

Going to Scale with Professional Development Schools in Urban Districts*

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For the past year, with the support of the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, NCATE has worked with three universities and their urban school district and union partners to design models for bringing professional development schools (PDSs) to scale. The three partnerships are Baylor/Waco Independent School District, University of Colorado Denver/Denver Public Schools and University of North Florida/Duval County Public Schools. Teams representing district, university and union leaders worked together. “Going to scale” was defined as creating sufficient numbers of PDSs to prepare all teacher candidates placed in the district, and to support the needs of new teachers. Each partnership developed a design for how they might approach this long-range goal. Their efforts were guided by a suggested set of principles (Wise and Levine, 2002) and the NCATE PDS Standards (NCATE, 2001). They were asked to identify the needs they wished to address, the principles they would use to guide their work, and the strategies they would use to implement the model they developed. Their work has added greatly to our understanding of how professional development schools can have system-wide impact on teacher quality and student achievement.

Although the three partnerships involved vary significantly in size, they have important commonalities. Each site had experience with PDS partnerships and the partners saw the potential for building upon the success of those relationships. All of the districts were in urban locations and served a majority of low income students of diverse backgrounds. The partners had identified a number of areas of need they hoped to address. These areas included teacher preparation, teacher quality, teacher recruitment and retention, and student achievement.

* This article is based on reports written for the project by each participating partnership.

Waco Independent School District/Baylor University School of Education

WISD is a medium sized urban school district with a population of 16,000 racially and ethnically diverse students – 79.6% economically disadvantaged. ‘Scaling up’ in the Waco Independent School District (WISD)/Baylor University partnership means moving from one successful professional development school to ten PDSs in Waco, enough to accommodate all Baylor teaching candidates in their junior year clinical experience, and in a year long internship in their senior year.

Guidelines for expanding the number of PDS partnerships were collaboratively developed. Essential components of the WISD/Baylor model include:

1. PDS Standards used for design and assessment: The PDS Standards framework was used by Hillcrest, the first PDS, as a design and assessment tool. When additional PDSs were solicited, the application process was explicit about the standards and had applicants reflect on their capacity for using them. This year, each of the PDSs engaged in a self study using the standards framework, as well.
2. “Scale down first”: The principle “think big, start small” has guided their scale-up approach. The success of Hillcrest PDS over eight years has helped build support for going to scale among a broad variety of stakeholders in the district.
3. Comprehensive partnership strategy: Since 2001, partnership work has been broadened to extend across the entire teacher career spectrum. Projects currently part of the partnership are PDSs, new teacher induction, support for National Board Certification, and comprehensive professional development.
4. Concentration of resources: In 2000 the School of Education made a commitment to use all of its partnership resources in WISD. This allowed district administrators and board members to make larger commitments than might be initially expected in order to match the financial commitments of Baylor University.

5. Collaborative design of the teacher education program. The conceptual model for the teacher education program was collaboratively designed and places the P-12 student at the center. The four professional studies areas – positive classroom environment, assessment, curriculum planning and instruction, professional development and collaboration that encircle the student contain 19 benchmarks, which have both teacher candidate and student performance criteria.

This design has already moved from drawing board to reality with the establishment of the nine additional PDSs over the past 18 months.

University of Colorado Denver/Denver Public Schools

The Northeast quadrant of the Denver Public Schools includes 25 elementary schools, five middle schools, and five high schools. They serve an ethnically diverse, low income student body. Twenty-five of the schools are ranked low performing; 40% of the teachers in the quadrant have three years or less experience and another 14% are not fully licensed. It is routine for teachers to begin their careers in the NE quadrant and then transfer to more affluent quadrants in the city as they gain seniority. The Northeast quadrant design calls for creating a network of 11 PDSs in the quadrant to support teacher preparation and induction for all the quadrant schools.

Essential components of this model include:

1. Build a reciprocal relationship between PDSs and other quadrant schools. Over a three year period the quadrant will establish a network of PDSs. at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. The model will be supported through resources committed by both university and school district. Resources within the quadrant would be reallocated to provide financial support (either direct or through FTE) for the PDSs, based on the commitment of the PDSs to serve the needs of quadrant

schools through teacher preparation, mentoring, and induction of quadrant teachers.

2. Extend the mission of PDSs to induction: The model extends the focus of the PDS to include not only teacher preparation, but also induction, mentoring, and leadership development. Borrowing from the K-12 “looping” model where children stay with the same teacher for more than one year of instruction, the PDS network will develop an “induction looping” model that permits new teachers to stay connected with their previous pre-service mentors into the first several years of teaching. It is anticipated that the new teachers will benefit from the sustained relationship with their PDS mentors (site professors, instructional coaches, and clinical teachers) who know their professional learning needs. New inductees would participate in monthly roundtables, peer coaching, content study, or inquiry studies at their former professional development school site. Support would also be provided for teachers completing their master’s degree at the university, and as they become leaders in the district and candidates for National Board certification. Each PDS will have a cohort of approximately 12-15 candidates, and will “loop” with that cohort for induction and leadership training.

3. Re-staff and restructure, and include leadership training. Veteran teachers and principals will be specifically recruited to staff the PDSs. Training will be provided to all selected staff members. Additionally, all PDS principals and quadrant principals of other quadrant schools will receive training to enable them to take full advantage of the PDSs as a resource in the quadrant.

4. Extend the model to other education professionals. The partnership plans to extend the model to the preparation and induction of other

educational professionals including principals, counselors, and special educators.

While the initial effort will involve the Northeast quadrant of the Denver Public Schools and the University of Colorado at Denver, the expectation is that eventually, it will be incorporated into other quadrants of DPS, and include other institutions of higher education.

University of North Florida/Duval County Public Schools

Duval County Public Schools (Jacksonville) is a large urban school district in Northeast Florida serving over 127,000 students and employing over 7,000 teachers. The University of North Florida College of Education and Human Services enrolls approximately 1,800 students, about two-thirds of whom are enrolled in undergraduate programs largely in teacher education.

This partnership's design for going to scale builds upon the history and success of a long term relationship established through the Elementary Urban Professional Development Schools Partnership in 1997.

Essential components of this model include:

1. Focus on high need areas for qualified teachers/student achievement: The UNF/Duval County Public Schools partnership approached the challenge of scaling up by focusing, not on increasing the number of PDSs incrementally across the board, but rather on zeroing in on providing quality teachers in high need content areas. The two areas identified were middle school teachers in the core subject areas and special education; and science teachers at the secondary level.
2. Expand to involve several IHEs: The PDS Inquiry Science Center model would involve the participation of several higher education institutions and include faculties outside education.

3. Expand PDS responsibility in the area of in-service professional development: The Centers would support intensive science teacher preparation as well as in-service education for experienced faculty. For example, PDSs would have model classrooms open for observation to all district teachers and offer on-site opportunities for master's degrees.
4. Re-staff and restructure: New PDSs would deliberately re-staff over time to strengthen the teaching faculty; and each site would take on the full continuum of teacher development responsibilities.

Although the three partnerships vary significantly in size, they have commonalities as well as some differences. All of the partnerships are addressing the needs of low income, diverse student populations, and all are concerned with ensuring highly qualified teachers for all their students. Each of the project sites addressed the need for collaborative governance councils, and all recognized the critical importance of leadership and leadership training to support such an effort. They all cited the need for good communications with all the many stakeholders involved in PDS partnerships and the importance of both formative and summative evaluation. Where relevant the sites recommended tying PDS roles and responsibilities to district and/or state career ladders or salary schedules. The two larger districts addressed the need to involve more higher education institutions in the PDS partnership in order to meet the long-range goals of 'going to scale'.

Research is telling us PDSs can do some heavy lifting with respect to student achievement, teacher quality, and teacher retention – all issues for America's urban school districts (Teitel, 2001). However, in order for PDSs to fulfill their potential, districts and universities will have to find ways to bring them to scale. Deep partnerships and major restructuring will be required. And, we will have to think more about how networks of PDSs within school districts can serve the needs of the broader school community. The work done in these sites has extended our thinking about PDSs in important ways. While participants still must address many issues that remain unresolved, they are on their way.

References

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