



**Professional Development Schools: Communities of Learners,  
Centers for Inquiry, Models of Collaboration**

by

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**Introduction**

Professional development schools are partnerships between schools and universities that are designed to create better schools and teachers. They serve a variety of purposes including preparing novice teachers, providing professional development for practicing teachers, generating new knowledge and organizational structures, and providing an example of exemplary practice (Abdal-Haqq, 1992).

Professional development schools have a pivotal role in driving educational change. Some of the goals that are examined in the partnership of schools and universities are improving student learning, strengthening teacher education, and promoting professional development (Osguthorpe, 1995). Professional development schools work in partnership with higher education for the training of teachers and the renewal of education. Through professional development schools, schools and universities seek to accomplish these four purposes:

- 1) educate children and youth
- 2) prepare educators

- 3) provide professional development
- 4) conduct inquiry

The expectations for each of these four areas are: educating youth with excellence and equity; preparing teachers for collaboration, pedagogy, curriculum and academic knowledge; linking theory, research, and practice; and linking inquiry to reflective practice and scholarship (Clark, 1995).

**The College of New Jersey  
Professional Development  
Schools Network**

The Laboratory for Student Success, funded as part of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory grants of the U.S. Department of Education, has enabled faculty from The College of New Jersey to initiate many positive changes in teacher education. Many successful projects were initiated in collaboration with the Professional Development Schools Network with the intent of improving the preparation and ongoing development of teachers and administrators and raising the quality of teaching and

learning in K-12 schools.

Several goals have been achieved through collaborative teaming, professional development initiatives, and collaborative dissemination of information and services among the three Focused Professional Development Schools—Bear Tavern Elementary School, Greenbrook Elementary School, and P.J. Hill Elementary School—and The College of New Jersey. The Focused Professional Development Schools are sites for the study of planned innovation. The innovations developed, tested, and implemented at the Focused Professional Development Schools are disseminated and implemented throughout the Professional Development Schools Network.

A primary goal was to bring current research into practice in the three Focused Professional Development Schools and to improve field experiences for preservice educators. The project aimed to increase the roles and responsibilities of practitioners in teacher education programs as well as to enhance teacher education initiatives across the continuum of practice by establishing learning part-

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nerships between faculty from The College of New Jersey and the educators from the Focused Professional Development Schools.

### Findings

The project is currently in Year 5 with significant success, and plans are in place for continued improvement. One initiative in particular that met with great success involved teaching preservice teachers to implement national and state science standards in the curriculum. In Focused Professional Development Schools, Junior Professional Experience students have become increasingly prepared to implement the standards and use alternative assessment techniques as specified in the standards (see Table 1).

Through thoughtful discussion and instructional support, students from The College of New Jersey successfully gained an increased understanding and appreciation of how to include students with learning differences in regular classrooms. A unique journal project took place at the Greenbrook School, where faculty from The College of New Jersey, school administrators, teachers, and parents investigated the kindergarten experience through the year. This positive experience has been recognized through various presentations and has been submitted for publication.

As a result of the comprehensive reform of the School of Education and the successful relationships established by this project's collaborators, some elementary and early childhood senior student teachers, as of the spring of 1999, are now being clustered in

groups of six to ten at Focused Professional Development Schools. Previously, student teachers held individual placements at different schools and essentially practiced in isolation. This organizational change allows student teachers to work in collaboration with one another. In this arrangement, a faculty member from The College of New Jersey spends one full day per week on site to provide additional support and work in combination with educators from the Focused Professional Development Schools to present a weekly reflective seminar for the student teachers. During the fall of 1999, plans to cluster student teachers were scaled up significantly, with 21 new clusters in operation (see Table 2).

Administrators from the Professional Development Schools continue to meet monthly with The College of New Jersey faculty and Focused Professional Development School principals to continue to improve upon the foundation created by these initiatives. Now that relationships have been established and many goals have been accomplished, the doors are open for continued improvement in the process of creating exemplary professionals.

### References

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**Table 1: Number of Preservice Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, and Students Involved in the Standards Project as of January 2000**

Preservice Teachers	144
Cooperating Teachers in Classrooms	72
Students in Classrooms	1800

**Table 2: Number of Clusters, Preservice Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, and Students Placed in Clusters as of January 2000**

Clusters	24
Cluster Professors	30
Preservice Teachers	147
Cooperating Teachers in Classrooms	147
Students in Classrooms	3850

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