

A PDS Governance Model: Building Collaboration and Accountability

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Many universities and school districts have joined together to participate in K-12 education reform through the establishment of Professional Development School partnerships (PDS) (Clark, 1999). Professional development schools are committed to developing exemplary practices to maximize student outcomes, provide optimum sites for teacher preparation, offer research-based teacher professional development, and implement reflective inquiry to enhance learning for all (Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris, & Black, 1995). In addition to these purposes, PDSs serve as vehicles for simultaneous renewal of schooling and teacher preparation (Goodlad, 1994). In order to accomplish this educational agenda, PDSs need ongoing opportunities to examine partnership goals and purpose (Teitel, 1998). The importance of this point is clear when one considers that as separate and complex institutions, schools and universities have distinct missions, cultures, and relationships that are not always mutual and may result in barriers to partnership development as institutional self-interests operate at cross purposes. For example, the primary purpose of schools is to provide an education for children and not serve as field settings for preservice teachers. Further, there may be financial, time, accountability, and personnel constraints that make it difficult for schools and universities to merge (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Thus, overcoming these challenges to establishing and maintaining effective school and university partnerships require early and ongoing preparation and planning (Moore, Hopkins, & Tullis, 1991). This preparation and planning can be

accomplished through strong governing bodies representing all stakeholders in a PDS (Teitel, 1997). In this article, we describe the four-year development of a PDS governance model that began with one elementary school partnership and moved to a multiple site partnership network. Further, we offer recommendations for other institutions establishing PDS governance frameworks.

The governance models described in this article are based on a union formed between a private university in the southeast and a local school district. This professional development partnership emphasizes shared decision making, collaborative planning, and encourages school faculty to assume leadership roles. The work of the PDS partnership is guided by the following four goals: (1) increase student achievement; (2) implement research-based best practices in teaching (3) provide on-going support for preservice and inservice activities to enhance professionalism; and (4) develop strong professional development partnerships. Further, the following vision statement developed by participating members of the PDS partnership (i.e., school principal, district personnel, classroom teachers, and university faculty) keeps the partnership focused:

The collaborative professional development partnership is dedicated to supporting a diverse community of learners at all levels of educational development. Through mutual trust, respect, and shared decision-making, emphasis [is] placed on professional growth, effective instructional practices and mentoring.

A One-Site Governance Model

The PDS partnership began with a Title 1 elementary school of approximately 800 students prekindergarten through grade five after a systematic and deliberate selection process (Heins & Tichenor, 1999). Ensuring that the partnership accomplishes the goals established by the

participants is a key function of the governance body referred to as the PDS steering council. The steering council, consisting of teacher education faculty, teachers and administrators from the elementary school, district personnel, and the university/school liaison, was formed during the planning stages of the partnership. The primary function of this group is to oversee PDS partnership activities. To carry out this charge, the steering council meets monthly throughout the school year to establish policies for the partnership, coordinate and manage PDS activities, and engage in long term planning and assessment. The steering council plans summer retreats, which are opportunities for members to reflect on and celebrate the year's accomplishments, formulate priorities for the upcoming year, and establish a time line for new PDS initiatives. Further, as a formal kick-off to the partnership each year, the steering council plans a motivational activity and discussion time to present PDS opportunities to school personnel. PDS adaptations of Jeopardy and Mission Impossible are examples of PDS kick-off events.

To facilitate shared decision-making, a university faculty member and a school faculty member are designated as co-chairs of the council. However, in the first year of the partnership, PDS governance was predominantly university driven as teacher education faculty assumed most of the responsibility for planning and conducting meetings and facilitating PDS activities. During this time, a classroom teacher was designated as the PDS contact person who assisted university faculty in planning PDS activities. The second year saw greater collaboration regarding the planning and facilitation phases of governance with school and university faculty working together on PDS sponsored initiatives. The joint planning and facilitation of the second annual summer retreat by the

council co-chairs and a year long study group on best practices in education co-facilitated by a teacher and a university faculty member are two examples of the collaboration that has occurred during the second year as a partnership. During the partnership's third year and fourth year, leadership for governance and PDS activities has been predominantly school driven with university faculty providing support as needed.

The selection of steering council members is crucial. An important dimension of the council is an agreement involving equitable representation of key personnel in the governance structure (Holmes Group, 1990, Levine, 1996, Mehaffy, 1992). Early in the formation of the PDS, members of the steering council drafted a written partnership agreement outlining specific duties and responsibilities of university, elementary school, and school district participants. One condition outlined in this agreement included a commitment by the school, school district, and university personnel to actively participate in the PDS steering council. Since its formation, the one-site steering council has maintained a stable membership with representatives from all areas. At the school level, participants are selected so that there remains an equitable representation across administration, grade levels and special areas. Although steering council members are committed to serving for at least one academic year, they can participate for longer.

Prior to steering council meetings, all members are asked to submit agenda items to the co-chairs. Minutes are taken of all meetings, distributed to members shortly after the meeting, and shared with school personnel through bulletin board postings. Meetings are consistently scheduled for the last Thursday of each month. Typical topics of discussion at the meetings include a report from the PDS liaison (the PDS liaison is a university faculty member whose primary

responsibility is working with the partnership schools), grant summaries, program evaluation, teacher professional development activities, teacher candidate activities, and special PDS sponsored events such as conference attendance, presentations, or staff development opportunities (see Figure 1).

Two helpful ways in which PDS activities are documented are through a tracking chart and a time line. Organized by month, the time line provides a listing of PDS activities followed by the date. The tracking chart is a more detailed version of the time line with a listing of the specific activity followed by location, participant involvement, date started and completed, assessment, and relationship to partnership goals.

PDS Steering Council Meeting Agenda	
1.	Greetings
2.	PDS Network
3.	Application time line for PDS Award (due next January)
4.	Liaison report
	PDS activities
	Newsletter stories
	Stetson sport tickets for honor roll students
	Intern update
5.	Conferences
	Learn and Serve Regional Institute
	Association of Teacher Educators Annual Meeting
6.	PTA night in March
7.	Literature conference
	Student essays
8.	End of year survey
9.	Summer planning/retreat
10.	Other/next meeting date

Figure 1 Steering Council Agenda

An important aspect of beginning any PDS partnership is the signing of an agreement between the district, school, and university. Our formal agreement was written early in the collaboration and committed

each institution to the partnership for a period of three years. In the agreement, we included the rationale, duration of partnership, vision statement, partnership goals, and specific roles and responsibilities of all participants. The district superintendent, school board chairman, school principal, university president, college dean, and the chair of the education department all signed the agreement. The agreement was then presented to the district school board.

A Multi-Site Governance Model

The governance system described above has been very effective in overseeing the operation of a single PDS site. However, after three years of working with one elementary school, the PDS partnership was expanded to include three additional elementary schools, thus beginning a PDS network. The purpose of the PDS network is to increase collaboration and support among area elementary schools and the university by providing opportunities for participants to work with other network schools in the area of professional development. Under this new direction, the original PDS site serves as the training center or hub site to disseminate best practices and provide support for teachers at the expanded sites. For example, a fifth grade teacher at the hub site helped train a class of fifth grade students at another site on the use of multimedia technology. As before, we began the network relationship with a formal signed agreement between the participating schools, school district, and university. Although the network agreement was modeled after the original partnership agreement, it also includes specific school focus areas and the signatures of the all network school principals. Once again the agreement was presented to the district school board.

The essential mechanism for ensuring that the PDS network remains accountable to all participating educational organizations and accomplishes the

established goals is the governance structure. Building on the experience and success of the original PDS steering council, the PDS network governance structure was designed to address the unique interests and needs of the four schools, school district, and university involved in the educational partnership. Thus, a two-tier system was established. The overarching tier is a network steering council with at least three representatives from all the schools (two teachers and the school principal), university faculty members, and district personnel. This council meets twice a semester to oversee all PDS network activities. Here again, co-chairs were identified to lead the council. As this was a new endeavor for most of the participants, everyone agreed that the co-chairs for the first year would be university faculty members. However, as we move into the second year of the network partnership, a university faculty member and a school principal will serve as co-chairs of the network steering council. As with the original steering council, we continue with the distribution of minutes after each meeting and the upkeep of a network-tracking chart.

In addition to the network steering council, each participating school has a site-level steering council, which functions much like the original steering council. To ensure university representation, at least one university faculty member serves on each site-level steering council. It is noteworthy to mention that at two of the schools the steering councils exist as a separate group whereas in the other schools the steering councils have been assimilated into an extant group (i.e., school-wide leadership committee). We find these configurations to be of interest with respect to the implications that might be drawn with regard to a school's level of commitment to the PDS and involvement in network activities.

Although the PDS network adopted the original partnership goals that channel the collective work of the network, one of the first tasks assigned by the

network council was for each school-level council to address its areas of need. As noted in Figure 2, the common focus area of *closing the gap on student achievement* emerged across all network schools. This common focus allows the network partners to plan and coordinate educational activities for all stakeholders. (During the initial network steering council meeting, a decision was made and agreed upon unanimously that network sponsored activities that are scheduled at one school would be open to faculty from other network schools.)

Network School's Focus Areas	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Elementary 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Closing the gap on student achievement ❖ Responding to behavior issues ❖ Increasing reading skills and literacy ❖ Serving special needs children ❖ Incorporating technology ❖ Building a team-oriented faculty ❖ Providing educational outdoor activities 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Elementary 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Closing the gap on student Achievement ❖ Improving instruction in reading And literacy ❖ Utilizing multiple alternative Assessments ❖ Networking with other schools to share best practices
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Elementary 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the gap on student achievement • Providing technology instruction for children • Developing small group instruction for at-risk students in reading and math • Offering early literacy intervention • Planning hands-on strategies in science and math 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Elementary 4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the gap on student Achievement • Enriching science with hands-on activities • Improving performance of the lowest performing students, especially in reading • Developing professional activities for teachers • Drawing on community resources To support students and families

Figure 2 School Based Focus Areas

Some topics already addressed by the network steering council include budgetary issues, school-level governance, workshops, technology integration, program evaluation, and teacher candidate preparation. A particularly successful event has been the distribution of mini-grants to teachers at all schools. Mini-grants were funded through university monies that were dedicated to be used to support the work of the PDS network. In order to receive these mini-grants, teachers had to submit an application that supported one or more of the identified focus areas at their schools. Principals from each school were asked to rank their teachers' proposals in relation to how well they addressed the focus areas. A selection committee comprised of representatives from the university and each school then reviewed the proposals. In order to ensure fairness, teachers' names were removed from the mini-grant proposals prior to being brought before the selection committee. This is an example of how all schools in the partnership network participated in the process of allocating resources in order to support partnership goals.

A critical first year challenge for the network council was keeping communication lines open among all schools and participants. It was difficult to keep all stakeholders apprised of all activities. In an effort to maintain open communication, a university faculty member was assigned to each partnering school to serve on the school's PDS governing body. Further, an interschool mailing system and a PDS network electronic listserv was started. A second challenge involved the equitable distribution of both financial and human resources among the network schools within the context of a small university and education department. (It is important to note that university faculty members participate in various ways and degrees in the PDS partnership.) With a teacher

education faculty numbering ten and a small student body, we continued to struggle with finding ways to work more efficiently. One way this was addressed was to encourage preservice teachers who were involved in research projects to consider undertaking a study that would support a partnership school's focus area. For example, a study that looked at alternative approaches to assessment in the area of literacy instruction provided valuable information to primary teachers at a network school site while at the same time provided teacher candidates with an authentic field-based learning experience. This project satisfied partial university requirements for both a senior research class and a course in reading methods.

Recommendations

Though diverse in structure and operation, educational partnerships are engaged in the work of increasing student achievement, mentoring preservice teachers, and providing on-going professional development activities for inservice teachers. An effective governance structure supports the goals of the partnership and creates opportunities in which all participants are able to grow professionally. After four years of working within our governance structure, we have learned many important lessons. We offer the following recommendations for institutions developing similar frameworks:

1. Build an environment of trust among steering council members by starting with non-threatening activities. Beginning of the year events such as Kick-Offs and periodic socials along with activities originating at the school level that address specific student learning and teacher professional needs have proven to be stable bedrock upon which to build a strong and enduring foundation of trust. This is especially important when adding new PDS partners and establishing new steering councils.

2. Include representatives from all stakeholder groups. An inclusive policy regarding governance communicates to individuals and groups that their participation is valued and necessary in order to accomplish the goals set forth to bring about educational reform. Although there may be many individuals who volunteer to participate in the beginning of the partnership, some attrition of members may occur. Establishing co-chairs for the council and providing opportunities for all participants to provide input for agenda items are indicators of an inclusive governance body.
3. Schedule regular meetings with written agendas. Formalizing the work of the PDS through a governing body such as a steering council is essential in order to coordinate day to day activities between partnership schools and the university and to maintain a balance between the goals of the partnership and the specific focus areas of each individual school.
4. Distribute steering council minutes to all stakeholders. This sends the message that participants are important to the success of the partnership. Moreover, organizations that work in partnerships are more likely to realize their mutual self-interests when communication flows openly between organizations. Council minutes are an excellent form of communicating, in an abbreviated form, the work of the PDS partnership at the school, university, and district level.
5. Outline short-term as well as long-term plans. Maintaining the day-to-day work of the PDS is an important function of a governance body. Equally important in governance is the ability to focus the lens of day-to-day work in order to clearly view and monitor the movement of the partnership toward the accomplishment of long term plans. Providing times during the year to reflect on what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done is essential in order adequately address both short-term and long-term planning.
6. Rotate steering council membership periodically. Governance is time-consuming work and people are more likely to volunteer and serve with genuine commitment if they know the duration of time involved. Members should also be free to resign if they find the responsibilities or time requirements too demanding. A staggered rotational membership fosters innovation, provides continuity and maintenance, and minimizes the likelihood of organizational stagnation. Foremost, steering council members must be committed to the mission and goals of the partnership.
7. Develop a formal written partnership agreement early in the relationship, which is consented to and signed by the key stakeholders. Formalizing the partnership through a written and

signed agreement serves to center the partnership and increase commitment among participants.

We believe that our governance structure has served the PDS well over the past four years. Through an active governing body we have addressed the critical tasks of governance, which include building bridges of mutual respect and support between the schools and university, managing the immediate work of the PDS network, engaging in long term network planning, and supporting the process of mutual renewal (Teitel, 1998). However, to further understand the effectiveness of a two-tiered governance structure and the implications of various governance models, additional research in this area will be conducted.

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