Doctoral student wins national award

At the 2018 National Association for Professional Development Schools annual conference, Ashley Nylin, Office of School Engagement graduate assistant and doctoral student in the middle grades program, received the “Emerging PDS Leader Award.” This national award is given to doctoral students who contribute to professional development schools by serving their home institution’s program, presenting at the national conference and publishing in the journals School-University Partnerships or PDS Partners.

Kathy Thompson, professor-in-residence at Hilsman Middle School and Nylin’s major professor, jointly nominated Nylin with Janna Dresden, director of the Office of School Engagement. “Ashley shows a deep understanding of the potential of our work as a doctoral student wins national award

‘Inquiry Fair’ highlights teachers, candidates

Event recognizes mentor teachers, connections made with UGA students

On April 7, 115 teacher candidates, mentor teachers, faculty and administrators participated in the first Mentor Teacher Recognition and Teacher Inquiry Fair at the Athens Community Career Academy. More than 70 UGA teacher candidates in the early childhood and middle grades programs shared inquiry projects in a gallery walk format and talked with UGA faculty and mentor teachers and administrators from the Clarke, Morgan and Barrow County school systems.

The Office of School Engagement and Professional Development School District sponsor annual receptions to honor and recognize the contributions of mentor teachers in the preparation of UGA teacher candidates. Since the Professional Development School District has been increasingly focused on developing shared inquiry through the partnership work, this year faculty decided to expand the recognition event by giving UGA students an opportunity to share inquiry projects they have been doing in local classrooms.

“The event provides an enriching experience for teacher candidates to present their...”
Welsh focuses on policy, equity, discipline issues across district

In January, Richard O. Welsh, assistant professor in the department of lifelong education, administration and policy, became a district-wide professor-in-residence with a focus on educational policy, equity and school discipline.

He supports the Clarke County School District in data analysis and policy formulation, as well as implementation around equity issues. Welsh is leading a mixed methods research project on the contributors to the disparities in disciplinary outcomes in the Clarke County School District, with particular focus on the interactions between teachers and school leaders.

“I am thrilled to be involved with the Professional Development School district and partner with the Clarke County School District on key issues with significant policy and equity implications,” said Welsh. “My work as a professor-in-residence is well aligned with the aim of my research to inform essential processes driving school improvement in K-12 education policy and practice, with a specific focus on the process of changing schools and the process of disciplining students.”

Doctoral student wins national award

In all, representatives of the College of Education-Clarke County School District partnership gave 18 presentations at the conference, which took place March 15-17 in Jacksonville, Florida. Clarke Middle School principal Tad MacMillan was recognized for his contributions to the organization’s board of directors as the P-12 representative.

Event highlights collaborations

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inquiry poster projects with teachers, administrators, and faculty,” said Bob Capuozzo, early childhood education program faculty member and one of the event organizers. To see all of the partners in the partnership interacting was in itself a success.”

During the program part of the event, Clarke County Superintendent Demond Means reflected on Martin Luther King Jr.’s death 50 years ago and encouraged teacher candidates to persist in becoming educators.

“You all are the keepers of the dream,” he said. He also thanked mentor teachers for being “dream keepers,” given all they do to help children succeed and to foster the growth of the next generation of teachers.

UGA College of Education interim dean Denise Spangler thanked teachers for opening their classrooms up to UGA students and mentoring UGA students in addition to the many demands put on them as teachers every day. Three teacher candidates also gave remarks thanking mentor teachers for inspiring them and supporting them through the ups and downs of student teaching and giving them the tools they need to become successful teachers.

Early childhood education students displayed posters that represented inquiry investigations they had completed in pairs during their “Block 1” first semester of their program while spending two days a week in pre-K placements. Projects were wide-ranging, including “Musical instruments spark peer interactions,” “Discovering dinosaurs,” and “Our healthy bodies.”

While in their early childhood education placement at the school district’s Early Learning Center, Sarah Carter and Madison Clayborn investigated career play. They encouraged pre-K students to “try out” different careers each day by dressing up as fire fighters, dentists, etc. “Play prepares kids for adulthood,” they said. “It was fun to see the kids get excited about potential future careers.”

Middle grades student inquiry projects ranged from “Mass incarceration and its effect on young adolescents” to “How can we introduce math and science students to STEM careers?”

Taera OConnor’s inquiry project centered on why it is important for teachers to include novels that represent students’ minority groups in middle grades language arts classrooms. “I remembered that when I was an adolescent, I didn’t want to read books where I couldn’t see myself in the characters,” she said. “So I created a resource guide that includes adolescent literature that reflects many different cultural backgrounds.”
After 11 years, Dr. Janna Dresden will step down as Director of the College of Education’s Office of School Engagement in July. She recently shared her reflections on school-university partnership work.

When she was hired in 2007 as the College of Education’s first director of the new Office of School Engagement, Janna Dresden was charged with “increasing the quality and quantity of relationships with local school districts.”

Dresden came into the position with a teaching background in K-12 and higher education that prepared her for managing school-university partnerships. With support from the Clarke County School District and College of Education leadership, Dresden, along with other College faculty, began meeting with district administrators and community members to explore partnership models, including the Professional Development School model.

In September 2008 they visited partnerships at DePaul University, the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. According to Dresden, the trip was a turning point. “Traveling together was inspiring and clarifying—it gave substance to the studying we had been doing and gave us shared experiences that we could build on,” she said.

During this time, a new Blue Ribbon NCATE report created a national wave of interest in clinically rich teacher preparation. This supported the idea of a local professional development school partnership—the education equivalent of a teaching hospital.

“Everyone involved recognized the power of this way of preparing teachers,” said Dresden. “We were all excited by the idea of mutual benefit—we were clear about that from the beginning and committed to that.”

By the spring of 2009, the group decided to open the new J.J. Harris Elementary School as a professional development school. Dresden was the first person to teach an on-site course and continued to teach her early childhood methods course on-site for 5 years.

In 2011, the partnership expanded to become a Professional Development School District that included all 21 schools. From that point forward, the partnership continued to grow and became the primary focus of the College of Education’s Office of School Engagement. The Professional Development School District now involves more than 200 professional teachers who serve as mentors, 25 faculty members who serve as professors-in-residence or on-site instructors, 20 College courses taught at schools and more than 500 UGA students in the schools each semester.

Throughout all these years, Dresden supported and advocated for the growth and development of the partnership.

“This work is continually engaging, interesting and fun, and it’s always changing. I love watching people come up with ideas and get excited and then helping to facilitate the work that is meaningful to them and benefits the people around them. It’s like being a teacher—people grow in ways you couldn’t have predicted,” she said.

“My greatest joy is the people I work with and the opportunity to creatively engage with a community to make positive contributions to public education.”

All partnerships are not without challenges. For the Professional Development School District, Dresden said the biggest challenge is maintaining trust. “We believe that the partnership is mutually beneficial for both institutions, but it is hard for everyone to believe that we are all contributing equally,” she said.

Despite the challenges, Dresden is most proud of the fact that “people keep coming to the table. Through this partnership we have provided better preparation for many of our teacher candidates, and we have put more positive energy out in schools for the Clarke County School District students,” she said.

Dresden is also proud of the new initiatives that have resulted from the partnership, such as Experience UGA (a field trip program) and Camp DIVE (a summer learning program).

Candidates are now being interviewed for the director position. After stepping down, Dresden will stay on as a faculty member in the early childhood education program until the fall of 2019. After retirement, she plans to relocate to the Washington, D.C., area, where she will advocate for teacher education and public education, work for causes close to her heart, and continue to read and write about professional development school work.
Study underway to evaluate Camp DIVE’s impact

In early 2018, the Office of School Engagement received approval from UGA’s Internal Review Board and the Clarke County School District to begin an evaluation of Camp DIVE (Discover, Inquire, Voice and Explore), a summer learning program that has been running since 2016.

Over the coming months, the research team will work to assess Camp DIVE’s impact in the following ways:

• Clarke County student achievement
• Clarke County student attitudes toward learning, school, and future academic involvement
• UGA student understandings about learning, teaching, development, and social context
• The extent to which the program facilitates the implementation of innovative pedagogical practices.

The research team is using a mixed-methods approach that will look at student achievement through various lenses, including a variety of test scores, grades, attendance, and behavior, as well as parent and teacher perceptions of student attitudes and achievement. The research will also include focus groups and surveys to better understand the impact on UGA students, UGA faculty, and Clarke County teachers involved in Camp DIVE.

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Make checks payable to the UGA Foundation with “School Engagement Project Fund” noted in the memo line of your check.

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