD can continue to investigate how these nested partnerships intersect and evolve.