

Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers–Administrators [AII-06]

Including Preservice Special Education Teachers in Professional Development Schools

Challenges and Possibilities

Briefly...

Understanding what is involved in implementing special education teacher preparation in Professional Development Schools is important to crafting effective partnerships between school faculty and teacher educators.

Learn more about developing partnerships that are responsive to these preservice teachers' needs.

Partnerships between schools and universities allow these organizations to leverage their assets while expanding and enhancing their knowledge bases. The Professional Development School (PDS) is a well-established type of partnership in which university and school faculty provide school-based preparation experiences for preservice teachers, while at the same time providing ongoing professional development to improve school practice.

Such partnerships are designed to close the theory-to-practice gap and to bring more rigor to teachers' initial preparation and ongoing professional development. PDSs promote school and teacher improvement reform by including K-12 educators in the design and implementation of preparation programs, producing teachers with classroom experience, increasing field-based opportunities to work with diverse students, and enhancing opportunities for feedback and evaluation.

Partnerships in PDSs are difficult to implement and sustain unless several key components work in concert. They are:

- Involving school and university faculty in managing, planning, and/or delivering the preparation program.

- Developing collaborative research projects aimed at improving specific aspects of school and classroom practice.
- Using university liaisons to provide feedback and professional development activities for both preservice and inservice teachers.
- Preparing inservice teachers to work as mentors with preservice teachers.
- Providing intensive field opportunities that are integrated carefully with coursework through the use of strategies such as weekly seminars and research-to-practice projects.
- Having the capacity to maintain funding and incentives for such resource-intensive efforts.

There are additional challenges in PDSs that include special education partnerships. This Brief considers the issues that are unique to developing special education partnerships in PDSs.

Challenges—Developing Special Education PDS Partnerships

To date, special education has not been an integral part of most PDS efforts. Yet, preservice special education teachers who participate in a PDS—especially

those who have had capable mentors and concrete field experiences and coursework—report feeling well prepared. Participating students appear to maintain or make gains in achievement, motivation, and attendance. Partnership schools and districts also tend to hire these preservice teachers upon graduation.

PDSs that focus only on general education classroom teaching limit opportunities for special education preservice teachers to work with students with disabilities. In such cases—especially when institutions of higher education partner with a limited number of schools—there may be insufficient opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with special education teachers and students with disabilities. This makes it difficult for these preservice teachers to acquire the skills they need. Yet, partnering with multiple schools presents enormous logistical and resource challenges.

PDSs that emphasize inclusion may offer some support. Partnerships may arise when inclusive teacher education opportunities at the preservice level are connected with those occurring in schools. Or, they may occur when schools partner with teacher educators for the purpose of improving inclusive education. In these partnerships, different types of teacher education arrangements may develop (e.g., dual certification programs in elementary and special education, elementary education programs that integrate some special education coursework, etc.).

Schools can support partnerships with special education teacher educators by clearly stating their commitment to including students with disabilities and defining their goals for improving student outcomes. They also can stress their com-

◎◎ Consider This...

Professional Development Schools can provide numerous benefits.

- **Preservice teachers** benefit from having coordinated and well-conceptualized programs of study, experiencing enhanced familiarity with school-based procedural practices, and being offered preferred hiring opportunities.
- **Inservice teachers** benefit from experiencing increased opportunities for on-site professional development, having frequent opportunities to put research into practice, and working in settings that reduce isolation and encourage collaboration, often with scholars in their subject area.
- **Students** in schools engaged in partnerships may benefit from receiving increased amounts of adult attention and experiencing innovative educational practices.
- **Districts** may benefit by having a pool of teachers who can help reduce teacher shortages in high-need areas.



mitment to involving special education preservice teachers in their PDSs. This may help institutions of higher education cluster resources by reducing the number of partner schools while being more selective about choosing sites that are involved in inclusive practices.

Support for PDS Partnerships

Governance structures can help promote collaboration between institutions of higher education and schools. Examples of activities that support collaboration include implementing projects that require collaboration (e.g., research groups, research-to-practice projects, schoolwide change projects) and engaging partners in reform efforts (e.g., joint planning committees for oversight).

A challenge associated with collaboration is having sufficient time to meet. Examples of strategies that administra-

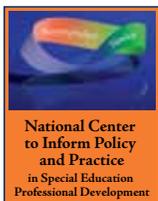
tors might implement to address time constraints include:

- Incorporating professional development into the school day.
- Reallocating time to the partnership.
- Creating opportunities for faculty to work in their areas of expertise. For example, working with students with cultural and linguistic diversity is an area in which special education teacher educators and school faculty have formed successful partnerships.
- Hiring adjunct faculty to work in schools.

Learn More. This Brief summarizes select findings from a comprehensive review of the literature:

Rosenberg, M. S., Brownell, M., McCray, E. D., deBettencourt, L. U., Leko, M., & Long, S. (2009). *Development and sustainability of school-university partnerships in special education teacher preparation: A critical review of the literature.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-3). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP).

It is available on the NCIPP website at www.ncipp.org.



This Brief is part of a series designed to help special education teachers during their initial years in the profession. The National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP) is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (cooperative agreement # H325Q070002). Bonnie Jones is the OSEP Project Officer. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. NCIPP aims to inform special education policy and practice by examining and recommending those policies and practices that improve the retention and quality of beginning special education teachers. There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please use proper citation. The Briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy and Associates.

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