Together with Clarke County School District, the Office of School Engagement hosted its third annual Professional Development Schools Workshop on October 26-27. Twenty-four teacher educators and school district personnel from different regions of Georgia and one from China by way of Michigan came to Athens to learn about forming successful school-university partnerships. After an opening presentation about the UGA-CCSD Professional Development School District (PDSD) partnership, participants visited six CCSD schools that are actively involved in the PDSD, traveling together in vans both Monday afternoon and all day Tuesday.

During the school visits, participants had opportunities to actively engage in conversation with mentor teachers, teacher candidates, Professors-in-Residence, and principals about the nature of the PDS work at each school. In some schools, participants also visited classrooms where UGA teacher candidates were working with CCSD students.

For example, at Cedar Shoals High School, visitors observed a 9th grade government class where six UGA field placement students in the secondary social studies

3rd annual PDS Workshop highlights: school visits, teacher inquiry, and principals’ perspectives

PDSD adds two new Professors-in-Residence for total of 10

The Professional Development School District (PDSD) partnership between the UGA COE and the Clarke County School District (CCSD) that began with one Professor-in-Residence (PIR) in 2009 has grown to a total of ten faculty working as PIRs representing four COE departments and one Outreach unit in 2015-16.

The two new PIRs who began working with schools this fall include Dr. Katherine Raczynski, director of the Safe and Welcoming Schools project in the Office of Outreach and Engagement, and Dr. Sara Kajder, clinical assistant professor of English education in the department of language and literacy education. PIRs are COE faculty who spend 50% of their time in CCSD schools, supporting both COE students through a combination of teaching on-site courses and supervising students doing field work, as well as supporting CCSD teachers and administrators through professional learning and school-based projects.

School Climate Focus

Katherine Raczynski is the third PIR to serve district-wide — her work focuses on school climate issues, such as fostering positive relationships, preventing mistreatment and bullying, and increasing opportunities for student, parent, and teacher input in schools. She supports administrators and school leaders in measuring school climate, identifying areas of focus, and implementing evidence-based initiatives that are responsive to school and community needs. At two elementary schools and two middle schools she provides job-embedded professional learning to build the capacity of school leaders to address school climate. Raczynski’s work directly aligns with one of CCSD’s five 2015-16 focus areas that asks schools to, “Develop positive learning environments that support the social-emotional development and physical well-being of students.”

—continued on page 3

Top of Page: Clarke County School District principals discuss their experiences in PDS schools during the closing panel of the PDSD Workshop on October 27. (L to R: Scarlett Dunne, Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary; Xernona Thomas, J. J. Harris Elementary; Tad MacMillan, Clarke Middle; Selena Blankenship, Hilsman Middle; Dwight Manzy, Coile Middle).

Photo credit: Justin Evans

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program worked alongside their professor, Dr. Sonia Janis who also teaches the 9th grade class at the school. The UGA students stayed afterwards to speak with participants—they shared how much they are learning both from working in a classroom alongside Janis and from the Cedar Shoals students who give them honest feedback about their practice teaching. Participants also commented that CCS students clearly benefited from being in this unique class where they experienced excellent teaching and individualized attention.

Monday evening’s dinner at the Hilton Garden Inn, which was also attended by additional COE faculty and CCS principals and teachers, opened with remarks from Dr. Jack Parish, College of Education Associate Dean for Outreach and Engagement, and Dr. Philip Lanoue, CCSD Superintendent. The interactive keynote address entitled “The Role of Inquiry in a Professional Development School” was given by Dr. Nancy Dana, Professor at the University of Florida College of Education. “Inquiry is a way of being … it’s about systematically studying your teaching practice,” she explained. Starting with a “wondering,” a question or dilemma about teaching, a teacher then collects and analyzes data, such as student work, field notes, and feedback from colleagues.

“Inquiry is not the same as ‘research’ in the traditional sense … The value of inquiry for PDS work is that it is very empowering and gives teachers ownership of their own practice,” she said. According to Dr. Janna Dresden, Director of the Office of School Engagement, Dana was asked to keynote because inquiry is an area of growing interest and is one of the 9 essentials of the PDS model.

Dana has worked with numerous schools and districts across the U.S. and abroad to craft professional development programs of inquiry as well as conducted extensive research on the process. She has published ten books and over 60 articles in leading professional journals and edited books focused on teacher and principal professional development and teacher inquiry.

On Tuesday afternoon, the workshop culminated with a panel discussion featuring five PDS principals who each shared their perspective on working in the partnership. Principals emphasized the importance of relationship building and trust to create successful partnerships. “PDS work requires responsiveness and nimbleness,” said Tad MacMillan, Principal of Clarke Middle School where the closing panel took place. “It’s a very alive partnership and it’s always changing.”

Workshop participants included representatives from Armstrong State University, Hesse K-8 School (Savannah, GA), University of West Georgia, Carrollton County Board of Education, Brenau University, Hahira Middle School (Hahira, GA), Michigan State, UGA Office of Government Relations, and the UGA College of Education Office of Student Services.

Dr. Nancy Dana, Professor at the University of Florida College of Education, gave the PDS Workshop keynote address entitled “The Role of Inquiry in the Professional Development School.”
New Professors-in-Residence

“It is so rewarding to work with a district that understands that positive school climate is the foundation for successful learning. One component of positive climate is that students feel like they have a say in what happens at school. I’m excited to help provide additional opportunities for students’ voices to be heard,” Raczynski explained.

As an example of this work, students at one middle school were surveyed on their passion for learning and future goals. Nearly every student agreed that school is important for achieving their future goals, but about half said they had a hard time focusing on long-term projects. This information showed the school staff that teaching skills for perseverance would be valuable.

Raczynski’s research activities focus on understanding child, school, and community factors as they relate to promoting healthy student development and enhancing positive school climate. Specifically, three areas in which she has conducted research are (1) understanding trajectories of adolescent social, behavioral, and academic development, (2) evaluation of strategies to improve school climate and prevent bullying and mistreatment, and (3) improving data analysis techniques to advance quantitative methodology in the social sciences. She received both her M.A. and Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from UGA.

Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School

Sara Kajder is the new PIR at Burney-Harris-Lyons (BHL) Middle School where Melanie Sigler serves as principal. At BHL, Kajder teaches a cohort of MAT English Education students on-site at the school and supervises students as they engage in mentoring experiences with middle school students. She also supports year-round embedded professional learning with the BHL teachers focused on choice-based and teacher directed literacy, which includes in-class coaching and collaborative lesson study. Kajder also serves as a resource for school-wide literacy initiatives and planning.

According to Kajder, “The preservice teachers have been welcomed as colleagues and co-learners in opportunities across BHL, and their growth is already tangible. They are facilitating peer writing groups, assisting with literacy assessments, modeling and engaging students in independent reading, and building relationships with middle school students.”

She is excited to see where her professional learning with teachers will lead this year. “The teachers are completely focused on what might work to help grow their readers and writers. In one group, we’re closely examining independent reading practices, and we’ve already made big strides in reimagining ways that we use conferences, book talks, and classroom libraries to build real reading communities. Such big growth – and we’re only still beginning,” she explained.

A former secondary English teacher and faculty member at Virginia Tech and the University of Pittsburgh, Kajder’s current research examines secondary English teacher practices and adolescent literacy identities as they are constructed in dialogue through digital media. Among many peer-reviewed articles and books, she is the author of Adolescents and Digital Literacies and the 2012 Recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English Britton Award. She is also a writer and consultant to K-12 school systems across the U.S. Kajder received her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Virginia.

Other Professors-in-Residence

In addition to Raczynski and Kajder, the eight other PIRs in the PDSD include:

- Dr. Allison Nealy (see feature on p.4), District-wide PIR for Special Education and clinical associate professor, department of communication sciences and special education
- Dr. Sally Zepeda, District-wide PIR for Leadership and professor, department of lifelong education, administration, and policy
- Dr. Bob Capuozzo, PIR at J. J. Harris Elementary School and clinical assistant professor, department of educational theory and practice
- Dr. Beth Tolley, PIR at Fowler Drive Elementary School and clinical associate professor, department of educational theory and practice
- Dr. Kathy Thompson, Co-PIR at Hilsman Middle School and clinical professor, department of educational theory and practice
- Dr. Gayle Andrews, Co-PIR at Hilsman Middle School and professor, department of educational theory and practice
- Dr. Sonia Janis, PIR at Cedar Shoals High School, clinical assistant professor, department of educational theory and practice
- Ms. Bridget Ratajczak, PIR at the Early Learning Center and clinical instructor, department of communication sciences and special education
Leading professional learning, such as this co-teaching workshop at Cedar Shoals High School, is one of the many components of Allison Nealy’s role as a Professor-in-Residence for special education. Photo credit: Andrew Tucker

“Growing up, I always wanted to help children with exceptionalities,” explained Dr. Allison Nealy, district-wide Professor-in-Residence for Special Education and clinical associate professor in the department of communications sciences and special education. “I am passionate about assisting students with disabilities to be successful and supporting general education teachers so that they provide the support these students need in the classroom.”

Nealy became a PIR in 2014, but she has been involved with the Professional Development Schools District (PDSD) partnership work from its beginning. In 2008, she got involved with the group of community members, faculty, and Clarke County School District (CCSD) administrators and teachers that developed the PDS. “The PDS model was a good pedagogical fit for me. I like that through the partnership, we are mindfully and intentionally connecting the university and school system,” she said.

In her role as a district-wide PIR this year Nealy has a secondary school focus in special education. She supports CCSD teachers through job-embedded professional learning in the areas of co-teaching, special education case management, IEPs, differentiation, and access to Common Core Georgia Performance Standards for students with disabilities. She works closely with Heidi Hill, CCSD’s new Director of Special Education, as well as CCSD principals, to specifically address district needs.

“I like that the PDSD gives my work a structure, and each school has the opportunity to be involved. As the role of special education continues to grow, this work is gaining traction,” Nealy said. With her engaging personality and vast expertise in the field, she is always in high demand and never has a dull moment.

“Dr. Nealy is a dedicated, focused and outstanding educator who really cares about kids and families,” said Cedar Shoals High School Principal Tony Price. “She is providing teachers great instructional strategies that help to make classrooms more engaging for students.”

This article is the eighth in a series of profiles of Professors-in-Residence (PIR) at Professional Development Schools in the Clarke County School District.

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As a PIR, Nealy also supervises UGA student teachers in four CCSD schools and teaches UGA courses throughout the year, including Teaching of Reading, Advanced Instructional Methods for Students with Disabilities, and Special Education Law and Policy. In addition to work at the schools and UGA, she also services as the Vice Chair of Board of Directors for Extra Special People and is active in regional and state organizations related to special education to keep current on trends and policy issues and share UGA resources broadly.

Last year in her PIR role she worked specifically with general education teachers to help them understand the complex needs of some special education students so that they had tools to help these students be successful. She also developed a teacher resource guide related to differentiation, case management, and co-teaching together with CCSD assistant principal Jennifer Leahy.

In total, Nealy has been employed by or worked together with CCSD for 16 years. She started her career in Athens teaching at Rutland Academy while she worked on her Master's degree at UGA in Behavior and Learning Disorders. In 1999, she began teaching in CCSD at Clarke Middle School, serving as a resource teacher for students with learning and behavioral disabilities for four years. Nealy then taught at Clarke Central High School and received her Ed.D. degree from UGA in Reading Education with an emphasis on learning disabilities, specifically the correlation between behavior and academic failure.

In 2007 she joined the faculty at the College of Education in the department of communication sciences and special education. She also taught regional behavioral intervention with a focus on curricular accommodations for struggling students. As a professor at UGA she served as a consultant to CCSD and then became a PDSO Professor on Special Assignment for two years before taking on the role of a PIR. Not surprisingly, despite moving into academia, Nealy stays in touch with many of her former students. She keeps up on what is going on in their lives by regularly calling and visiting them.

Nealy is one of ten PIRs in the partnership and one of three who serve district-wide.
Ongoing conversations within the PDSD partnership revealed some areas in which Clarke County teachers needed additional support. To help meet these needs, the Office of School Engagement now supports seven UGA graduate assistants (GAs) who work with Clarke County teachers and COE faculty who work in the PDSD.

Some of these GAs work directly with CCSD teachers, such as Kalianne Neumann and Erika Mané, who provide professional development at both high schools as teachers incorporate the district’s one-to-one technology initiative into their instructional planning. Hwa Young Lee provides district-wide support for high school teachers in mathematics, also developing curriculum guides with supporting resources. Melissa Baker supports teachers at Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School as they integrate literacy into all content areas. Others serve as teaching assistants for on-site classes. Matthew Moulton works at Hilsman Middle School with PIRs Gayle Andrews and Kathy Thompson, while Megan Ernst works with PIR Sonia Janis at Cedar Shoals High School and also directly with the OSE, providing support for a summer learning program that is under development, and also for Experience UGA. In addition, Larissa Powers supports the UGA String Project, in which UGA music students provide string instruments instruction to CCSD students in 3rd through 8th grades.

Not only do these graduate assistants support UGA faculty and students, and CCSD teachers, but they also benefit from working in a PDS setting. Moulton has participated in research projects and presented at national conferences about PDS work. His work in middle schools has helped shape his research interests, which include exploring the ways teacher candidates view middle school students. Neumann’s research interests include examining the ways technology impacts writing instruction. Her relationship with Clarke County allowed her to make connections at Google, which led to the publishing of her app, Revision Assistant. Baker’s work has furthered her interest in PDS scholarship, and her dissertation grew directly from her work in PDS middle schools.

Last June, the Professional Development School District was cited as “exemplary” by judges selecting regional winners of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Award, presented by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU).

The Professional Development School District was UGA’s submission to compete with the nation’s public universities for the annual awards. Although the project was not among the four regional winners that were considered for the top prize, UGA was one of only two institutions singled out as exemplary and a plaque of recognition was awarded at the APLU annual meeting in September.

Established in 2006, the Engagement Scholarship/W.K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Awards recognize programs that demonstrate how colleges and universities have redesigned their learning, discovery, and engagement functions to become even more involved with their communities.

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Renowned author, poet and activist, Alice Walker spent two days in Athens as the inaugural Delta Visiting Chair for Global Understanding. This position was established by the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts, through the support of the Delta Air Lines Foundation, to bring outstanding global scholars and leading creative thinkers to the UGA campus. The Office of School Engagement collaborated with the Willson Center to make it possible for CCSD high school students to attend both of Walker’s speaking engagements as well as a screening of the documentary about her life, Beauty in Truth, at Cine the previous week.

Although the demand for space and tickets at the in-person events was much greater than the number of available seats, Clarke County students, teachers, and parents had reserved seats—about 15 people attended the event held on October 14 at the UGA Chapel and nearly 30 were in attendance on October 15 at the Morton Theater.

At her first event, “Standing in Georgia, Writing to the World,” Walker spoke at the UGA Chapel about growing up in Eatonton, GA and being unable to sit at the front of the bus when leaving for college. Although she grew up in a small community with restrictive customs, she was able to learn about a bigger world outside of her town through reading.

“How do you realize that there is actually a world somewhere where people are different? By reading, I was able to go somewhere else where there’s a different reality,” said Walker.

This encouraged her to explore different cultures and travel to places such as the Soviet Union, Uganda, and China. The people that she met widened her perspective and enabled Alice Walker to understand issues at home in the United States, including racism and segregation.

“The thing about enslavement of other people, about segregation, and all of that is that it makes you unnatural,” said Walker. “And that is what I had witnessed all my life, very unnatural acting people.”

The following day, Alice Walker addressed reading as well as the development of her writing, religious beliefs, womanism, and connection to nature during the interactive event at the Morton Theatre, “A Conversation with Alice Walker.”

“She was very inspirational. She had a lot to say about future expectations for the world,” said Destiny Briana Barnett, 12th grader at Cedar Shoals High School. Attending these events impacted Cedar Shoals students, who were motivated to read more of Walker’s works.

“There are enormous resources here at the University of Georgia and it makes sense that we make those resources available to people in the community, particularly students in the local public schools,” said Janna Dresden, director of the College of Education’s Office of School Engagement at UGA and a member of the Willson Center’s planning committee for Alice Walker’s events.
Reflections on an Oxford semester

By Erica Gilbertson, Newsletter Editor and Project Manager/Public Service Faculty, Office of School Engagement

Last spring semester, I had the opportunity to take a partial leave from the Office of School Engagement to live in Oxford, England, while my husband led the UGA Law School study abroad program at Oxford University. Along with our two daughters, we lived in a faculty flat along the Oxford canal and enjoyed our walk and bike-only lifestyle, eating at pubs established in the 1200s, and endless visits to Blackwells, one of the world's best bookstores.

Thanks to Professor Ian Menter in the Oxford University Department of Education, I also got to learn about Oxford's partnership with local schools, called The Oxford Education Deanery. I took advantage of his offer to sit in on regular meetings and visit schools involved in the partnership. The Deanery was set up in 2013 as a collaborative between Oxford University and 7 local secondary schools.

I found it fascinating to learn that collaborative research is one of the key foci of the partnership. Each school has an appointed “research champion,” a teacher who serves as the primary liaison to the Deanery and works with other teachers in their schools to develop research that would benefit the school at-large. Through Action Research Fellowships, teachers receive small amounts of funding for action research projects that they do in consultation with Oxford University faculty. On their website, they provide a summary of all of the teacher research being carried out in Oxford so everyone involved can learn from each other: http://www.educationdeanery.ox.ac.uk. The Deanery also supports “Teach Meets” where teachers and faculty gather to share expertise with each other in short TED-type talks around a particular theme.

At a Deanery Coordinating Committee meeting in March, I had the opportunity to share with information about our PDSD model with the leadership team. After seeing this “Georgia girl” hanging around all semester, they were very interested in knowing the similarities and differences in our partnership work. I am hopeful we can continue to learn from one another in the years to come.

Furthering our relationship with Oxford University, Office of School Engagement Director Janna Dresden had the opportunity to follow up with many of my contacts when she visited in late June after teaching at the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

Though we do not know where relationships in Oxford will lead, one of the things Janna and I both appreciated was the tea offered to us at every meeting in the UK. Now, if you visit the Office of School Engagement, you can enjoy a cup of tea in our suite in Aderhold Hall—one of the ways we extend the hospitality we received from our new friends across the pond.