College of Education dean launches office of (school) engagement task force

Over the summer, Denise Spangler, dean of the UGA College of Education, initiated a task force to rethink the future of the Office of School Engagement. Janna Dresden stepped down as director in June after having led the office since it was created in 2008. When no director was hired for Dresden’s position, Spangler decided it was a good time to consider the future direction for the College’s school engagement efforts.

The Office of School Engagement has primarily served to support the Professional Development School District partnership between the College and the Clarke County School District. The task force has been asked to consider building additional partnerships and more broadly conceiving engagement with the community using the name Office of (School) Engagement.

District welcomes 8 professors-in-residence

The Professional Development School District executive committee initiated a new process for selecting professors-in-residence from UGA to serve in the Clarke County School District for the 2018-19 school year.

This year, interested faculty applied for the position with support from a principal or district administrator. Applications included descriptions of planned activities aligned with school district goals, as well as evaluation plans. In April, the executive committee selected eight professors-in-residence. Three are new to the position: one is based in a high school and two are from UGA’s School of Social Work and are serving district-wide.

New to the position

Morgan Faison, clinical assistant professor in the department of educational theory and practice, is the new professor-in-residence at the Athens Community Career Academy. In collaboration with the Career Academy’s CEO Lawrence Harris, Faison supports the school district’s goal of increasing equity and access through college and career exploration and readiness. She is engaged in several school-wide projects. One of these includes the design and implementation of an advising course that offers high school students enrolled in the Future Teachers Academy, a new career pathway available through the academy, early exposure to social-justice teaching and learning experiences. She has also designed a Future Teachers Internship program for students interested in elementary teaching careers through Camp DIVE; the internship program was first initiated in 2017.
“This is an opportunity to rethink our Office of (School) Engagement from the ground up,” said Spangler. “The task force is considering all forms of College engagement—not just P-12 schools, but also clinics, community centers and more. I have asked the task force to dream big.”

Faculty nominations for the task force were solicited over the summer, and 10 members were selected in September. The task force includes faculty from five departments, representing a range of faculty status. Bethany Hamilton-Jones, clinical associate professor in the department of communication sciences and special education, and Georgia Hodges, assistant research scientist and MAT coordinator in the department of mathematics and science education, are serving as the group’s co-chairs. They have convened two task force meetings and began discussing the future of the College’s engagement efforts.

“As a former science teacher, I understand the value of productive university and community collaboration in the brick-and-mortar school building and beyond,” said Hodges. “I hope to help the College of Education create a new vision for community collaboration.”

Spangler has not given the group a deadline; rather, she wants the task force to take the time they need to clearly define a direction for engagement efforts. The recommendations will determine whether to re-open a search for a director. Erica Gilbertson, formerly the project manager for the Office of School Engagement, is serving as the interim director.

Task force committee members

Tina Anderson, clinical assistant professor in the department of communication sciences and special education (UGA Griffin Campus)
Erica Gilbertson, public service faculty and interim director of the Office of School Engagement
Mary Guay, clinical assistant professor in the department of language and literacy education
Bethany Hamilton-Jones, clinical associate professor in the department of communication sciences and special education
Margaret Hines, lecturer, department of educational psychology
Georgia Wood Hodges, assistant research scientist and MAT coordinator in the department of mathematics and science education
Amy Murphy, clinical assistant professor in the department of educational theory and practice
Alisa Norris Schultz, clinical associate professor in the department of communication sciences and special education and speech-language pathology clinic coordinator for the UGA Speech and Hearing Clinic
Paige Tompkins, director of P-12 educator preparation and clinical professor in the Office of Academic Programs
Richard Welsh, assistant professor in the department of lifelong education, administration, and policy

Members of the Professional Development School District executive committee include (top row, from left) Claire Suggs, Paige Tompkins, Demond Means, Denise Spangler (bottom row, from left) Erica Gilbertson, Xernona Thomas and Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett.

Committee overseeing partnership welcomes 4 new members

The Professional Development School District executive committee, which oversees the partnership between the College of Education and the Clarke County School District, welcomed four new members from both institutions for the 2018-19 school year.

New school district-affiliated members include Xernona Thomas, chief of staff, and Claire Suggs, chief of community engagement and strategic partnerships. New College-affiliated members include Denise Spangler, dean, and Erica Gilbertson, interim director of the Office of School Engagement.

Spangler was appointed dean of the College in April and joined the committee over the summer. “The Professional Development School District is an important partnership, and I look forward to playing a role in making decisions and shaping its future,” she said.

Other members of the executive committee are Demond Means, superintendent, Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett, associate dean for academic programs, and Paige Tompkins, director of P-12 educator preparation.
“Dr. Faison is an absolute joy to have on our campus,” said Harris. “As an educator herself with expertise in early childhood, she has brought a wealth of knowledge and practices to our program. She consistently works to bring culturally relevant pedagogical strategies to our early childhood education students, opening up their eyes to understanding their own identities, academic abilities and talents. Having Dr. Faison on our campus is truly adding to our program’s culture and climate.”

For the first time since the Professional Development School District formed in 2011, two professors-in-residence are faculty in the School of Social Work. Jennifer Elkins and Michael Robinson, both associate professors, are working as a district-wide team to support the district’s School Social Work Department. Together with Dawn Meyers, associate superintendent of policy and school support services, and Chrystal Gillis, director of social work, they are leading professional learning for school social workers related to race, equity, other sociocultural dimensions and trauma informed care to build their capacity to lead social justice initiatives in schools.

School of Social Work dean Anna Scheyett is very excited about the new collaboration. “So often, children struggle with issues outside of the classroom that interfere with their learning—issues like trauma, poverty, parental conflict—that can be targets of social work intervention. Having Dr. Elkins and Dr. Robinson working with the school district gives us the opportunity to enrich the district’s capacity to address these issues through training, consultation and research,” she said.

The opportunity to work with the school district gives the faculty members a unique perspective. “School social workers are an integral and unique part of the fabric of our community,” said Elkins. “I am excited to be collaborating with the school social work team this year to facilitate their ability to enhance the well-being of students, families and schools where they are embedded.”

### Continuing their work

Five of the eight professors-in-residence are continuing work begun in prior years. In addition to supporting College of Education teacher candidates through supervision and/or teaching on-site courses, these faculty members are involved in activities that support district goals.

**Lou Tolosa-Casadont**, clinical associate professor in the department of language and literacy education, continues to provide support for the dual-language immersion program at Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary for a third year. The school now has Spanish-English classrooms at the Pre-K, kindergarten, first- and second-grade levels.

In her eighth year as a professor-in-residence at Fowler Drive Elementary School, Beth Tolley, clinical associate professor in the department of educational theory and practice, has started a new program called Fowler University. All fourth- and fifth-grade students have the opportunity to attend her UGA early childhood education course that is taught on-site at the school. The Fowler Drive students learn about the structure of college classes, engage in discussion and notetaking, and interact with Tolley’s UGA students.

**Amy Murphy**, clinical assistant professor in the department of educational theory and practice, is in her second year as PIR at Clarke Middle School. She supports culturally responsive classroom management in teachers’ classrooms and facilitates a professional learning community on the topic.

In her second year as a district-wide professor-in-residence for secondary social studies, Sonia Janis, clinical associate professor in the department of educational theory and practice, works with school district administrators Laura Ambrose, K-8 social studies instructional coach, and Glenda Huff, high school curriculum coordinator, to support secondary social studies teachers. Janis participates in teacher collaborative planning meetings, co-writes curriculum and facilitates professional learning related to social studies standards.

**Richard Welsh**, assistant professor in the department of lifelong learning, administration, and policy, is in his second year as a district-wide professor-in-residence with a focus on educational policy, equity and school discipline. He continues his research study that uses a systems approach to examine how student mobility, school climate and students’, teachers’ and school leaders’ characteristics contribute to rates and disparities in disciplinary outcomes.

Professors-in-residence work either 25 percent or 50 percent of their time in school or district-based settings, depending on each individual’s scope of work. Since 2009, 19 College of Education and School of Social Work faculty have served in this role.
Camp DIVE (Discover, Inquire, Voice and Explore), a summer program designed to reduce summer learning loss, served 75 Clarke County School District students for a third summer this past June at Clarke Middle School. The program, a partnership among the UGA College of Education, Clarke County School District and the Athens-Clarke County community, continued to provide enriching, hands-on learning experiences for campers as well as new leadership and arts-based opportunities.

Co-director Ashlee Perry, a counselor at Clarke Central High School and a College of Education doctoral student, initiated a new internship program for students who had aged out of the camp. Under her supervision, four rising ninth-graders served as junior counselors, gaining work-based learning skills and experience with young children.

Kevin Burke, faculty in the department of language and literacy education, said he appreciated this new component. “The most intriguing part about the third year of Camp DIVE was getting to observe—and in some small way, work with—former campers who returned in leadership roles,” he said. “These were youth who stuck around for an extra summer to provide a learning experience for and mentoring to younger campers. It’s a lovely model for building youth leadership capacity, and it’s also a great example of the ways in which youth share empathy in a school setting.”

Also new this past summer was a “Festival of the Arts” component that gave campers more fine arts-based experiences, including dance, visual arts, drama and musical theater. Campers performed for their parents on the last day of camp. As part of the celebration, 200 people enjoyed a lunch donated by local restaurants.

First- and second-grade campers paint a mural during the “Festival of the Arts” component of Camp DIVE in June.

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