Dr. Philip Lanoue, Clarke County School District Superintendent. Photo credit: Cassie Wright

Dr. Lanoue named National Superintendent of the Year!

Everyone involved in the Professional Development School District is so proud of Clarke County School District Superintendent Philip Lanoue, who was recently named the National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators.

Lanoue has worked for the Clarke County School District since 2009 and was an administrator for the Cobb County School District before that.

Lanoue was instrumental in creating the Professional Development School District with the College of Education, and his ongoing support of the College’s work in the schools has contributed to the partnership’s success.

Under Lanoue’s leadership, Clarke County became a Title I Distinguished District and received a number of other statewide honors.

“I am incredibly honored to be recognized as National Superintendent of the Year, and am so proud to share this recognition with Athens and the Clarke County School District community,” Lanoue said in a statement. “Together, as a community of learners, we have made a difference in the lives of our children, and I am so pleased that we have been recognized for this on a national level.”

Top of Page: Representatives from the UGA/CCSD Professional Development School District take the stage to receive a 2015 NAPDS Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement from the National Association for Professional Development Schools on March 6, 2015 in Atlanta, GA.

UGA and Clarke County School District win top award for Professional Development Schools

The school-university partnership between the University of Georgia College of Education and the Clarke County School District has been named one of the top programs in the country.

The Professional Development School District (PDS) was awarded a 2015 NAPDS Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement from the National Association for Professional Development Schools. The award recognizes university-school district partnerships that “create and sustain genuine collaborative partnerships” and help shape future educational leaders.

The award was announced Friday, March 6, during the annual National Association of Professional Development Schools conference in Atlanta. Thirty PDS educators from both UGA and CCSD were on hand to receive the award at the general session on Friday, and afterward attended a celebratory lunch where the team reflected on the hard work and collaboration that has brought the partnership recognition at a national level.

What makes the partnership unique is the placement of College of Education faculty and students into local classrooms. Many schools have a “Professor-in-Residence” who supervises student teachers, teaches on-site courses and provides professional

Representatives from the UGA/CCSD Professional Development School District stand with their 2015 NAPDS Award for Exemplary Professional School Achievement. Attendees included (back row, from left) Bridget Ratjczak, Matthew Moulton, David Forker, Rich Pavone, Lew Allen, Melanie Sigler, Beth Tooley, (front row, from left) Selena Blankenship, Janna Dresden, Kathy Thompson, Gayle Andrews and Erica Gilbertson.

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PDSD makes 18 presentations at NAPDS Conference in Atlanta

The UGA College of Education and Clarke County Professional Development School District was well-represented at the annual National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS), conference in Atlanta in March, making 18 presentations and winning a 2015 award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement.

Representatives from J.J. Harris Elementary Charter School, Fowler Drive Elementary School, and UGA presented “A Tale of Two Schools,” which described an ongoing research project examining how the PDS model is implemented at each school. Janna Dresden, Director of the Office of School Engagement, and Mark Tavernier, Associate Superintendent, provided an overview of the history of the PDSD collaboration. COE faculty in the department of educational theory and practice, including Lew Allen, Bob Capuozzo, and Beth Tolley described their roles as Professors-in-Residence (PIR), while Xernona Thomas and Anissa Johnson, principals, explained how the PDS has impacted their schools. Jori Hall, faculty member in the department of lifelong education, leadership, and policy, then described the research, a multiple case study design which will examine the nature of the PDS collaboration at each school. Attendees were interested to learn about how the partnership collaboration has developed and how this research can inform PDS efforts at other schools.

Anissa Johnson, principal at Fowler Drive Elementary, and Beth Tolley, PIR, also presented a session titled “It’s People, Not Programs.” They explained that the emphasis of their PDS from the outset has focused on what benefits the children. Their decision to immerse COE teacher candidates in all K-5 classrooms brings the teacher/student ratio to an average 1:9 at least three days a week. This has promoted substantial academic growth and a significant closing of the achievement gap. Because of their increase in student achievement, Fowler has recently been recognized as a 2015 High Flying School Award winner at the National Youth-at-Risk Conference.

Teams from Hilsman Middle School presented several sessions that involved Hilsman faculty, administrators, COE faculty, graduate students, and teacher candidates, including Principal Selena Blankenship and PIRs Kathy Thompson and Gayle Andrews. In one session, Middle Grades Education teacher candidates described their focus on differentiated instruction in their classes taught onsite at Hilsman and their presentation re-created the Differentiated Learning Centers Fair they had held at the school. In another session, faculty, administrators, and teacher candidates shared their work on Hilfest, an alternative to a traditional open house. At Hilfest, families were engaged in an innovative and crowd-pleasing outdoor event where teacher candidates had the opportunity to interact with families and get to know their students in a friendly setting.

“I thoroughly enjoyed presenting at the NAPDS Conference, because it provided me with an extraordinary opportunity to teach and learn from other school districts about the benefits of developing a professional relationship with the local university professors and school district to improve the quality of education of the students,” said Jasmine Lewis, UGA teacher candidate at Hilsman and co-presenter at NAPDS.

Bob Capuozzo, faculty member in the department of educational theory and practice, presented a session detailing how he built relationships as a new Professor-in-Residence following a long-time PIR who retired. Attendees were eager to learn about his first-year successes and struggles.

“I found the conference stimulating, and I know it will further my work in the PDSD. The larger PDS community will be a good sounding board for my continued teaching, research, and service efforts as a PIR,” Capuozzo reflected.

A sampling of other sessions included:

- Sonia Janis, in the department of educational theory and practice, described her experiences as a PIR at Cedar Shoals High School, teaching a 9th grade Social Studies class and preparing teacher candidates.
- Ruth Harman and graduate student Nicole Siffrin, from the department of language and literacy education, presented a session on Contextualized SFL-based (Systemic Functional Linguistics) Literacy Professional Development.
- Meg Hines, Tarek Grantham, Brittany Anderson, Octavia Fugerson, and Jeremy Pina from the department of educational psychology, and Stephanie Franks and Jennifer Moon, CCSD teachers, shared how school-university partnerships can promote equity and excellence in schools and develop talent in students from under-represented minority groups.
Top award

—continued from front

development to teachers at the school. In addition, many other faculty members teach UGA courses in a local school, and some serve as a “Professor on Special Assignment,” working at a school on a project developed by the school’s administration and teachers.

As a result, UGA students graduate with extensive school-based experiences, Clarke County students benefit from additional classroom support and role models, and teachers and faculty benefit from collaborative research projects and ongoing professional learning.

“This honor reflects the level of commitment our faculty have for sharing exemplary teaching methods with our students and professionals in the field and a commitment to educating the next generation,” said Craig H. Kennedy, dean of the College of Education. “We are thankful to have such a strong partnership with the Clarke County School District and the ability to set a standard for the nation.”

Now in its sixth year, the Professional Development School District is in place at 11 schools across Clarke County, at the early learning, elementary, middle and high school levels. Each semester, more than 20 College of Education courses are taught on-site at schools across the district, and large numbers of COE students participate in field placement and student teaching in the schools thus providing more than 500 teacher candidates with valuable classroom experiences each year. Eight faculty members are currently working as PIRs.

“I am extremely pleased that our nationally innovative work is being recognized at this level, and I am so proud of what the Clarke County School District and the University of Georgia have been able to accomplish together,” said Clarke County Superintendent Philip D. Lanoue. “We are making a real difference in connecting research and practice to ensure the most effective teaching and learning environments at all levels—from our students to UGA students to our teachers to UGA professors. Partnerships are central to who we are as a community school district, and I look very forward to this continued work as we transform our classrooms.”

More than 30 UGA faculty, graduate students, and teacher candidates made 18 presentations at the conference, accompanied by almost twenty representatives from the Clarke County School District, including teachers, principals, and central office administrators. The presentations showcased the variety of projects going on in PDSD schools.

Janna Dresden, COE faculty member and Director of the Office of School Engagement, said, “It is an honor and a privilege to work alongside so many innovative and passionate educators from the Clarke County School District and our College. Winning this award has been energizing for all of us and I look forward to the exciting opportunities ahead.”

Fowler Drive wins 2015 High Flying School Award

Clarke County School District’s Fowler Drive Elementary School was recently named the winner of the prestigious 2015 High Flying School award. This honor was presented at the 26th National Youth-At-Risk Conference in early March.

“Each day, my priority is to reinforce a learning environment that is so stimulating, enriching and positively rewarding for all of my students,” said Principal Anissa Johnson. “I am fortunate to work with a staff who unites with me to raise standards and expectations of learning for students and commits to achieving great results. We work tirelessly together, to achieve optimum levels of learning.”

The award recognizes a school that has shown substantial growth in closing the achievement gap, and also meets the award criteria. These criteria include consistent high achievement, high poverty, high minority, community collaboration, citizenship development, and democratic education. Beth Tolley, PIR and faculty member in the department of educational theory and practice, nominated the school for the award.

“Each day I am impressed and encouraged by the amazing work being done at Fowler Drive,” Tolley said. Tolley has worked as the school’s PIR since fall 2011.

Tolley said that the work being done is beneficial to UGA students as well as Fowler students.

“My university teacher candidates are immersed in the work of the school,” she said. “They are flourishing in their own professional development due to the rigor and excellence of classroom instruction and modeling. The Fowler Drive students are flourishing, as well, and exceeding academically and socially.”

The 99.7 percent free and reduced-price lunch student body has achieved high standardized test scores. Fowler Drive, in its fourth year as part of the Professional Development School District, has found increasing benefits from its community partnership with the UGA College of Education.

“Administrators, faculty, and staff at Fowler Drive credit much of the significant academic growth to the resources and benefits made possible by participation in the professional development school partnership between the Clarke County School District and the University of Georgia College of Education,” Tolley said. “This win-win environment is certainly worthy of recognition and rewards.”

Clarke County Superintendent Philip Lanoue praised the school and the UGA partnership for its success.

“Kudos to the entire Fowler Drive Elementary School team for this well-deserved honor,” Lanoue said. “Under the leadership of Ms. Johnson, the school focuses on student achievement, as well as ensuring a positive school climate. Leaders, teachers, UGA partners, students, staff and parents have worked together to make this well-deserved recognition happen.”

Anissa Johnson, Principal at Fowler Drive Elementary and Beth Tolley, Professor-in-Residence at Fowler Drive Elementary.
PROFESSOR-IN-RESIDENCE PROFILE

Bridget Ratajczak at Early Learning Center

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

Bridget Ratajczak, clinical instructor in the department of communication sciences and special education, enjoys essentially every aspect of her job as Professor-in-Residence (PIR) at the Early Learning Center (ELC).

“It’s never dull!” she said of her work. “I love working with the amazing faculty and staff in the Office of Early Learning. I also love providing my pre-service teachers with opportunities to see high-quality instruction with a very diverse group of children. I also enjoy identifying resources from our UGA community to meet specific needs of the OEL faculty and staff.”

Ratajczak’s role at the ELC is complex because the center is not a typical school. The center is home to Pre-K, Head Start, Early Head Start and Preschool Special Education classes. Over 200 children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old attend school daily. It is also the administrative center for the entire Office of Early Learning (OEL), which supports all 36 Pre-K classes in the Clarke County School District, Head Start classes in the elementary schools, Early Head Start classes at a day care center, and the home-based Head Start Program.

As a PIR, Ratajczak works closely with Jan Stephens, Interim OEL Director, and with the administrative team from the different programs to organize and facilitate professional learning for the faculty and staff in the OEL. She places pre-service teachers in classes at the ELC and other OEL classes, developing strong relationships with classroom teachers along the way. She teaches a practicum seminar each semester on-site at the ELC, and every spring she teaches a service-learning course called “Nature as Teacher.”

“I also help facilitate connecting the leadership team with different resources at UGA to meet the needs of their families, faculty and staff,” she said. “What I do is listen to the leadership team and teachers, help them identify needs, and help to meet those needs to the best of my ability.”

Ratajczak served in the same capacity last school year as well and focused on the assessment and data collection portion of the Striving Readers grant. This year, she said she is focusing more on professional learning.

“I meet with the leadership team, review data, help them identify areas of need, and do what I can to either provide training myself, or help find other professionals who can provide that training,” Ratajczak explained. “I’m very proud of the fact that we’ve identified veteran teachers who have begun to assist in providing professional learning sessions on different topics. The veteran teachers have done a spectacular job presenting information in...
applicable ways, and the teachers have responded very positively to training provided by their peers.”

Ratajczak also works directly Stephens, “to stay abreast of the happenings and needs of the programs,” she said.

Ratajczak takes her work as an instructor as seriously as she does her role as a professional development coach. She is particularly engaged with her annual service-learning course “Nature as Teacher,” which she co-teaches with Anne Shenk, Education Director at the State Botanical Gardens of Georgia and adjunct faculty in the College of Education’s department of mathematics and science education.

“This course is unique because Anne and I incorporate many different elements of instruction and pedagogy into the syllabus” Ratajczak said. “Not only do our pre-service teachers learn about the importance of using nature to teach young children, but they learn how to use puppetry in their instruction, and they learn the mechanics of lesson planning and implementation.”

Ratajczak ensures that the curriculum is fun, but also in line with state standards.

“All of our lessons are tied to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), and our pre-service teachers learn how to provide child-centered, developmentally appropriate standards-based instruction,” she said.

In addition to this service-learning course, Ratajczak ensures that every pre-service teacher in her program has at least one of their field experiences at the ELC, so that each spends time in a Head Start or Early Head Start class. “The Head Start and Early Head Start program serves children and families who live in poverty,” she said. “By spending a semester in a class of young children who live in poverty, our pre-service teachers get to see, often for the first time in their lives, the global impact that poverty has on a child.”

The ELC provides an important learning environment for pre-service teachers, according to Ratajczak.

“The classes at the ELC provide a level of diversity that we don’t find in many other schools,” she said. “Our pre-service teachers get to interact with children from very diverse cultures and with a variety of ability levels. These experiences are critical to their development as responsive and capable teachers.”

“I love providing my pre-service teachers with opportunities to see high-quality instruction with a very diverse group of children [at the Early Learning Center].”

-Bridget Ratajczak

Below: Bridget Ratajczak, Professor-in-Residence at the Early Learning Center meets with her UGA teacher candidates on-site at the ELC. Photo credit: Sina Iranikhah
In true technology-age fashion, this partnership started with Twitter. Gretchen Thomas, an instructor in the College of Education’s department of career and information studies, direct-messaged one of the people she follows on Twitter. She asked Andy Plemmons, the Barrow Elementary School Media Specialist, if he could put her in touch with a teacher that might want to partner with one of her classes for a pen pal project.

“It just snowballed from there,” Thomas said.

Now, Thomas teaches three classes on-site at Barrow, one of 14 elementary schools in the Clarke County School District. The 40 undergraduate students she teaches work on a weekly basis with 3rd-5th grade students participating in the maker space in Barrow’s media center, a portion of the library dedicated to creating, tinkering, and inventing, in addition to helping integrate technology in other aspects of the school.

Thomas said that the integration of learning and working on-site has enhanced the experience for her UGA students.

“I’ve found that if we focus on helping the CCSD students where we are able: providing feedback, helping to solve technical issues, assisting with brainstorming and also intentionally sitting back and learning from the CCSD students - the content I would have taught on campus is more than addressed,” Thomas said.

Thomas supports some UGA students completing an independent study course, who help Plemmons facilitate the daily maker space at Barrow. Thomas said these students have learned about programming robots, 3D printing, and a multitude of other projects dreamed up by the Barrow students as they create, tinker, and invent in the maker space.

“Having UGA students on-site has allowed me to offer the space more openly to kids,” Plemmons said. “I teach a pretty full load of classes, and having UGA students has resulted in more access to space for my kids in unstructured time.”

These UGA students are also developing additional maker space activities for the media center and blogging about their experience.

Students in Thomas’ EDIT 4100S class even helped Barrow students bring a pop-up maker space onto the UGA Tate Center lawn. Plemmons said the field trip was in many ways a “culminating experience” of Barrow’s partnership with Thomas and her students.

“It allowed the kids to be the experts and teach strangers what they’ve learned within the maker space,” he said. “It was really empowering for my students and it allowed them to connect with an
College of Education’s Experience UGA field trips help kindergarteners explore UGA campus

Every year, nearly every student in the Clarke County School District takes a field trip to the University of Georgia campus through Experience UGA. These trips are designed to foster a sense of excitement about higher education, while using UGA resources to connect the trip to the curricular goals of the schools.

“People in the Athens community have, for a long time, talked about the fact that some students grow up in the shadow of UGA but never take advantage of the resources it offers,” said Janna Dresden, faculty member in the early childhood education program and the Director of the Office of School Engagement.

J.J. Harris Elementary Charter School principal Xernona Thomas brought this to Dresden’s attention soon after the school opened in 2009. Later Dresden and Dr. Noris Price, former associate superintendent of Clarke County School District, solidified their goal of organized, yearly field trips as part of the priorities in the Whatever It Takes initiative’s U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhood grant application, which outlined solutions for education inequality in Athens.

Though Athens did not receive a Promise Neighborhood Implementation grant, Experience UGA is funded thanks to many generous donors.

Many units at UGA sponsor a grade level, and from the outset, the College of Education has hosted the kindergarten field trips to campus. In 2014-15, COE faculty and students have volunteered more than 1,600 hours, coordinating a total of thirteen field trips for the nearly 1,000 CCSD kindergarten students.

According to Dresden, this year’s kindergarten trips have been particularly successful. The field trip’s goal is an introduction to campus, helping students realize that “UGA is a school with many buildings,” Dresden said.

“We encourage the children to look carefully at the buildings and focus on the shapes they can see in those buildings, thus connecting the trip to some of the math standards for kindergarten,” she said.

The small group design of the field trip allows teachers, students, and UGA students to benefit from the experience.

“One of the most impactful parts of the experience for our undergraduate students is the opportunity to interact with just a few students at a time,” said Denise Oen, faculty member in the early childhood education program, and on-site instructor at Ogelthorpe Avenue Elementary School. “When my students write reflections about the field trip, they are all about being able to listen to children and hear the wonderful stories these kids get to tell.”

Oen said that the small group atmosphere encourages children to have those conversations, particularly about connecting to UGA and interest in attending college, more than a classroom does.

“One of our goals is for kids to feel like ‘This is my place. I belong here. I could be a member of this community,’” Oen said. “From my experience on many different Experience UGA trips, our undergraduate students will have those conversations over time, helping Athens students to develop a sense of place on UGA’s campus.”

If you are interested in supporting the Experience UGA initiative, please visit experience.uga.edu or contact Coordinator Claire Coenen at coenen21@uga.edu.
Our Purpose:
The Office of School Engagement at the University of Georgia serves as a bridge between the worlds of theory and practice in P–16 public education to improve the educational experiences of students and the professional lives of educators.

Contact Us:
Janna Dresden, Director
629F Aderhold Hall
Phone: 706-542-8491
Email: jdresden@uga.edu
OSE Guest Editor: Megan Ernst, megernst@uga.edu
Writers: Megan Ernst and Pat Waldrip
www.coe.uga.edu/ose

Professional Development Schools Workshop

Are you interested in learning more about the potential benefits of strong school-university partnerships? Or are you interested in forming or strengthening a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between your school district and your local college or university? The University of Georgia, College of Education and the Clarke County School District formed a partnership in 2009, which has grown to include 11 active PDS sites. College of Education courses are taught at the local schools, and university faculty work with school-based teachers and administrators on a variety of initiatives.

In this two-day workshop, faculty and administrators from the University of Georgia College of Education and Clarke County School District will lead participant teams through PDS visits (pre-K through 12th grade) and working sessions on how to build sustainable partnerships, create a model that serves both institutions, and maximize the benefits of PDSs for all stakeholders. Participant teams are encouraged to include both school district members (principals, teachers, administrators) and university teacher educators.

Workshop Information
October 26-27, 2015
Day 1: 10 a.m.–8 p.m.
Day 2: 8 a.m.–4 p.m.
Downtown Athens, GA
Price and registration information to come.
For more information, please contact Melanie Baer, Program Coordinator, University of Georgia College of Education, mbaer@uga.edu.

Please share with your colleagues ~ we hope you will join us!