

History of the Partner School Network

In 2008, Ken Zeichner and Jack Jorgensen proposed creating the Partner School Network (PSN) at the University of Wisconsin. In its initial conception, PSN would support the preparation of UW students as they prepared to become teachers, administrators, school counselors, psychologists and library media specialists by providing practicum experiences in a smaller number of area K-12 schools through formal partnerships. The rationale for this model was to (1) create more coherence, sustainability, and effectiveness in clinical components of UW certification programs, (2) build stronger relationships between placement sites and UW preparation programs, and (3) improve supervision of UW student in placements. Through this distributed model of expertise, the talents of local educators – both at university and in local schools – are recognized and leveraged in support of students. Area schools enjoy significant benefits through this partnership as they have a greater access to university resources and professional development and increased opportunities to collaborate with faculty around inquiry and pedagogy. The university enjoys significant benefits as K-12 educator expertise contributes in deep ways to instruction in teacher education courses and to the overall teacher education programs. This model seeks two-way learning and growth, contributing to deeper relationships between schools and university faculty and staff.

Today, the Partner School Network remains committed to a collaboratively preparing educators through partnerships built upon six foundations, which include:

1. A commitment to the high achievement of all students, enhancing the mutual commitment between K-12 schools and the university to inclusive, equitable education.
2. Preparing preservice educators to contribute to strong school communities.

3. Securing consistent, high-quality sites for clinical experiences that reflect effective practices grounded in the UW teacher education standards.
4. Promoting reciprocity and collaboration where expertise flows among and between institutions, as well as valuing and furthering the work of all professionals to improve opportunities for students and their families.
5. Requires a commitment to the continual pursuit of excellence among partners through inquiry-based professional learning and reflective practices.
6. Honors the strong relationships that currently exist between schools and the university though fostering new and stronger relationships that build an identity that is unique to each partnership and reflects the individuality of the schools and programs.

The Review Process

The review process was implemented over a two-day period. During this time, members of the review team met with cooperating teachers, principals, UW faculty and staff, and the school-based coordinators who have worked with the Partnership Schools.

Cooperating Teachers

Seven cooperating teachers from the east side and seven from the west side gathered to discuss the Partnership Schools. Overall, they expressed a desire for deeper connections to the university and more opportunities for partnership. Several noted that the Partner School Network could provide more concrete information and better communication about the various UW school of education programs. Cooperating teachers are interested in being more involved with the teacher preparation programs and seek ways to showcase their expertise as CTs. They express concerns about the lack of continuity across placements and advocate that, when

possible, preservice teachers stay in the same school or in a pod of schools for consecutive semesters.

Although a few CTs had “never heard of anything about the Partner School Network”, CTs who were familiar with the program, spoke highly of the program and viewed the partnership as a resource, as opposed to a burden. Overwhelmingly, CTs perceived UW student teachers and practicum students as assets in their classrooms. They feel as though they learn from the students. CTs mentioned specific projects, such as professional book clubs that are particularly beneficial and successful. Schools that maintained continuous relationships with specific faculty/staff, which included the placement of preservice teachers, were identified as contributing to the building of strong relationships between UW Madison and local schools. CTs from these schools agreed that it is wonderful to have students who had previously completed practica in their building placed there as student teachers as these students already know about the schools and are able to “hit the ground running.” CTs who worked with Mary Klehr also appreciated increased opportunities for meaningful professional collaboration and the personal touch that she is able to provide. Several mentioned the PSN grants as a valuable resource to support collaborative UW and school-based projects.

In terms of challenges, the CTs were divided as to whether the new cohort model was an improvement over the previous Professional Development School (PDS) program. Those who were committed to PDS reported a deep sense of loss. They feel that PDS had helped to foster community amongst all parties involved in teacher education. They also feel that CTs are challenged in being able to support the PSN students with the range of assignments that they are bringing to their classrooms. At times, the preservice teachers’ assignments do not align with the classroom schedule. They requested that the guidelines for assessments be clearer and that

professors be more flexible. Finally, CT's worry that supervisors are not consistent and while some are excellent, others are demanding and sometimes inconsiderate.

In general, CTs want to be appreciated for their expertise. They want to be invited into seminars and provided with opportunities to showcase their knowledge. CT's request that faculty be accessed to provide high quality professional development and identified ways that the university and its faculty might better support them. CTs suggest that there be an online portal where all assignments and syllabi are available to CTs. They encourage instructors to hold seminars at schools and request substitute pay that would enable them to participate in some of these seminars. CTs suggested that the Partner School Network provide spaces where teachers, preservice teachers, instructors, and university faculty can congregate and get to know each other. They suggest developing networks of Cooperating Teachers who can learn from each other and collaborate across schools. Finally, they appreciate recent efforts to create spaces for CTs to meet and share best practices.

School Principals

Eight principals from a range of K-12 schools gathered to discuss the Partner School Network. Overall, the conversation around the Partner School Network was positive. Principals believe that PSN is a valuable resource for supporting teachers and accessing resources that are generally unavailable from their districts. Principals want increased access to high profile faculty and more research initiatives that are responsive to their needs.

All of the principals are eager to continue developing collaborations. Those who have worked with PSN for multiple years and have strong relationships with its director, Molly Carrol. They report feeling comfortable reaching out to the university for resources. They noted that being a partner school enables them to lead their staff in effective and meaningful ways. They

identify the hosting of practicum students and student teachers as significant in being able to locate prospective teachers who fit with the needs and direction of their schools. Principals also believe that cooperating teachers benefit from having preservice teachers in the classroom as it exposes cooperating teachers to new ideas and supports their continued growth.

While the dinner conversation was generally positive, there are some challenges surrounding the Partner School Network that the principals brought to the review team's attention. One issue involves making significant research connections with faculty and graduate students. While principals have been regularly solicited to support research projects, these projects were often too narrow in focus and did not address the particular issues that principals faced; as a result principals were sometimes unable to provide access to their schools. In general, principals voiced that those interested in research were not responsive to the school's needs. Principals also want more access to high profile faculty members and question the process for accessing these individuals. Principals who have felt successful in making these connections reported that they reached out to UW faculty directly. Principals wonder if the Partner School Network could facilitate connections with faculty members outside of the department of Curriculum and Instruction (i.e., Educational Leadership faculty, science faculty). Finally, principals express concerns around the communication between the central district office, the Partner School Network, and partner schools. In short, they worry that central office administrators may be ambivalent about the role and purpose of the PSN. Some principals wish that the PDS model would return as it enabled them to create a stronger and more focused community of cooperating teachers, preservice teachers, supervisors, and faculty.

The principals requested that the Partner School Network facilitate responsive longitudinal relationships. They requested grants, or series of grants, that last for one or more

years rather than short-term, semester-long projects. They seek more opportunities for their teachers to participate in action research communities that would result in data that would be directly useful to the school. Several principals note the need for a continued and expanded commitment to equity. Finally, they want assurance that the Partner School Network, MMSD district administrators, and school personnel are committed to working together around shared goals.

UW Faculty/Staff

Eleven faculty and staff member from the University gathered to discuss the Partners School Network. Overall, the eleven faculty and staff members agreed that the PSN is an important asset to the teacher education program and adamantly argue that UW students placed in partnership schools are better equipped to tackle the challenges of teaching and have a better understanding of schools and classrooms. The faculty/staff also think that, by virtue of more adults being in classrooms, the placement of UW students in schools has a positive impact on K-12 students. It was agreed that PSN is well respected across the School of Education and recognized as a working partnership model.

The faculty/staff believe that it is time to expand the PSN. There were numerous ideas as to what this might look like, but the general consensus is that PSN needs to be better understood by all faculty which they argue could be achieved through clear articulation of the PSN's specific mission and goals. They also argue for an organized and systematic model plan for further developing existing partnerships and for creating new partnerships. Establishing an advisory board for PSN appeals to most group members, as they feel this might assist in combating what some perceive as the "randomness" and "inequities" created by recent changes in the elementary and secondary education programs. Faculty and staff identified these structural changes as being critical in opening up dialogue so that more key players (i.e., UW faculty & staff, MMSD

faculty) can better understand and utilize PSN. Faculty members are particularly excited about the possibility of PSN acting as a platform for transformative research within schools.

School Based Coordinators

Twenty-one School Based Coordinators (SBCs) met to discuss the PSN. Overall, SBCs feel that the partnership is mutually beneficial as it provides resources for schools and provides placements for UW preservice teachers. Similar to cooperating teachers, they view student teachers as an asset and recognize the partnership supporting access to these student teachers. Most SBCs agree that having more placements in their schools (practicum and/or student teachers) makes creating and maintaining connections with the university more feasible and natural. Because of this, some SBCs discussed frustration they have with the lack of placements their building receives; placements are sometimes limited by access to ELL students. While most SBCs appreciate the partnership, some middle schools SBCs were overwhelmed with providing classrooms for both middle childhood and secondary placements; they request more coordination between these two programs to help alleviate confusion that sometimes arises. All SBCs wish for more transparency and stronger connections with supervisors and cohort leaders along with more access to UW resources.

Generally, the secondary SBCs feel that Molly Carroll and Joey Anderson are doing a fabulous job of getting resources to schools. They appreciated access to university resources and the recognition they received for their work with the partner schools. All SBCs feel that the preservice teachers coming into their schools are or have been well matched with cooperating teachers. Many feel that the professional development opportunities facilitated by the Partner School Network are highly beneficial. They feel that the SBC role also takes some of the work off Learning Coordinators who previously facilitated preservice teacher placements. This has

allowed for stronger connections with the UW. They were also impressed at how the Partner School Network creates a space where SBCs can meet and share their expertise. They valued this time together and feel that it should continue.

While these were all great benefits associated with the Partner School Network, SBCs seek stronger relationships with university supervisors. They are also confused by the different programs and often do not know which program the preservice teachers are from. Middle schools are in a particularly precarious position because they host both secondary and elementary preservice teachers. SBCs wished their roles were more carefully delineated so that they can communicate their additional responsibilities to their building principals, and potentially be given extra time to work with UW students, supervisors and CTs. Finally, they want more information about the benefits of being part of the Partner School Network.

The SBCs want to keep the partnership with the UW and Partner School Network strong. They want more longitudinal opportunities that are comprehensive and responsive to schools. They suggested an online platform that identifies resources and opportunities. SBCs request time to meet regularly with supervisors to collaborate around issues related to teacher education. Finally, they want more access to campus facilities including theaters, labs and museums. They suggest that partner schools be able to register for UW events prior to registration being opened up to the larger community. Overall, they want to find ways to deepen connections with the university.

Strengths

Across the various discussions, it is clear that the Partner School Network has many strengths and makes significant contributions to the learning and development of preservice teachers and practicing K-12 teachers, provides principals with means to recruit new teachers,

and offers K-12 students increased access to knowledgeable adults. In particular, the partnership's strengths seem to lie in the strong relationships among stakeholders and the resources the partnership brings to the schools.

A clear strength is the strong relationships that have developed among members of the partnership across stakeholder groups. This was clearly tied to individual efforts to forge relationships. In particular, we heard about the ways both Molly Carroll and Mary Klehr worked hard to bridge institutions and support individuals in schools. All stakeholders also viewed the partnership as providing resources to both the schools and the university. School resources include human resources through both student teachers as interns and future hires, as well as financial resources through the small grants. Although less direct, stakeholders also reflected on how the partnership has provided resources to the university including access to research sites and practitioner expertise.

During their interview, faculty and staff agreed that placing preservice teachers in a partner school is a great benefit to UW students. Overall, by working in a partner school, preservice teachers (1) have a better understanding of how schools operate and a better connection to classrooms, and (2) have a richer understanding about the ways schools operate which helps them to more fully articulate answers to difficult interview questions when applying for future positions.

Principals, cooperating teachers and school-based coordinators agree that hosting UW preservice teachers enhances the overall knowledge of teachers at their schools and gives teachers access to new teaching pedagogies. Observing others as they teach invites teachers to reflect more thoughtfully on their own practices. Principals also agree that hosting preservice teachers is an advantage when hiring for their building. In addition, being a "partner school"

provides many schools with professional development experiences from both UW faculty from the School of Education and from across the university. The Lodewick Grants are viewed as a bonus and as a means for creating important partnerships with the UW. Specifically, in these tight economic times, these grants provided schools with funds to support special projects which have been inspiring to teachers and ultimately serve children.

Finally, while stakeholders acknowledge the anecdotal nature of their experiences, they believe that the combination of preservice teachers, teachers, and faculty working with and in the schools has had significant and powerful effects on teacher and student learning.

Challenges

While everyone appreciates the work of the PSN, numerous challenges were identified. These challenges include a need for better communication and systems to support deeper collaboration. Challenges were identified as relating to (1) an overall lack of a clear mission and knowledge/understanding about PSN, and (2) frustration that K-12 schools feel as they try to establish and sustain partnerships that are truly meaningful and reciprocal.

Many stakeholders feel that establishing a clear purpose and direction for PSN will assist in making collaborations stronger and their effects more potent. The clarification of this mission will also help all stakeholders to understand the purpose of the PSN and their roles within the collaboration. Members of three out of the four groups interviewed—principals, cooperating teachers, and UW faculty—recognized that either they or their colleagues knew little about the PSN. Many also thought that the apparent lack of a central PSN focus has contributed to missed opportunities for collaboration among UW, MMSD central office, and even supervisors placed within K-12 schools. Others believed that clarifying the central focus for PSN could provide a

means to stimulate more school-based research by students and faculty who want to access schools to conduct research but are not aware of the needs and interests of the schools.

Even stakeholders who have knowledge of PSN and strong ties to the university voiced the need for greater communication. They expressed frustration over not being aware of all the resources that accompany being a partner school. K-12 personnel note that they do not feel as though some of the “top faculty” are available for consultation, and that faculty in ELPA and EPS do not seem invested in PSN. Further, the lack of communication surrounding what PSN could offer was a discussion point in almost every interview. Principals, SBCs and CTs all stated that they found the lack of communication, as well as a detailed account of the resources that PSN has to offer, a detriment to creating stronger partnerships.

Along these same lines, school-based participants noted their frustration with not understanding how/when partnerships with schools are created or how/why some schools receive more placements and more resources than others. Schools that once enjoyed thriving partnerships sometimes expressed confusion as to why they are no longer being called up to host UW students and/or receiving attention from faculty. Many stated that having a large number of placements contributes to a good partnership, but schools with low numbers of UW students feel as though they do not have the means to gain traction and thus establish strong partnerships. Changing faculty (particularly cohort leaders), changing commitments to schools, and changing of K-12 administrators has had a huge impact on PSN partnerships. Across all the interviews, people felt as though the principal has a key role in creating and maintaining PSN partnerships.

Finally, many participants feel as though the PSN cannot continue to grow given its current organizational structure and that in order to meet the changing demands of faculty and K-

12 students, it must be systematically revamped. Multiple groups voiced this call for streamlined systems to support more responsive and sustained collaboration.

Wishes

Overall, the parties invested in the Partner School Network believed that they have benefited from their participation in the PSN. In fact, they seek a stronger connection to UW. Communication and increased transparency among stakeholders in both schools and at the UW is needed. Thinking small, CTs voiced simple wishes; they requested that the university seek ways to appreciate the work that they do (i.e., muffins, bagels, classroom materials). On a larger scale, they would like their knowledge and expertise to be more recognized, and want to be rightfully positioned and treated as teacher education colleagues. Principals explained that they would like more responsive partnerships in which the needs and interests of schools are better connected to the support they received from the university. School Based Coordinators want more sustained opportunities for collaboration, time to meet with supervisors around issues related to teacher education, and deeper connections with the university. Faculty and staff identified structural changes as critical in creating workable spaces for collaboration with school-based colleagues.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on conversations with teachers, principals, School Based Coordinators and faculty/staff. They reflect the challenges and wishes voiced by constituents.

- Create structures for deeper collaboration: Mechanisms should be created that allow faculty, school leaders, and teachers to design and implement mutually beneficial and longitudinal collaborations that support communities of practice and research projects that are responsive to the specific challenges faced by K-12 schools.

- Establish a PSN advisory board co-chaired by a UW and a school district representative.

This advisory board, including the PSN Director, UW faculty and staff, school leaders, cooperating teachers, central office representatives, and graduate student supervisors, should be formed to 1.) Craft and disseminate a clear statement of the mission of the PSN as well as to delineate the roles and responsibilities of various PSN stakeholders; 2.) Meet regularly (initially monthly and later at least twice a year) to revisit and refine existing practices and policies; 3.) Provide guidance and vision for the future of the PSN. 4.) Design and implement a communication plan for all PSN stakeholders (this might include an online platform for communication among constituents); 5.) Explore possibilities for shared expertise and collaboration between school and university constituents; and 6.) Review the number of schools involved in PSN, assess the level of their participation, and clarify the process for becoming and continuing as a PSN school.

Revisiting and clarifying the mission of the partnership is the central task of this committee. Particular attention should be paid to the crafting and dissemination of a clear statement for the continuation of the PSN. For example, historically the central function of the previous university-school partnership (i.e., Teach for Diversity, PDS models) was to create fertile and innovative spaces for preservice teachers while creating rich and collaborative school communities that highlight shared responsibility for teacher education and inquiry, as well as mutual respect and renewal. Much of the work of the PSN in recent years has focused on connecting UW resources with partnership schools. This is particularly problematic because “The Network” has recently been established and charged with connecting local schools to UW faculty and resources. A clarification of roles and responsibilities of “The Network” relative to PSN is needed. The advisory

board should identify specific goals, and evaluate annual progress of PSN toward achieving those goals, at regular intervals (e.g. annually).

- Explore ways to capitalize on both the expertise that is located in local schools and the expertise at the university in ways that are collaborative, respectful, and productive. Possible initiatives might include UW personnel supporting cooperating teacher professional development, offering courses that serve the needs of local schools, holding undergraduate courses in schools while drawing on the resources available in schools and classrooms to strengthen UW teacher education programs.
- Review what it means to be a partnership school and the various roles that accompany this designation (i.e., identify the responsibilities of principals, faculty, school based coordinators, clinical faculty, cooperating teachers, supervisors). In addition, clarify the benefits of being a partnership school for the various constituents.
- Across the interviews, it was apparent that the PSN has been successful in schools where a school/university liaison is employed to work closely across schools and UW. With this in mind, it appears that more resources should be allocated to hire at least one more liaison (i.e., clinical professor) to fulfill this role for other partner schools. In addition, the PSN will also benefit greatly from the hiring of one or more C & I faculty members who are explicitly and centrally committed to teacher education. It is possible that the PSN Director might assume this role and/or that additional people are hired.
- Explore the relationship between the Partner School Network and the emerging Teacher Education Center. In particular, examine how practicum and student teaching placements in PSN schools will be handled within that new structure and the connection of what is now the Office of Field Experiences to the PSN.

- Clarify specific goals for meetings: While stakeholders in the PSN meet bi-annually with the project's director, the activities and foci of these meetings should be revisited to increase the focus creating powerful and inspiring school communities that involve both university and school-based professionals. Additional meetings for stakeholders to meet, both across and within stakeholder groups, should be facilitated by the partnership. Once the focus on community building is established then collaborations that involve the identification of available resources and problem solving around specific challenges faced by schools can be addressed.
- These meetings should continue to access and possibly increase resources and spaces on the UW campus while providing opportunities for all parties to explore issues related to teacher education in forums in which everyone's voice is heard and appreciated
- Develop strategies for working with central office administrators: The development of meaningful collaboration is contingent on support from school districts. Given recent changes in both school districts and the university, it is essential to maintain close communication with district level administrators. Cultivating and maintaining strong relationships with key district level administrators who understand and support the work of the PSN is critical.

PSN Recommendations

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Explore the relationship between the Partner School Network and the emerging **Teacher Education Center**. In particular, examine how practicum and student teaching placements in PSN schools will be handled within that new structure and the connection of what is now the Office of Field Experiences to the PSN.

Clarify specific goals for meetings: While stakeholders in the PSN meet quarterly with the project's director, the activities and foci of these meetings should be revisited to increase the focus creating powerful and inspiring school communities that involve both university and school-based professionals. Additional meetings for stakeholders to meet, both across and within stakeholder groups, should be facilitated by the partnership. Once the focus on community building is established then collaborations that involve the identification of available resources and problem solving around specific challenges faced by schools can be addressed. These meetings should continue to access and possibly increase resources and spaces on the UW campus while providing opportunities for all parties to explore issues related to teacher education in forums in which everyone's voice is heard and appreciated

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