

---

## **Professional Development Schools and Future Teachers of America Clubs: A Promising Pipeline**

Maureen F. Ruby  
Sacred Heart University

Ernesto Davila  
Brookfield High School, Brookfield, CT

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the opportunity for universities and Professional Development Schools (PDSs) to engage with Future Teachers of America (FTA) clubs and similar groups in secondary schools to ensure the future of the profession. Student leaders and their mentor from an active high school FTA club share their perspectives on the benefits of membership in an active FTA. They aspire to engage in authentic educational experiences through relationships with teacher preparation programs and diverse classroom opportunities. In alignment with the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Nine Essentials, collaboration with FTA clubs is a boundary-spanning opportunity for faculty that will cultivate and advance positive relationships, provide mutually beneficial clinical experiences to a robust and motivated source of potential future educators, and contribute to the research on solutions to teacher shortage.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional Development Schools, Future Teachers of America clubs, teacher shortage, response rate, preservice teacher preparation, teacher pipeline

### **NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:**

**Essential 1: A Comprehensive Mission:** A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.

**Essential 3: Professional Learning and Leading:** A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.

**Essential 4: Reflection and Innovation:** A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.

**Essential 8: Boundary-Spanning Roles:** A PDS creates space for, advocates for, and supports college/university and P–12 faculty to operate in well defined, boundary-spanning roles that transcend institutional settings.

**Essential 9: Resources and Recognition:** A PDS provides dedicated and shared resources and establishes traditions to recognize, enhance, celebrate, and sustain the work of partners and the partnership.

### **Teacher Shortage**

The COVID pandemic exacerbated an already significant teacher workforce issue. Teacher shortages, “the inability to staff vacancies at current wages with individuals qualified to teach in the fields needed” (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016, p. 1), existed worldwide before the global pandemic (Sedlak, & Schlossman, 1986; Smithers, Robinson, & University of Liverpool/Centre for Education and Employment Research, 2000; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016).

The shortage cause is multifactorial and includes salaries, lack of respect, increased career opportunities, stress, and working conditions, (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e). Amelioration strategies include increasing teacher pay, forgiving student loans, increasing investments in education, respecting teacher voice, treating teachers as professionals, and improving training (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

### **Future Teachers of America**

Future Teacher of America (FTA) club members are a resource worthy of the attention of PDSs. This paper proposes collaboration between PDSs with FTAs to offer enriching, high-quality educational experiences, and leadership opportunities for high school students. Broadening students’ exposure to the profession beyond the context of their personal experience could potentiate existing interest and inspire others in a teaching career.

The Nine Essentials of PDSs (National Association for Professional Development Schools [NAPDS], 2021) support development of PDS-FTA relationships. Levine (2006, as cited in NAPDS, 2021, p.6) stated that PDSs “offer perhaps the strongest bridge between teacher education and classroom outcomes, academics and clinical education, theory and practice, and schools and colleges.” Similarly, the collaboration of a PDS with talented, interested high school students offers a bridge to the teaching profession.

### **Portrait of the Graduate and The Nine Essentials**

Across the U.S., school districts have developed “Portrait of the Graduate” (POG) profiles (Quigley, n.d.). Quigley defines a POG as “a school district's vision for the 21st century skills, character traits, and/or social-emotional competencies that students need to succeed in college, career, and life.” Well-designed POGs provide coherence, highlight the shared “why” undergirding the organization, and honor the “loose coupling” associated with school organization (Stewart, 2020). POGs identify desired attributes of a graduate including being a creative and critical thinker, problem solver, self-navigating learner, lifelong learner, collaborator, effective and positive communicator, innovator, changemaker, dynamic leader, and globally concerned citizen. Graduates should be curious, empathetic, resilient and goal directed, service oriented, compassionate, future ready, respectful, and financially and digitally literate (Quigley, n.d.). Commonalities and relationships are evident between the essential competencies and skills for student success represented in POGs and the concepts and ideas essential to PDSs. The ideas embodied in the Nine Essentials include boundary spanning roles and structures, clinical practice, community, equity and social justice, innovative practice, inquiry, PDSs as third spaces, professional learning and leading for all, reciprocity, reflection, respectful relationships and collaboration, shared governance, simultaneous renewal, and traditions, celebrations and recognition (NAPDS, 2021, pp.10-14). PDSs provide a logical framework and resource to enhance the pathway to the pre-service educator pipeline.

Aspiring educators need access to a third space to authentically operationalize learning and advance application of learning. This paper demonstrates the awareness, competencies, and drive of high school FTA members and their hunger for expanding their space, their roles, and their experiences regarding the education profession. The potential inherent in PDS-FTA relationships for recruiting high quality and diverse students to replenish and sustain our educator pipeline is promising and powerful. Examples of the perspectives of aspiring teachers are shared.

### **A Future Teachers of America Club**

BHS is a public high school in suburban New England. Of the 903 students, approximately 75% are white, 14% re Hispanic/Latino, 2.9% are Black, and 7.9% are Asian. Twenty percent qualify for free and reduced lunch, 1.8% are English learners, and 17.8% qualify as students with disabilities. The district's [POG](#), is part of the [strategic plan](#). BHS has an active FTA club. FTA members meet for one hour per week during the school year. Membership numbers (15) at meeting attendance is 95%. BHS faculty activity/club advisors serve as mentors/coaches and encourage student agency. The FTA advisor is a world language teacher, school climate coordinator, and the BHS 2020 Teacher of the Year. He empowers students to take initiative and explore their passions. This advisor elevates student voice and choice and encourages creative and critical thinking, goal directed collaboration, effective communication, innovation and leadership activities, and curiosity, compassion, empathy, and respectful service. The FTA Club supports the members' attainment of the qualities embodied in the POG while exploring the education profession.

The club's mission statement reads, "As BHS' Future Teachers of America, we value an orderly structure, adequate communication, a quality social and emotional well-being, beneficial constructivism and differentiation, encouragement of higher order thinking, and an overall love for learning." Both the mission statement and the club's activities place heavy emphasis on "responsibilities to the profession" aligned with the CT Common Core of Teaching (CCT) and the [CT Code of Professional Responsibilities](#) (CT State Department of Education, n.d.). The advisor shared that members have obtained foundational leadership, presentation, communication, and problem solving skills, and the knowledge of child development and emotional discipline necessary in the field of teaching and education" (E. Davila, personal communication, 2022).

### **Major Accomplishments of the BHS FTA**

FTA members' accomplishments are evidence of the potential for securing future teaching candidates in our nation's secondary schools. The following examples support the recommendation for PDS engagement with secondary FTA groups as a strategy to increase the teaching force.

#### **Engagement in Research**

COVID interrupted in-school learning worldwide. At BHS, students initially experienced remote learning (March 2020) followed by a combination of remote and hybrid learning in 2020-21. FTA members' concerns about increased stress levels among peers was the driver for a club-initiated school climate research project. The research question was "How does the altered schooling format impact students' mental and emotional health and education?" Following data collection using a student developed survey, FTA members designed a [PowerPoint presentation](#) (BHS FTA, 2020) to share findings. The students' efforts succeeded in showcasing student voice and in raising awareness within the school and district about student social emotional well-being, mental health, and response to virtual and hybrid instruction, both synchronous and asynchronous. Data collected informed school and district changes in instruction. The advisor continued weekly

surveying of students and faculty. Data informed iterative changes including increasing synchronous contact with the use of cameras and providing options for face-to-face engagement, which were originally not available. FTA's research was integral to the evolution of the district's remote learning opportunities and led to a "[Shared Best Practices: Feedback](#)" (BPS Video, 2020) presentation which features student voice (BPS Video, 2020, 12:03).

### **Engagement in Instruction**

#### ***Word of the Week: WOW!***

In 2019, the district implemented a [Word of the Week](#) (WOW!) program. The goal was to support vocabulary development and a love for and awareness of language, K-12. Through WOW!, students developed "word consciousness" and became "Word Wizards" (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Each week, students learned a new Tier II word, which as described by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) is a "new" word for a known concept and one that students would encounter in school in text. Teachers shared the word-of-the-week on Mondays and used the word daily in informal ways. Described in a [brochure](#) on the district webpage, the WOW! [slide deck](#) was shared with the community so students would encounter the word beyond the school day. As WOW! was rolled out, FTA club members reflected on the program and formed an ad hoc WOW! FTA subcommittee. The subcommittee discussed the impact of WOW! and its alignment with high school students' needs. They proposed developing a WOW! enhancement differentiated for older students. In January 2021, the advisor emailed the Assistant Superintendent requesting a meeting with the subcommittee.

The students put together [this presentation](#) outlining the goals of their BHS WOW proposal, explaining their proposed format, and indicating a source for words for their initiative. The students also thought of some activities such as making mini video lessons and workshops to spread awareness of the BHS WOW, especially during these times in which we are leveraging technology and virtual interactions as part of our educational experience (E. Davila, personal communication, January 2021).

Students expressed how valuable WOW! is and how helpful it would have been to have as middle schoolers and explained the plans for needed differentiation. The enhanced WOW! included a student-designed five-day lesson plan. The plan transformed the original WOW! presentation of a simple word, kid-friendly definition, sentence, and image on one slide to a new level of sophistication. The student-created five-day WOW! included: (1) the word, its part of speech, and a student-friendly definition (Monday); (2) synonyms, antonyms, and an example sentence (Tuesday); (3) etymology [word origin] (Wednesday); (4) translation into French, Portuguese, and Spanish (Thursday), and (5) other forms of the word with definition, example sentence and translation (Friday). Student designers first studied research on vocabulary development and instruction provided by the Assistant Superintendent. Students then provided BHS faculty with an introductory letter and lesson plans for the "enhanced" WOW!. Faculty delivered the lessons during a daily common "Individualized Learning Time" or ILT period. Daily updates, seen [here](#), were posted on the Brookfield Word of the Week Instagram account. Finally, students presented their "curriculum" at the Board of Education's subcommittee on Curriculum, Instruction and Program Evaluation and the regional newspaper featured the work in a [news article](#) (Engle, C., 2021).

### ***Teaching Assistants***

In July, the district provided a hands-on inquiry-based STEM experience for interested K-8 students. Certified teachers oversee the small classes of eight to ten students. FTA club members served as teaching assistants, providing enthusiastic, motivated, high-energy support for teachers, and relatable role models for students. This career-related, paid, administrator intern position provided a full-day of professional development and daily job-embedded mentoring for aspiring educators.

### ***Grant Writing: [Voice4Change](#)***

Current students are our future leaders. [Voice4Change](#) characterizes students as “community changemakers of today” (Connecticut State Voice4Change, n.d.). The Connecticut Voice4Change program is the first state program to award millions of dollars of funds to high school students to implement change at their schools. Solicited grant proposals addressed priority areas identified by the Connecticut Department of Education (learning acceleration, academic renewal, and student enrichment; family and community connections; social, emotional, and mental health of students and school staff; strategic use of technology, staff development, and the digital divide; and building safe and healthy schools). BHS FTA club members collaborated with the local youth commission and BHS Spanish Honor Society and submitted a competitive grant titled *A Safer, More Inclusive, and More Comfortable Learning Environment*. The Connecticut Commissioner of Education, Russell-Tucker, and Lt. Governor Bysiewicz revealed the winners in April 2022 during a live streamed [announcement](#). The BHS FTA award was \$20,000. The FTA’s winning project details are described in a May, 9, 2022 [press release](#) (Brookfield Youth Commission, 2022). The Commissioner and Lt. Governor said the students’ efforts were “history making” as the Pennsylvania Department of Education plans to replicate the project. Bysiewicz emphasized that the students “helped to start a national movement to give students the power to and the voice to change their schools and their communities...” She further noted her hope that students recognized “how creative the ideas were and how innovative they were” (Equity and Excellence in Education, 2022, 19:32). The leaders encouraged students to be civically engaged, advocate for themselves, and register to vote (Equity and Excellence in Education, 2022, 18:00).

### **Student Voice and the Future of FTA**

Student voice is highly valued by our school community and state leadership. During a May 2022 FTA meeting, students provided insights on the value of FTA and gave suggestions for future enhancements. Emma, a former FTA club leader provided input via [video recording](#). Her comments reflect her current perspective as a college student preparing to be a teacher. In her recording, Emma details a variety of experiences beginning in her middle school years to the present (E. Sands, personal communication [recording], April 2022). Remarking on her FTA experience, she stated:

Not only did it reaffirm that that’s what I wanted to be doing with my life, it gave me the skills I needed to be successful – public speaking, classroom management – all of those very foundational skills that I still use in college. ... There are a bunch of volunteering opportunities that came through FTA and I took as many as I could and I am so thankful that I did because those are the experiences that have truly enriched my life. I wrote my college essay about a tutoring experience that I got through FTA.

Emma recounted her experience with research as an FTA member, noting that she wrote about that research experience for her honors essay. Emma believes that the experiences she had as an FTA member “shaped” who she is and her “love for education.” Emma encouraged students to continue to take advantage of every opportunity they have through FTA.

Emma’s contribution to the May meeting sparked FTA club members’ interest in expanding opportunities for members. Students wanted to explore possibilities for working with professors and students from university teaching programs. FTA leadership met after the close of the school year, via Zoom, to follow-up on the May discussion. The conversation focused on the following two questions: (1) What do you think of having a partnership between FTA and higher education institutions? What value do you think these relationships will bring to our club? (2) What opportunities or projects would you like our club to engage in as part of these partnerships? Students who were unable to participate through Zoom provided input on a google form.

Responses to Question 2 included:

- Considering the goals and values of FTA, connecting students to their future careers, I think this would be more than sensible. After all, any students looking to eventually pursue a career in education will need to enter a higher ed institution, so it makes sense for them to already form that connection prior to their time after high school. Any method of getting ahead of the game and creating an advantage for an individual’s career path would be advantageous for both the student and the students that individual will connect with.
- I believe that a relationship of that caliber would be amazing. This would help further show to students that we have a voice at school and that the school board is hearing our issues with the school!
- I think having a partnership between FTA and higher Ed institutions is a great idea and almost critical to the focus of our group and club. These relationships will bring a higher level of involvement and allow us to take a deeper look into this profession. It will bring many opportunities for us that will prove to be beneficial later in our careers. Overall, this will help our club get to the next level and involve all of its members in a deeper part of the profession.

Responses to Question 2 included:

- I would like our club to start looking outward and look into bigger opportunities to explore the career path the club values. With the help of the partnerships we would have a more expansive variety of places to visit to explore more of the profession.
- Even just small connections and partnerships would create an advantage for anyone going into the field of education. It could be as minimal as having meetings with students who are already in college for these careers or performing research projects in the classroom using various collaboration methods with colleges and other higher ed institutions.
- We need to see other schools beyond our community. Working with university education programs and going into urban school with professors and students is an experience that would be very valuable. We need to see and experience more diverse schools.
- Having opportunities to meet with higher ed people, like we do with the Climate Committee and the BOE would allow us to bring up points that lead to schools’ future success.

The club advisor supported the students' position on partnership with higher education. He expressed that developing such a partnership could serve as an exemplar for other schools.

He noted:

Through this opportunity I envision students having access to the coursework and expectations of the teacher preparation programs available in the state, and through building connections with program directors, professors, and students they will be able to better direct their education and involvement at BHS to be more prepared for higher education. Higher education institutions can also benefit from this partnership by identifying skills that they would like to see in their candidates and informing our club on how we can better foster desirable skills from high school. Through this positive feedback loop, in which we will communicate transparently we'll be able to develop a pipeline to get strong and motivated future educators, strengthen the quality of teacher preparation programs, inspire high school students to pursue our altruistic career, and very likely be able to mitigate teacher shortages and contribute to a more diverse workforce. (personal communication, July 5, 2022)

### Conclusion

Students in the BHS FTA club represent talent and hope for the future. How many equally talented students would pursue teaching careers if they had opportunities as described?

Collaborative relationships between PDSs and FTA clubs are a strategy for combating teacher shortage. Garcia and Weiss (2020) describe strategies addressing issues primarily disrupting to practicing teachers and do not target the "pipeline" and its substantial economic impact. The PDS-FTA collaboration proposed offers a cost-effective bridge to the professional pipeline.

### References

- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press
- BHS FTA (2020). *School improvements: Future Teachers of America*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- BPS Video. (2020, April 2). *Shared best practices: Feedback* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3kZXZiXu9c>
- Brookfield Youth Commission (2022, May 10). *Brookfield Youth Commission* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved July 9, 2022 from [https://m.facebook.com/brookfieldyouthcommission?ref=py\\_c&locale=ne\\_NP&\\_rdr](https://m.facebook.com/brookfieldyouthcommission?ref=py_c&locale=ne_NP&_rdr)
- Connecticut State Voice4Change. (n.d.). Ct.gov. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/Voice4Change/V4C/Voice4Change-Program>
- CT State Department of Education (n.d). *Connecticut code of professional responsibility for teachers*. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Certification/Connecticut-Code-of-Professional-Responsibility-for-Teachers>
- Engle, C. (2021, March 9). Brookfield students find 'little moments to engage' by updating 'Word of the Week' program. *Newstimes*. <https://www.newstimes.com/local/article/Brookfield-students-find-little-moments-to-16010308.php>
- Equity and Excellence in Education. (2022, April 8). *Voice4Change winners announcement*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/qECwCIGWAao>

- Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2019a). *The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/>
- Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2019b). *U.S. schools struggle to hire and retain teachers*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/u-s-schools-struggle-to-hire-and-retain-teachers-the-second-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/>
- Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2019c). *Low relative pay and high incidence of moonlighting play a role in teacher shortage, particularly in high-poverty schools*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/low-relative-pay-and-high-incidence-of-moonlighting-play-a-role-in-the-teacher-shortage-particularly-in-high-poverty-schools-the-third-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-marke/>
- Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2019d). *Challenging work environments (school climates'), especially in high poverty schools, play a role in the teacher shortage*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-shortage-professional-development-and-learning-communities/>
- Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2019e). *The role of early career supports, continuous professional development, and learning communities in the teacher shortage*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-shortage-professional-development-and-learning-communities/>
- Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (2020). *A policy agenda to address teacher shortage in U.S. public schools*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/a-policy-agenda-to-address-the-teacher-shortage-in-u-s-public-schools/>
- National Association for Professional Development Schools. (2021). *What it means to be a professional development school: The nine essentials* (2nd ed.) [Policy statement]. Author.
- Quigley, K. (n.d.). *A comprehensive guide to a portrait of a graduate*. Panorama. Retrieved from <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/comprehensive-guide-portrait-of-a-graduate>
- Sedlak, M. & Schlossman, S. (1986). *Who will teach? Historical perspectives on the changing appeal of teaching as a profession*. RAND. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R3472.pdf>
- Smithers, A., Robinson, P., & University of Liverpool/Centre for Education and Employment Research. (2000). *Coping with teacher shortages*. Centre for Education and Employment Research. <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/teachershort.pdf>
- Stewart, T. D. (2020). *Using a portrait of a graduate to build common vision and increase coherence in a public school system* [Doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education]. Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard. <https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364862>

**Maureen Ruby, Ph.D.** is the former Assistant Superintendent of the school district of focus. She currently holds the Isabelle Farrington Endowed Chair in Social, Emotional and Academic Leadership and is an Associate Professor at the Isabelle Farrington College of Education and Human Development at Sacred Heart University. **Ernesto Davila, M.S.** is the faculty advisor for the FTA club described in this paper. He is a World Language teacher, School Climate Coordinator, Youth Commission Officer, and Historical Society Board Member. Special thanks to the inspiring, dedicated future leaders who “did the work” and made this paper possible: **Ben Bogues, Gregory Friedman, Vanessa Greenstein, Emma Sands, Peter Suarino, and Meagan Zaccagnini.**



---

## Collaboration to Promote Social-Emotional Learning: Promoting Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Theresa Kruczek  
Ball State University

Janay Sander  
Ball State University

Jenny Smithson  
Ball State University

Jess Paul  
Ball State University

**Abstract:** A long-standing, traditional teacher professional development relationship was expanded to involve school mental health professionals in supporting the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and fostering social-emotional learning district-wide. The ultimate goal of the collaboration was to foster a balanced focus on social-emotional, behavioral, and academic student success throughout the district. The goal for the first year of the collaboration was to develop and support MTSS within the context of the American School Counseling Association's National Model for Comprehensive School Counseling and the National Association of School Psychologists Practice Model. This paper describes the partnership and how the infusion of SEL informed the school district's responses to the pandemic.

**KEYWORDS:** social-emotional learning, Multi-Tiered System of Support, professional development schools, pandemic

### **NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:**

Essential 1: A Comprehensive Mission: A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.