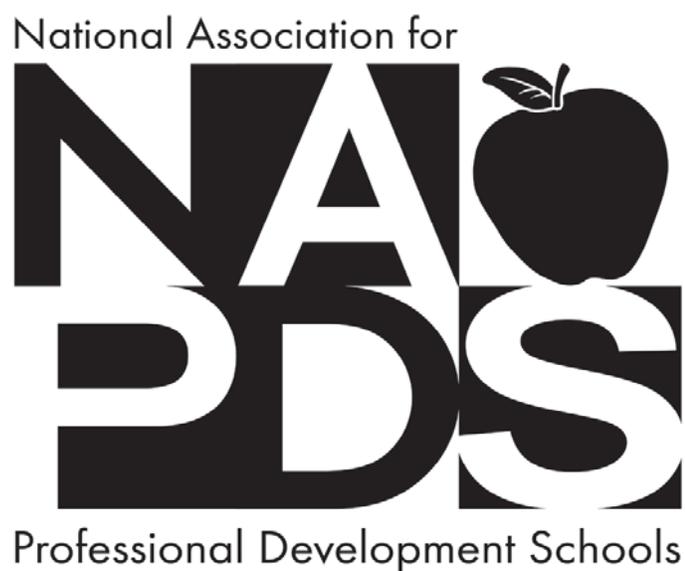


What It Means to Be a Professional Development School



*A Statement by the Executive Council and Board of Directors of the
National Association for Professional Development Schools*
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Foreword

The purpose of the following statement is to share with the educational community the National Association for Professional Development Schools' (NAPDS) articulation of the term "Professional Development School." This statement is not intended to be either an evaluation or a critique of the phenomenal work that has punctuated PDSs over the past twenty years. Rather, the association recognizes that there is a tendency for the term "PDS" to be used as a catch-all for various models of school-university partnership work that may or may not be best described as PDS. Thus, the intent of this NAPDS statement is to assert the *essentials*, or fundamental qualities, of a Professional Development School.

The NAPDS encourages all those working in school-university relationships to embrace the nine *essentials* of PDS work communicated in this statement. The *essentials* are written in tangible, rather than abstract, language and represent practical goals toward which PDS work should be directed. For those in established PDSs, some aspects of current work will be confirmed while other aspects may be identified as needing attention. For those aspiring to establish PDSs, we offer this statement as a useful guide for their work.

The NAPDS invites individuals involved in school-university partnerships to share this statement with colleagues in the spirit of continuous improvement. By coming to terms with the challenges and opportunities inherent in this statement, we can collectively fulfill the vision of this remarkable and distinct partnership we call PDS.

What It Means to Be a Professional Development School

A Statement by the Executive Council and Board of Directors of the National Association for Professional Development Schools¹

Colleges and universities and P–12 schools and districts in the United States have often worked together to advance agendas of mutual interest. Such collaboration has been particularly noteworthy in the field of education where the goal of preparing and sustaining professional educators has enhanced the need for school–university collaborations. In the mid-1980s, thanks to the work of organizations such as the Holmes Group (now the Holmes Partnership) and the National Network for Educational Renewal, the term “Professional Development School” (PDS) emerged as a part of the nation’s educational discourse. Unique and particularly intense school–university collaborations, PDSs were designed to accomplish a four-fold agenda: preparing future educators, providing current educators with ongoing professional development, encouraging joint school–university faculty investigation of education-related issues, and promoting the learning of P–12 students. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) gave credence to the significance of Professional Development Schools by conducting a study that resulted in the publishing of the NCATE PDS Standards. That document identified five standards, twenty-one elements, and dozens of descriptors that could be used not only to evaluate the efficacy of a particular Professional Development School but also to determine the developmental state of that PDS.

Despite the valuable work of these PDS pioneers, in the two decades since “PDS” first hit the American educational landscape and in the six years since the publication of the NCATE PDS Standards, the term Professional Development School has come to be used to describe all manner of school–university relationships. In particular, educators seem to be routinely using PDS to describe any school–university relationship that engages in the preparation of new teachers. As such, the term has lost its authenticity as schools and universities have climbed on the PDS bandwagon without giving sufficient attention to the question, “What precisely does it mean to be a Professional Development School?”

It has become imperative that recognizing a PDS by some means be communicated throughout the educational world, particularly as PDSs have been praised in recent years as being among the most effective models for furthering educational goals. Arthur Levine,

in his 2006 report *Educating School Teachers*, cited PDSs as “a superb laboratory for education schools to experiment with the initiatives designed to improve student achievement” (p. 105). He further indicated that a PDS can “offer perhaps the strongest bridge between teacher education and classroom outcomes, academics and clinical education, theory and practice, and schools and colleges” (p. 105). Responding to Levine, Sharon Robinson, president and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), posited that PDSs “are emerging as particularly effective, evidence-based school–university partnership models in many sites across the nation, providing academic content and pedagogical instruction that is well integrated with extensive, closely supervised, hands-on in-school clinical experience” (2007, p. 2). We also know that PDSs have begun to be legislatively mandated. Thus, the proliferation of PDSs and their support by national education leaders provided a tacit mandate to the National Association for Professional Development Schools to articulate a deliberate set of *essentials* that would allow educators to “know” whether the relationships in which they work are indeed PDSs.

In an attempt to come to a common understanding of what it means to be a PDS, the NAPDS Executive Council and Board of Directors gathered twenty-two educators in August 2007 for a two-day Summit on Professional Development Schools entitled “En Route to a Common Understanding.” The participants in the summit, which was held in New Orleans, were all experienced with PDSs and represented not only the P–20 continuum but also a number of professional education associations that have played active roles in the PDS national initiative.² The conversation produced agreement on nine *essentials* that the NAPDS maintains need to be present for a school–university relationship to be called a Professional Development School. Without having all nine, the relationship that exists between a school/district and college/university, albeit however strong, would not be a PDS. How individual PDSs meet these *essentials* will vary from location to location, but they all need to be in place to justify the use of the term “PDS.”

The nine required *essentials* of a PDS are:

- 1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;**
- 2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;**

3. **Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;**
4. **A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;**
5. **Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants;**
6. **An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved;**
7. **A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration;**
8. **Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and**
9. **Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.**

The NAPDS posits the following narratives for each of the nine required *essentials* of a PDS to assist with the differentiation between PDSs and other forms of strong school–university partnership. *Essentials* 1 through 5 establish the philosophical underpinnings for PDSs, while *essentials* 6 through 9 describe the logistical requirements of a PDS relationship.

1. **A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community**

Schools/districts, colleges/universities, and their respective teacher education units all have mission statements that may differ from those of their PDS partners. However, the mission statement of the PDS needs to reflect the *essentials* of the respective participants that pertain to the PDS work, as well as wider-ranging aspects that are involved in a relationship between/among entities. Thus, the scope of the PDS mission statement should provide an all-inclusive sense of the partnership that distinguishes the PDS from the participants, yet is reflective of their contributions, input, and involvement.

In addition to identifying the distinctive nature of the PDS relationship, the mission statement should also focus on two overarching goals: the advancement of the education profession and the improvement of P–12 learning. In furthering the education profession, the PDS

relationship should be all-inclusive in its promotion of professional growth across the continuum of pre-service teacher candidates, in-service educators, and college/university faculty and administrators.

The tenet that all students can learn becomes the sine qua non of the PDS work that must be conducted in ways that are unbiased, fair, and just for everyone in the school community. PDSs must provide safe environments where all students can learn, all students are comfortable, and all students are secure and physically, emotionally, and intellectually out of harm's way. The implication of a comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach scope than the mission of any partner is tied implicitly to this phrase.

PDSs may also extend themselves to the community outside the school/district and college/university gates. Ultimately, local businesses, agencies, and policymakers can become participants in the work of a PDS, and how their involvement is delineated becomes an expression of the PDS. P–12 parents and families may also be involved in the work of the PDS. While involvement of stakeholders beyond the school/district and college/university gates is not a required delineator, their participation can strengthen the PDS.

2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community

As noted in the prefatory comments above, the professional preparation of teacher candidates lies at the heart of the four-fold agenda of Professional Development Schools. PDSs, however, are more than simply places where teacher candidates complete their clinical experiences. Instead, they are schools whose faculty and staff as a collective whole are committed to working with college/university faculty to offer a meaningful introduction to the teaching profession. As such, PDSs create a school-wide culture that incorporates teacher candidates as full participants of the school community.

3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need

While PDSs focus, in part, on the preparation of new teachers, they also provide a venue for professional development of educators already in the field. Thus, continuous learning focused on an engaged community of learners is a critical feature of a PDS. The knowledge and skills of those involved in the PDS requires enhancement and refinement, including an infusion of data-based (qualitative and quantitative) state-of-the-art content. The

continued learning of those involved in the PDS requires that the activities that promote this learning be provided on a regular basis. The notion of selecting topics or themes and providing guided learning activities suggests that practice, reflection, and feedback, at the very least, need to be embedded in a series of working sessions with PDS participants.

Schools/districts provide professional development for teachers that is typically school-wide and/or district-wide. The intent of the professional development in a PDS is that it is specific to the PDS. Additionally, at any given time and for any given topic or theme, either or both P–12 faculty and college/university faculty could be involved in providing the professional development. Both faculties, as well, could be the recipients of the same professional development.

The community of learners, through action, results, and personal/professional expectation, determines the focus of the professional development of those involved in the PDS. What is fundamental to this aspect of professional development is the individual and collective self-reflection that establishes the direction of professional development.

4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants

The field of education tends to use the term “best practice” without always providing parameters for its application. As we look at the use of this term related to PDSs, implicit in best practice is the focus on providing improved and enhanced educational opportunities for all P–12 students. These opportunities, however, must be explicit and based on practice that is mutually determined by the PDS participants. We recognize that this determination implies that “theory” and “practice” be co-mingled in a way that will provide what is best for the learning of the P–12 students in the PDS. Incorporating a “theory to practice” model will necessitate discussion and shared decision-making among the participants. The intent of this statement is to honor: (a) the skill and expertise of P–12 faculty and the context in which they work on a daily basis and (b) the knowledge and expertise of college/university faculty. Therefore, the PDS should foster and encourage practice that is extraordinary or novel but also thoughtful. Concomitantly, the PDS also serves as a learning laboratory for the development of teacher candidates. Thus, on a continuum, teacher candidates, new teachers, veteran teachers, and college/university faculty are professionally developed via their work in the PDS.

5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants

PDS participants both engage in and routinely reflect upon best practice. The structures and processes for advancing the planned study of the work of the PDS and its effects on P–12 student and teacher candidate learning are defined differently by each PDS, but those structures and processes must be deliberately planned and routinely conducted so that reflection and feedback are used to strengthen the work of the PDS.

In addition to routinely examining best practice, PDS participants also share their work with others, both within and outside of their PDS, as a way of contributing to the educational dialogue. This sharing can take many forms, including, but not limited to, conference presentations, inter-school and/or intra-school discussions, PDS-sponsored forums, and oral or written reports to school boards, parent organizations, and other community agencies.

6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved

A PDS involves, at a minimum, a relationship between one school/district and one college/university. Whether the PDS involves one or multiple relationships, various forms of conversations will naturally occur as the relationship takes shape. These conversations necessarily lead to a formalized, written document signed by the individuals responsible for negotiating on behalf of the respective participants. The document, which goes beyond agreements involving teacher candidate placements, should specifically identify the obligations of each entity, as well as the roles to be played by various individuals in maintaining and furthering the relationship. Conversations leading to the signing of the articulation agreement must not be restricted to single representatives from each entity but must include representatives of as many PDS participants as possible (e.g., P–12 teachers and administrators, college/university faculty and administrators, teacher candidates).

7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration

An organizational structure/arrangement must be in place that not only guides the work of the PDS but also allows for and encourages collaboration, reflection, and regular communication among participants. Meetings and discussions, both formal and informal,

should be held on a regular basis, with the regularity of formal meetings/discussions being at the discretion of participants. To help guide the work of the PDS, the structure that is developed will provide for decision-making over such issues as how the PDS functions, how evaluations of the PDS will be used, and how resources will be best invested for the benefit of the relationship. Participation in the structure may not necessarily be equal but should represent some equivalency of contribution based on the ongoing collaboration.

8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

A successful PDS relationship requires the engaged involvement of both college/university and school/district personnel. Participants from both entities participate on a regular basis in fulfilling the mission of the PDS through both formal and informal roles.

Formal roles are those necessary functions that are defined by the PDS, have specific titles, and have detailed expectations and responsibilities for those assuming the roles. Examples of these roles might be: site coordinator, site liaison, site supervisor. Titles tend to be specific to each PDS and will vary, as will the expectations, responsibilities, and the individuals filling these roles. However, for each PDS, the roles need to be operationally defined, as would any job description. These roles are considered necessary but may not be sufficient for the operation of a PDS. In many PDSs, there are informal roles that are assumed short-term by any number of individuals. These informal roles tend to be more fluid, situation-specific, and, while perhaps helpful to the functioning of the PDS, are not precisely or explicitly stated in an articulated agreement.

In the same sense that colleges/universities and schools/districts have varying mission statements, so, too, do they have differing institutional cultures. While differences exist among P–12 schools/districts and colleges/universities, the roles and their associated expectations and responsibilities need to be respectful of and incorporate the differences among the various institutional cultures represented in the PDS. This type of boundary spanning is germane to the work that takes place in a PDS, is sensitive to the work that takes place in each culture, and accepts unconditionally the necessity for collaborative effort.

9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Successful PDS work requires the dedication of significant resources beyond the normal operating scope of schools/districts and colleges/universities. Resources can take any of a variety of forms including, but not limited to: leadership, time, space, people, money, materials, expertise, and workload. The more traditional sense that resources are financial and or equal must be examined and not limited in light of the needs of the PDS. In the true sense of collaborative effort, resources for PDSs are not necessarily equal or on a one-to-one correspondence. However, at the core of sharing resources is that each participant agrees to dedicate and provide willingly that which it has available to strengthen the work of the PDS.

How educators, especially those in P–12 settings, are acknowledged for the work they do, the investment they make, and the involvement they have in PDS work must be determined in prescribed ways. While rewards and recognitions are not the incentives for which educators necessarily work, they are critical as an acknowledgement from the PDS about how participants are engaged. For example, a school-based liaison and a university faculty member who is school-based may have differentiated teaching schedules from others on their faculties; teachers who may take on the mentoring of new teachers in the building may receive additional funds for supplies or travel to a conference or tuition for a specialized workshop.

Conclusion

The NAPDS Executive Council and Board of Directors assert that these nine *essentials* are integral to the philosophies, policies, and processes of Professional Development School partnerships. The NAPDS has a responsibility as a steward for the PDS movement to encourage all PDS stakeholders to articulate their own unique relationships within a framework that allows P–20 educators the opportunity for a common understanding of what it means to work in a PDS partnership. As conveyed, these nine *essentials* allow for multiple variations in PDS work while maintaining some consistent expectations irrespective of the idiosyncratic nature of individual PDS partnerships. Armed with this common understanding, PDSs have the opportunity to forge their own individual policies and processes based on their own contextual needs, safe in the knowledge that they can describe the ways they have adhered to the nine overarching *essentials*. These *essentials* afford and encourage flexibility while maintaining some common assumptions.

We thank our gracious colleagues from valued P–20 associations for their wisdom in the creation of these nine *essentials* as the central tenet of Professional Development School work. We trust that PDSs will use the nine *essentials* to shape their own commitments, visions, and strategic planning efforts. Moreover, we believe that these *essentials* will provide insight for all school–university partnerships seeking to extend further the scope and magnitude of their existing relationships so that they can build toward a PDS culture. By expressing common expectations for PDS collaboration, the NAPDS believes the PDS movement will continue to establish itself as the preeminent model for partnerships between P–12 schools/districts and colleges/universities.

Notes

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