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A Toolkit for Building Strong
District-Teacher Preparation
Program Partnerships

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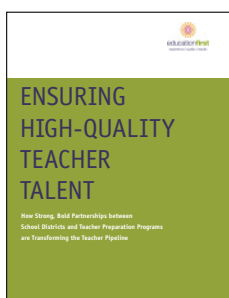


Introduction

It has never been more important—or more challenging—to find effective teachers for every classroom. With rigorous college- and career-ready standards, an increasingly diverse student population and all-too-frequent funding uncertainty, districts and schools require strong educators, especially in high-need subject areas, to support all students to succeed. At the same time, teacher preparation programs must frequently adjust coursework to meet the ever-changing demands of the teaching profession while finding quality student teaching placements for their students.

Districts and teacher preparation programs need not face these challenges alone. **Across the country, districts and teacher preparation programs are coming together to build mutually beneficial partnerships that share the responsibility for hiring and retaining effective educators, address teacher workforce needs—and that ultimately improve student achievement and outcomes.** But developing a strong partnership is hard work, requiring significant time, resources and trust from both parties. How can districts and teacher preparation programs get started?

WHY WE BUILT THIS TOOLKIT



In 2016, with the support of the Joyce Foundation, **Education First** released **Ensuring High-Quality Teacher Talent**, which made the case for strong, bold district-teacher preparation partnerships and provided 10 recommendations for building them. The report was favorably

received, and was shared and used widely by districts, teacher preparation programs, states and foundations, among others.

Since the report's release, we've seen partnerships flourish nationwide. States have begun to require and incentivize partnership work. Districts and teacher preparation programs—several of which we have been working closely with—are implementing the recommendations, and funders are investing in

partnership models. And as these partnerships have progressed, partners have shared that they want to learn from one another in new ways.

Thus, in January 2018, we began the process of creating a Toolkit—which would be complementary to the original report—to enable partners to engage even more deeply around this work. We began by conducting interviews with over forty district and teacher preparation leaders, teachers, principals, policymakers and advocates to understand the state of district-teacher preparation partnership in the field. Through these conversations, we identified steps partners could take to implement the recommendations, enabling factors for partnerships, and through the generosity of our interviewees, collected over 50 tools from the field. This Toolkit is the result of that work.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

We created the Toolkit specifically for districts and teacher preparation programs that want to launch new partnerships or partner more effectively with one another. We also believe it can be helpful for funders, nonprofits, states and technical assistance providers interested in supporting partnerships.

If you are interested in using the toolkit to build stronger partnerships in your community, we recommend you start by completing the Self-Assessment Tool. Then dive in to the toolkit itself. The toolkit is organized by the three stages of partnership—Initiation, Implementation and Continuous Improvement—as originally outlined in the 2016 report. For each stage, we share specific steps you can take as well as examples and tools from the field. Additionally, we’ve included a series of case studies highlighting effective partnerships nationwide. Please note that though the stages are laid out in a linear fashion, the real work of partnership is iterative and can often span two or more stages at once.

Partners can find multiple entry points to engage in joint work, but should strive to incorporate all the recommendations in the graphic below.

While we have designed the Toolkit to be a standalone document, we also recommend you read the [original report](#) as well for additional context and framing. We have also created a [website](#), where we’ve included an overview of the Toolkit as well as a searchable database of tools. We will continue to add tools there as they are developed or come to our attention. If you have any suggestions for tools we can include, you can reach us [here](#).

As districts and teacher preparation programs seek to create an educational system that serves all students, we believe partnership work is vital. By working together, partners can ultimately ensure that teachers are prepared to truly provide every student with an excellent education that enables them to succeed in college, career and beyond.

INITIATION STAGE

1. Districts should understand their talent pipeline and discuss these needs with teacher preparation programs
2. Partners should set the initial vision and goals together, with a focus on relationship-building and trust
3. Partners should align on rubrics and key expectations for program graduates
4. Partners should commit to sharing and looking at data together to drive action

IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

5. Partners should jointly select and train mentor teachers and strategically place candidates
6. Partners should ensure coursework matches clinical experiences and district language
7. Partners should communicate and meet frequently
8. Partners should spend more time in schools together

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT STAGE

9. Partners should be open to change, and regularly step back to honestly discuss progress and challenges
10. Partners should ensure that district needs drive shifts in teacher preparation programs’ pipelines, structures and systems

Self-Assessment

District-Teacher Preparation Partnerships

Complete this assessment to reflect on your partnership. For each recommendation and set of activities, please select a rating: (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree)

	RECOMMENDATION	WHAT YOU CAN DO (WE HAVE...)	RATING
INITIATION STAGE	1. We understand our talent pipeline and discuss these needs together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assumed responsibility collecting and analyzing pipeline data ■ Organized data into accessible reports ■ Focused on a few primary partners 	
	2. We have set the initial vision and goals together and built relationships and trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Had honest conversations about where we've been ■ Gotten clear on each other's needs and developed a joint student-centered vision ■ Set (or reset) expectations for work together and goals we'll pursue ■ Built an MOU and revisited it, as appropriate 	
	3. We have aligned on rubrics and key expectations for program graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identified shared rubrics and key expectations for graduates ■ Developed and conducted staff training around rubrics and expectations ■ Considered our non-negotiables and know when to bow out 	
	4. We share and look at data together to drive action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identified what data to collect and shared it ■ Developed a data sharing agreement ■ Built a collaborative research agenda to explore the data 	
IMPLEMENTATION STAGE	5. We jointly select and train mentor teachers and strategically place candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identified criteria for mentor and student teachers together ■ Aggressively recruited and thoughtfully selected mentors and student teachers ■ Built mentor teacher capacity ■ Placed student teachers in high needs schools, when possible, and supported them to succeed 	
	6. We ensure coursework matches clinical experiences and district language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identified and discussed district instructional priorities ■ Redesigned coursework and clinical experiences together ■ Formalized regular conversations about coursework into collaborative learning practices 	
	7. We communicate and meet frequently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identified point people and made "partnership" a formal part of their role ■ Committed to regular, in-person relationship-building ■ Gotten the right people in the room for the task at hand 	
	8. We spend more time in schools together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Started with grounding in shared programmatic expectations ■ Conducted and debriefed well-designed learning walks together ■ Extended invites to and engaged in relevant partner-led events 	
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT STAGE	9. We are open to change and regularly step back to honestly discuss progress and challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Had regular step-back conversations, elevating district voice ■ Learned from others to build a broader perspective ■ Been willing to make the first move 	
	10. We ensure that district needs drive shifts in teacher preparation programs' pipelines, structures and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Listened well and acted on feedback ■ Redefined relevancy and viability in terms of serving districts ■ Considered sustainability 	

Initiation Stage

Initiating a strong, bold partnership, as outlined in [Ensuring High Quality Teacher Talent](#), can pose significant challenges to both districts and teacher preparation programs. Often, a relationship exists, which requires difficult conversations about what is and is not working already. In other cases, leaders at partner organizations are busy and simply getting the right people in the room can be a challenge. In still other cases, stakeholders lack interest to engage in partnership work. Regardless, districts and teacher preparation programs that initiate strong partnerships push past the discomfort and time and resource barriers, understanding that the work will prove beneficial to both organizations, and ultimately lead to positive outcomes for the teachers and students they are serving.





In conversations with partners, several enabling factors surfaced as critical in the **Initiation Stage**:

Strong individual relationships. Where there is a relationship, the potential for partnership abounds. “Relationships are the things that will keep partnership work going, even when the data is not promising, or when you want to challenge a difficult policy,” said Julie Stephenson, Teacher Pipeline Lead at [Lincoln Parish Schools](#). In larger school districts, where there tends to be more turnover in leadership roles, the absence of strong, enduring relationships can pose challenges to the sustainability of partnership work and can require ongoing efforts to build buy-in and connectivity across organizations.

Cross-institutional understanding. When partners understand each other’s strengths and weaknesses, they can accelerate the work. This is made even easier if individuals leading the partnership work have had roles at the other institution. “Boundary spanners who have stood on both sides of a partnership can play a critical role in forging shared vision and expectations,” Peter Fishman, Vice President of Strategy at [Deans for Impact](#), said. In some cases, partners intentionally hire leaders who have experiences in their partner institutions, to build that trust and understanding.

Leveraging good timing. Many partners shared that their work started as the outcome of coinciding factors, such as changes in leadership or in policy, which opened the door to change. “The stars aligned when I joined [University of Tennessee at Chattanooga \(UTC\)](#),” Dr. Renee Murley, Director of the School of Education observed. “We had an interim superintendent, I was an outsider to the community and brought a fresh perspective, and the state department had a grant to build a network of partnerships.” Though these factors are often outside of partners’ control, those we interviewed emphasized the criticality of recognizing and leveraging these moments. For example, in UTC’s case, it was not on the initial invite list for the Tennessee Network for Educator Partnership (which had the goal of fostering partnerships between and among teacher preparation programs and districts to improve teacher effectiveness) but seeing the opportunity, went to the state to ask for funds to participate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Districts should understand their talent pipeline and discuss these needs with teacher preparation programs 
2. Partners should set the initial vision and goals together, with a focus on relationship-building and trust 
3. Partners should align on rubrics and key expectations for program graduates 
4. Partners should commit to sharing and looking at data together to drive action 

VIEW ALL TOOLS IN THE INITIATION STAGE HERE.



Districts should understand their talent pipeline and discuss these needs with teacher preparation programs

From the start, partnerships must be focused on the needs of districts, their teachers and students. To create what many teacher preparation program and district leaders call a “consumer-driven partnership,” partners must examine district data to understand workforce needs, challenges and opportunities but not assign blame.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

■ **Assume responsibility for collecting and analyzing pipeline data.** Districts desiring strong partnerships must start with gathering and analyzing pipeline data centrally. This can be a challenge. Many districts do not capture this information in a consistent, high-quality way. Additionally, district HR departments often lack integrated data systems or reporting tools, which can make collecting and analyzing data a manual and messy process. As a result, “HR departments can operate by ‘this is what it feels like’ versus operating with data,” said Erin Harrell, Recruitment and Field Experience Coordinator at **Hamilton County Schools**. However, many strong district partners, including Hamilton County Schools, have led the charge. As they looked into their data, they learned, to their surprise, that they had a deficit of upper elementary teachers and asked their partner, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, if it could launch a preparation program to train 4th and 5th grade teachers, which they did. **Chicago Public Schools**, for example, hired a **Harvard Strategic Data Fellow** to create **data visualization maps** to share with partners that mapped trends in student teacher placement and hiring, to highlight opportunities and challenges.

Teacher preparation programs must also support and drive this work. For example, Dr. Ken Coll, dean of the **College of Education at University of Nevada, Reno (UNR)** looked closely at local school districts to understand their teacher workforce needs. Together, as outlined in this **op-ed**, they used the data they analyzed to develop long- and short-term solutions—including new

pathways, recruitment efforts, innovative principal training and data sharing agreements—to address those needs.

■ **Organize data into accessible reports.** Once partners take responsibility for collecting and analyzing district data, they must organize it so stakeholders can review and draw necessary conclusions. States can support this work by providing districts with well-organized data reports. For example, the **Louisiana Department of Education** publishes an **annual workforce report** for each region to help districts identify preparation programs that supply a majority of their teachers and for teacher preparation programs to learn how their graduates perform in the district as novices and as veteran teachers. This kind of information can enable districts to advocate for what they need in partnership conversations, particularly if a partner is a major supplier of teachers to the district. “[In our case] almost 75 percent of our teachers go into one district to work. If districts know what to ask for from teacher preparation programs, then they can be more assertive,” Dr. Coll observed.

Step one is to collect and analyze data on your teacher pipeline. Partners can help.

■ **Focus on a few primary partners.** Achieving a strong, bold partnership can be daunting, especially if organizations are trying to deepen relationships across multiple partners. The **Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE)** found greater success when they encouraged districts and educator preparation providers

participating in their state-facilitated community of practice to focus their partnership efforts. “We found that programs needed to get their processes, practices, and procedures right with one partner before engaging with another,” said Susan Jones, Director of Networks and Partnerships at TDOE. In some cases, partners created tiered partnership levels to accommodate needs and address resource limitations. **Austin Peay State University** had 14 partner school districts across two states and realized that they couldn’t engage in rich partnerships with all of

them with the resources they had. “We drew a line on a map around the districts we would work with, focusing on those that were geographically near and went down to six partners. A majority of our student teachers (80 percent) go to one district, Clarksville-Montgomery,” Dr. Lisa Barron, Director of Teacher Education and Partnerships noted. The remaining districts joined the **Center for Rural Education**, which served to sustain their relationship with Austin Peay and meet their individual needs.



Partners should set the initial vision and goals together, with a focus on relationship-building and trust

Once partners have ascertained and understood district needs, they must ensure from the start that the partnership is focused on addressing them. This requires all partners to jointly establish a shared vision and goals for the partnership. Partners must both focus on creating these, but also on building relationships and trust among stakeholders on both sides.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

■ **Have honest conversations about where you've been.** Often, partners aren't starting collaborative work from scratch, but have existing relationships that each organization is looking to transform in some way. In some cases, there is new leadership that has inherited a struggling partnership. It is critical, therefore, that partners have the opportunity to share honestly what has and has not gone well in the past, even in cases when they themselves were not present. When Austin Peay State University (APSU) sought to refresh its partnership with **Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS)** and build a new **partnership agreement** (with the support of the Tennessee Department of Education), it had to create space for difficult conversations. "Dr. Sean Impeartrice [the Chief Academic Officer of CMCSS] was very frank when we first started talking about our partnership.

groundwork for relationship building and trust, which are critical to developing partnerships over time.

■ **Get clear on each other's needs and develop a joint student-centered vision.** In early conversations, strong partners make sure to identify their needs and vision to ensure commonality and alignment across organizations. For example, the Dean of the College of Education at the **University of Texas Rio Grande Valley** and the Superintendent of **Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD)** shared a vision that they would prepare first-year teachers that looked like second-year teachers. In parallel, they also had to discuss what they were not doing. "We had to be clear that we wanted to move away from a 'traditional partnership,' where we give them a list of requirements and ask them to place our student teachers," noted Dr. Alma Rodriguez, Interim Dean of the College of Education and P-16 Integration. **Richland Parish Schools** set similarly high goals with their partners at **TNTP**, creating a **Vision of Excellent Practitioner Teaching** to set the expectation that teacher residents would be indistinguishable from veteran teachers by the end of their first year.

To help partners facilitate this process, the **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** developed a **vision-setting protocol**. The protocol outlines a simple process partners can use to guide their vision-setting conversation and includes several sample vision statements. At the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Dr. Renee Murley regularly re-reads their partnership application for state funding to

Be honest about what has worked—and not worked—in the past. Be clear about your shared vision for the future.

He didn't want it to be 'business as usual,'" said Dr. Lisa Barron, Director of Teacher Education and Partnerships at APSU. "He was ready for a new level of partnership where we could each speak freely about our needs, be assured that the commitment would be sustainable and long-term and that our plans would be mutually beneficial." Having these candid conversations lays the

remind herself of their student-centered vision. “I tell my faculty: When we lose sight of the fact that the children are the most important, then we aren’t producing the kind of teachers we need to produce. Everything has to be student focused. We work backwards from there,” Dr. Murley said.

- **Set (or reset) expectations for how you’ll work together and goals you’ll pursue.** Strong partners discuss expectations and goals for work together upfront, so all parties know what to anticipate. It might feel uncomfortable to get this clear at the start, but these conversations can pay dividends in the long run. When Dr. Ken Coll started as dean at UNR he immediately met with the **Washoe County School District’s** Superintendent, Director of Human Resources and Vice President of Academics, and talked about wants and needs. “I talked about wanting to share data, solving problems on an ongoing basis, meeting monthly and laid out the mutual benefits. They were on board. My lesson learned: Ask for what you want and need, and they might just say yes,” Dr. Coll recollected. By setting expectations upfront, UNR gained the information it needed to set **five-year goals** aligned to district needs and track progress toward them.

- **Build a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and revisit, as appropriate.** Partners differ in their perspectives on MOUs; while some view it as a living document they revisit often, others view the MOU as more of a formality. However, most agree that partnerships must have an MOU and that it must include non-negotiables and expectations for all partners. For example, the **University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP)**, a national center committed to transforming teacher preparation, provides its coalition members with an **MOU template** that includes criteria like teacher candidate videotaping, to ensure K12 partners know upfront that this is a requirement. The **MOU** between the **University of Louisiana at Monroe** and Richland Parish Schools states the responsibilities of the district, the responsibilities of the teacher preparation program and their shared responsibilities. States can help by developing and sharing strong examples or templates. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, for example, provides partners with a sample **Partnership Compact** focused on student teaching that they can use as a starting point.



Honest Conversations for Better Partnerships



“We found we both wanted the same things, but needed to have conversations to work together and jointly benefit.”

– DR. SEAN IMPEARTRICE, CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER, CLARKSVILLE-MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

When Lisa Barron became the Director of Teacher Education and Partnerships at [Austin Peay State University \(APSU\)](#), she knew that APSU had work to do. Though the institution was placing student teachers in an impressive 14 districts across Tennessee and Kentucky, the relationships with those districts were surface-level. The districts and the university weren’t communicating enough about the challenges they were facing and how to improve.

To address this issue, APSU first made the tough decision to prioritize districts that were closest to the university, decreasing the number of partner districts from 14 to six. But it wasn’t enough to just decrease the number—they also needed to strengthen the ones that remained. Building a stronger relationship with [Clarksville-Montgomery County School System \(CMCSS\)](#)—the district in which APSU is located and where most of its student teachers are placed and many are ultimately hired—was of particular importance.

Barron knew that prioritizing honest conversation and feedback was key. So she formed the Education Partnership Advisory Council, a group that includes representatives from APSU and all six districts and meets four times a year. The Council started by performing a SWOT analysis—a structured format in which participants discuss strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats—to encourage honesty and candor. Barron limited APSU staff participation to elevate district voices. She was skeptical that the districts would buy in to such a shift. But all parties relished the chance to be honest about the challenges they were facing.

This newfound transparency has led to real improvements in APSU’s partnerships, particularly with CMCSS. For instance, CMCSS and other districts revealed that they were struggling to hire teachers in high-need areas such as STEM and special education; APSU responded by sharing information

about scholarships and other opportunities available through the university to help the districts build stronger talent pipelines in these subject areas. APSU wanted to ensure that their student teachers had high quality mentors, and CMCSS made a commitment to place all student teachers only with teachers who achieve a four or five on the [TEAM](#) (state teacher evaluation) rubric. The district also worked with APSU to develop joint criteria for mentors. And APSU has incorporated CMCSS curriculum and language—such as Explicit Direct Instruction and classroom management training—into their coursework for pre-service teachers.

Today, the relationship is even stronger. As APSU Dean Dr. Prentice Chandler puts it, “Quality teacher education is the responsibility of colleges of education and local school districts working in tandem with one another. It’s not one or the other. It’s both.” CMCSS has opened up its professional development opportunities to APSU students and regularly leads trainings on APSU’s campus. APSU uses data on new teachers from CMCSS—including [edTPA](#), [TEAM](#) and [Praxis](#) scores—to improve their programming. The language and principles of high quality instruction that CMCSS uses and prioritizes for its teachers starting at induction are incorporated into APSU coursework. APSU and its partner districts are also working together to make their teaching pipelines more diverse through partnerships with organizations such as [Future Teachers of America](#) and the [Nashville Teacher Residency](#).

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [SWOT Analysis Results](#)
- [Sample Advisory Council Agenda](#)
- [APSU/CMCSS Partnership Agreement](#)



Partners should align rubrics and key expectations for program graduates

While some partners stop at high-level vision setting conversations, strong partners delve into the nitty-gritty; i.e., what specific knowledge, skills and mindsets will a graduate from the teacher preparation program have in order to be successful as a first-year teacher (and beyond) in the district? How will these capacities be assessed and what tool(s) will we use? How does this look in each content area and grade? Agreement at these levels, though often complicated, ensures that partners are committed to achieving a shared vision of excellence.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- **Identify shared rubrics and key expectations for graduates.** First, partners must identify and agree upon a set of expectations for program graduates. This can sound easier than it actually is, as changes to teacher excellence frameworks or rubrics on both the district and teacher preparation sides can require complicated approval processes. Additionally, partners may want to land on multiple rubrics that are content-specific and developmental. Thus, partners should start this conversation early and continue to revisit it often. For example, **Texas Tech University (TTU)** adopted the **TAP System Rubric** from the **National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET)** to undergird their revamped model for preparing teachers. The rubric articulates practical standards for instruction, learning environment, designing and planning instruction and teacher responsibilities. As several districts also used TAP or a similar rubric, this provided Texas Tech University and its partner districts with a common language to describe instructional quality.

California State University, Fullerton looks to state standards as well. Their **student teacher observation form** aligns with the **California Teacher Teaching Performance Expectations**. In 2016, **Roosevelt University** also changed its student teacher assessment of success from a faculty-developed rubric to a modified version of the Danielson framework, as recommended by partner districts. The university now uses a **modified version of the Danielson rubric** as their assessment for student teaching.
- **Develop and conduct staff training around rubrics and expectations.** Once partners identify rubrics and expectations, they must ensure a common understanding of them and the fidelity of their use. For example, TTU co-wrote a grant with **Lubbock Independent School District** to implement TAP in five middle schools that the district indicated needed a critical intervention in math instruction. TTU faculty worked with math coaches and other school leadership to practice scoring and norming student teacher observations using TAP, and provided training to them on a multi-step feedback model called the **PoP (pre-conference, observation, post-conference) cycle**. In the case of TTU, “the PoP Cycle is integral to shaping teacher candidates’ teaching competencies, instructional decision-making, and objective self-analysis,” Dr. Scott Ridley, Dean at Texas Tech University noted. California State University, Fullerton adapted the **Mathematics Classroom Observation Protocol for Practices (MCOP2)** as its math observation tool, and led a training for partners to create common language for instructional excellence in mathematics.
- **Know when to bow out.** Though partnership requires significant flexibility, partners must also get clear on what matters most. Jiun Kimm, Analyst at the **Overdeck Family Foundation**, recounts: “It is important to know where alignment matters between partners. For example, in a past role, we created a partnership model that prioritized culturally responsive education; however, certain schools said they weren’t ready for it and that it wasn’t in line with their priorities. We put a stake in the ground, and decided to go our separate ways.”

Shared Vision for Partnership



“You need visionaries, decision-makers and implementers all in the same room, working together, and collaborating at all levels of the organization.”

—TERESA MORALES-YOUNG, TEACHER DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR, FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Effective partnerships often start with a mutual recognition that things need to change. Though [Fresno Unified School District](#) (FUSD) and [Fresno State University](#) (FSU) had been longtime neighbors, they agreed on a crucial point: it was time to build a new team approach to preparing strong teachers and to stop assigning blame.

They began by articulating a clear vision that “every classroom has a highly effective teacher or leader where students thrive.” That vision was paired with the goal to create—together—a clear path and coherent continuum for teacher development. With those fundamentals in place, FUSD and FSU were able to begin building the Fresno Teacher Residency Program (TRP).

But sharing an overall vision wasn’t enough—they also needed to agree on how to get there. And that started with calibrating on and building a shared language around what great classroom instruction looks like. So FUSD and FSU started doing school walkthroughs together once a month. The principal hosting the walkthroughs provided context for the classrooms visited and then district and teacher preparation program leaders observed classrooms. After the walkthroughs, they debriefed, which helped them develop common expectations for novice teachers and think about whether what they had seen had any implication for their preparation programs. Eventually, the partners co-created an observation tool based on state teaching standards, allowing them to use common language and shared expectations for teacher residents.

It hasn’t all been easy, though—there were many difficult discussions, especially around aligning each institution’s expectations for teacher performance. But these have only strengthened the partnership. As Morales-Young puts it,

“We’ve had many hard conversations, but those of us who have been in the work for a while know they were the right ones to have.”

Today, their relationship is stronger than ever. FUSD and FSU engage in quarterly curriculum meetings and walkthroughs. FSU offers some courses at FUSD schools. And FUSD district leaders co-develop and co-teach courses with FSU faculty to ensure that pre-service candidates understand the perspective of staff in the district they have a high-degree of possibility of being hired into. The partners also hold joint interviews for prospective teacher residents, allowing them to further calibrate their expectations, and FSU provides district mentors with rigorous training.

By dedicating themselves to working toward a shared vision, FUSD and FSU have created a strong partnership that is getting stronger. Three hundred residents from the TRP have been placed in FUSD schools, supplying 30 percent of the district’s pipeline needs—and that percentage is growing. Though the work isn’t always easy, the payoff has been unquestionably worth it.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [Partnership Vision & Overview](#)
- [Observation Tool](#)

Resident Interview Tools:

- [Essay](#)
- [Questions](#)
- [Equity Scenarios](#)

Partners should commit to sharing and looking at data together to drive action

By the end of the first stage, partners must make a deep commitment to collecting, sharing and looking at data together. Though this can pose challenges—in some states and organizations, there are very strict policies around data-sharing and -privacy—partners must make the case internally and externally to share data in a structured and regular way. Ultimately, the data will focus partners on the most critical activities to pursue during the implementation stage.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

■ Identify what data to collect and share it.

Districts and teacher preparation programs often have an overabundance of data but struggle to know what data to examine together. Thus, partners should agree early on what specific data is the most critical to collect and share. For example, **Indianapolis Public Schools** learned that sharing data with a partner about all of its graduates collectively was not useful, as each partner university housed a number of disparate teacher education programs. The district agreed to disaggregate data by program (e.g., elementary, secondary math), which helped conversations about improvement become more concrete. In some cases, third parties, such as states, can support thoughtful data sharing. For example, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) develops and shares **human capital data reports** for districts to support conversations between partners. Interestingly, they learned that while districts in their partnership network were using the reports internally, they had not been sharing information with their EPP partners. “You can’t develop SMART goals without having a good understanding of the data and not everyone had an understanding of each other’s data,” Susan Jones, Director of Network and Partnerships at TDOE, said. Subsequently, the TDOE held a webinar for network partners that focused on data sharing and connecting the data to partnership goals and strategies. **Indianapolis Public Schools** developed a set of **teacher preparation program reports** to facilitate data-driven conversations with partners about their graduates and share

unmet pipeline needs. The district shares this data with all local preparation programs at bi-annual partnership meetings.

■ **Develop a data sharing agreement.** Partners unanimously agreed that getting a data-sharing agreement in place was critical to solidifying the partnership and driving toward data-based decision-making. Using a state-provided template, Lincoln Parish Schools built a data agreement with **Louisiana Tech University** and they completed their first bulk data exchange in summer 2017. The success of this MOU has furthered conversations with other potential partners. The UNR also asked its partner, Washoe County School District, to sign a five-year **data-sharing MOU** to obtain teacher evaluation data on all first-, second- and third-year teachers in the district. Starting in 2016, Washoe County School district began sharing K12 student achievement data with the university.

■ **Build a collaborative research agenda to explore the data.** Once data points are identified and the MOU signed, partners must commit to exploring the data together. In many cases, districts can lean on their teacher preparation programs to support data analysis. Teacher preparation program partners “are effective research partners because they have deep analytic capacity. They have people who can use the information that we’re given—sometimes raw data sets—and tease them apart,” noted Julie Stephenson, Talent Pipeline Lead at Lincoln Parish Schools.

Making the Most of Multiple Partnerships



“You have to be willing to communicate and engage until you find that common ground.”

—REBECCA FREELAND, TALENT PIPELINE LEAD, RICHLAND PARISH SCHOOLS

To create a strong talent pipeline in districts in which recruiting educators can be a struggle, district leaders sometimes need to be open to working with multiple partners. Leveraging the strengths of those partners to pursue a common goal can lead to even greater impact.

In **Richland Parish Schools** in Richland, Louisiana, that responsibility belongs to Rebecca Freeland, Talent Pipeline Lead. And through her diligent, thoughtful work, Richland has strengthened its talent pipelines for both traditionally and alternatively certified educators through complementary partnerships with the **University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM)** and TNTP.

Though Richland had partnered with ULM in the past, both knew that there was room for their relationship to grow. To start that process, Freeland went to every school to recruit a pool of mentor teachers and created a “selection experience” where potential mentors could try their hand at giving feedback and learn more about the mentor teacher role. ULM hired Heather Kennedy as Residency Coordinator to lead more face-to-face contact with the district and drive proactive problem solving. Kennedy began hosting a residency fair in which potential pre-service teachers heard firsthand about the preparation they would receive in Richland and what teaching there is like.

To support their talent pipeline even further, Freeland wanted to bolster Richland’s alternative certification pathways. So she partnered with TNTP, as part of an effort called TeachRichland, to build a suite of high quality pathways to the classroom. Today there are six affordable alternative certification pathways, with Richland and TNTP sharing the load: TNTP provides the bulk of the content for the program, while Richland facilitates pre-service training activities.

But TNTP and ULM do not just work in parallel—Richland has found additional opportunities for it to work with both partners at the same time—and learn from each other in the process. Representatives from the district, ULM and TNTP participate in “learning walks” during which they observe residents in classrooms and use the Instructional Practice Guide Coaching Tool (IPG) developed by Student Achievement Partners to draw conclusions about what they’ve seen in classrooms. Observers then have an opportunity to debrief, with the goal of identifying the one thing that could most improve classroom instruction and—crucially—what the focus of the coaching conversation with the observed teacher should be. Mentor teachers participate in the walkthroughs as well, giving them the opportunity to reflect on how their own practice has contributed to the observed teachers’ performance. This culture of continuous improvement is present throughout: Freeland provides feedback and coaching to the mentor teachers and then those mentors observe TNTP giving feedback to Freeland. They call this multi-layered structure the “onion of support”.

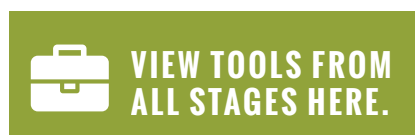
Building and maintaining complementary partnerships can seem intimidating. But when it’s done well, it can help to create strong, sustainable educator pipelines that can improve outcomes for students.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [Richland Parish/ULM MOU](#)
- [Teach Richland Undergraduate Residency Guide](#)
- [Learning Walks: Overview & Orientation; Sample Pre-Work & Schedule](#)

1. Districts should understand their talent pipeline and discuss these needs with teacher preparation programs	
Data Visualization Maps <i>Chicago Public Schools (CPS)</i>	These data visualizations highlight trends in student teacher placement across Chicago. CPS and its partner programs created these maps to help drive strategic changes to the student teacher placement process.
Nevada Teacher Pipeline Op-Ed <i>University of Nevada, Reno</i>	This editorial, published in the <i>Reno Gazette Journal</i> , describes the long- and short-term changes the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno made in response to a state-wide teacher shortage. The university used this editorial to highlight the ways in which it is actively responding to state and district partner needs.
Annual Workforce Report <i>Louisiana Department of Education</i>	This workforce report provides data on teacher certification status, school effectiveness and recruitment and hiring for the Southwest region of Louisiana. The Louisiana Department of Education created this report to help district and teacher preparation partners respond to shortage areas in the teacher pipeline.
2. Partners should set the initial vision and goals together, with a focus on relationship-building and trust	
Primary Partnership Agreement <i>Austin Peay State University (APSU) and Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS)</i>	This primary partnership agreement, built from a state-developed template, outlines joint recruitment, selection and retention strategies and goals, expectations for candidate preparation and the design of clinical experiences. APSU and CMCSS created this agreement to build a more collaborative partnership.
Vision of Excellent Practitioner Teaching and Vision of Excellent Co-Teaching <i>Richland Parish Schools and TNTP</i>	These vision documents outline, in detail, Richland Parish’s vision for practitioner instruction and co-teaching over the course of the school year. Richland Parish and TNTP used these documents to ensure mentor and resident teachers understood expectations for their practice at different points in the school year.
Setting the Vision Protocol <i>Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE)</i>	This vision-setting protocol provides step-by-step instructions for writing a vision statement. MA DESE shared this protocol with partners as a part of a larger state toolkit to support partnership efforts.
College of Education Goals Presentation <i>University of Nevada, Reno</i>	This presentation outlines the 16 program goals for the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno and the rationale for each one. The University of Nevada, Reno set these goals to better meet the needs of its partner districts.
Sample MOU Between University and School District <i>University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP)</i>	This MOU template is a tool for developing shared expectations across partners, including individual and shared obligations. US PREP provided this sample MOU to its coalition members to modify according to their contexts.
Partnership Compact <i>Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE)</i>	This partnership compact lists conditions for a strong student teaching partnership. MA DESE shared this compact with partners as a part of a larger state toolkit to support partnership efforts.
MOU <i>University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM) and Richland Parish Schools</i>	This MOU between the ULM and Richland Parish Schools outlines their joint goals and collective responsibilities. ULM and Richland Parish Schools created the MOU to formalize non-negotiables and expectations for the partnership.
Partnership Agreement <i>Clark University and University Park Campus School (UPCS)</i>	This partnership agreement outlines the mission and commitments of Clark University and UPCS, a school serving grades 7–12. They developed the agreement to create a strong partnership that intentionally blurs the boundaries between the school and the university.

<p>MOU <i>Roosevelt University and Hoover Math and Science Academy</i></p>	<p>This MOU between Roosevelt University and Hoover Math and Science Academy outlines the characteristics of the partnership, how often the partners agreed to meet and when an evaluation of the partnership should occur. They created this MOU to set the terms of the partnership.</p>
<p>MOU <i>University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD)</i></p>	<p>This MOU between UTRGV and HCISD states the responsibilities of both partners and their shared agreements. They created this MOU to set the terms of the partnership.</p>
<p>Alder Co-Teaching Framework <i>Alder Graduate School of Education</i></p>	<p>This framework explains the why, how, pros and cons for eight co-teaching styles that mentors can use with student teachers. Alder GSE uses this to provide co-teachers different ways to work together and for the resident teacher to learn from the mentor teacher.</p>
<p>August Gradual Release Example <i>Alder Graduate School of Education</i></p>	<p>This schedule provides an example monthly calendar of actions mentors and residents can take as residents gradually take on more teaching responsibilities. Alder GSE uses this tool to guide the gradual release of residents from more intense to less intensive supervision.</p>
<p>Fresno Teacher Residency Expectations and Timelines <i>Fresno Unified School District</i></p>	<p>This document outlines how a mentor teacher should gradually release teaching responsibilities to the resident teacher over the first three weeks of the school year. Fresno Unified School District uses this as a recommended timeline to begin building the ability of residents to lead classroom instruction solo.</p>
<p>3. Partners should align on rubrics and key expectations for program graduates</p>	
<p>Clinical Practice Observation Form <i>California State University, Fullerton</i></p>	<p>This clinical practice observation form is a tool to assess student teacher performance. CSU Fullerton created this observation form to align its expectations for student teachers to the state's (CA) teaching performance expectations.</p>
<p>Adopted Mathematics Classroom Observation Protocol for Practices (MCOP2) <i>California State University, Fullerton</i></p>	<p>This is the observation form that CSU Fullerton adopted from MCOP2. CSU Fullerton uses this to measure student engagement in math classrooms.</p>
<p>Modified Danielson Framework Rubric <i>Roosevelt University</i></p>	<p>This rubric is a tool designed to assess student teachers in the domains of planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. Roosevelt University uses this rubric to assess student teachers because of its alignment to the majority of teacher evaluation tools used by Illinois school districts.</p>
<p>POP Cycle Packet <i>US PREP</i></p>	<p>This classroom observation packet provides protocols and templates for pre-observation discussions, lesson delivery observations and post-observation conferences with teacher candidates. US PREP created the packet to facilitate high-quality coaching conversations between those who conduct classroom observations (e.g., site coordinators, mentors) and teacher candidates.</p>
<p>4. Partners should commit to sharing and looking at data together to drive action</p>	
<p>Data Sharing MOU <i>University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and Washoe County School District</i></p>	<p>This MOU states that the district will provide teacher evaluation data to the College of Education at UNR. Washoe County School District and UNR agreed to this data sharing agreement to facilitate evaluation of the UNR teacher preparation program and create a cycle of continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Sample Teacher Preparation Program Report <i>Indianapolis Public Schools</i></p>	<p>This sample report compares demographic, evaluation and placement trends between a teacher preparation program's graduates and a district's teacher population as a whole. Indianapolis Public Schools created this report to facilitate conversations with its teacher preparation partners about strengths, areas for growth and workforce needs.</p>



Implementation Stage

Partners must choose to work together on something that matters to both of them. Often this can be the clinical experience of mentor and student teachers, as this is an intersection point between districts and teacher preparation programs, but it doesn't have to stop there. This joint "project" work can often lead to building stronger relationships and greater alignment. "One of the best ways to form partnerships is to work on projects together and develop strategic goals together. Getting people to work together changes behavior; if you change behavior, then attitude follows," said Susan Jones, Director of Networks and Partnerships at the Tennessee Department of Education.

In conversations with partners, several enabling factors surfaced as critical in the **Implementation Stage**:





Develop spirit of generosity on both sides. Partnership work is complicated and each partner must take steps to support the other. This can include supporting implementation of action items, committing to making changes, or traveling to meet partners at their sites. Even asking the question, "How can we better serve your needs?" can be groundbreaking. "I've been struck by the look I get when I say I want to build a program around your needs and the talent you have. People are surprised that this is where I'm coming from. I don't know how I can have an effective educator preparation program that isn't around the needs of the district," Dr. Tom Philion, Dean at Roosevelt University's College of Education said.

Roll up your sleeves on something that matters. Partners must choose to work together on something that matters to each of them. Often this can be the clinical experience of mentor and student teachers, but it doesn't have to stop there. A joint project improving the clinical experience can often lead to building partnerships and relationships in other areas. "One of the best ways to form partnerships is to work on projects together. Getting people to work together changes attitudes; if you change behavior, then attitude follows," said Susan Jones of the Tennessee Department of Education.

Don't underestimate the value of logistics. Leaders at partner institutions are busy, and to help create and sustain engagement, those driving the partnership work must ensure that they create time and space for the work. Having a designated (or third party) facilitator, getting meetings on people's calendars early, circulating agendas and revising agendas based on feedback are critical to ensuring partner meetings are valuable and to making participants feel as though it was worth their time.

Engage in strategic communications. While partners are engaging in implementation, they must not forget to keep stakeholders in the loop. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley intentionally holds events focused on partnerships, including advisory committee meetings with district and community partners and regular superintendent breakfasts to discuss specific initiatives, all on top of individual meetings with partners. Partners can also invite key stakeholders to existing events. Roosevelt University participates in a network of local deans and issues invitations for monthly meetings to Chicago Public Schools (its largest local partner) and the state board, with each organization participating in alternative months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Partners should jointly select and train mentor teachers and strategically place candidates 
- Partners should ensure coursework matches clinical experiences and district language 
- Partners should communicate and meet frequently 
- Partners should spend more time in schools together 

[VIEW ALL TOOLS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE HERE.](#)



Partners should jointly select and train mentor teachers and strategically place candidates

Mentor teacher quality and student teacher placement are critical to the clinical experience. Strong partners work together to identify what mentor teachers need to be successful and are intentional about selecting the right people to fill those roles. They also thoughtfully build mentor teacher capacity, through professional development activities and leadership opportunities and place student teachers with intentionality.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

■ **Identify criteria for mentor and student teachers together.** Strong partners know that strengthening the student teaching experience can be a critical place to start, as it impacts both pipeline for districts and the coursework teacher preparation programs offer. To improve the quality of the student teaching experience, Indianapolis Public Schools formed the **Student Teacher Advisory Committee (STAC)** with five teacher preparation program partners. The STAC, which met four times in the 17–18 school year, clarified the **role, competencies and expectations for Clinical Preparation Teacher Leaders (CPTLs)**, the district’s title for mentor teachers. It also built a rigorous screening and interview process for CPTLs.

Like Indianapolis Public Schools and its partners, other district-teacher preparation program partnerships must have several conversations to identify standards for mentor teacher selection. “I felt comfortable to push back, for example, when one university required a masters’ degree for mentor teachers, as a lot of my great teachers don’t have masters’ degrees. I felt really heard, and they worked with us to make sure we didn’t knock out good talent,” Rebecca Freeland, Talent Pipeline Lead at Richland Parish Schools said.

During their time in the Massachusetts Student Teaching Partnership Consortium, **Boston University** and **Boston Public Schools** created **supervising practitioner (mentor) selection criteria**. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley also worked closely with its partner, Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District, to create a **clinical teaching program handbook**,

which details the expectations and selection and assessment criteria for the resident and mentor teachers.

■ **Aggressively recruit (and thoughtfully select) mentors and student teachers.** To get the right mentors, partners (often with districts taking the lead) must aggressively recruit them to the role. At Richland Parish Schools, Rebecca Freeland developed a **mentor teacher job description** and visited every school in the district to identify teachers who could meet the criteria to build a pool of candidates. After mentors completed a **mentor teacher application**, they attended a **selection experience**, also attended by staff from the University of Louisiana-Monroe and learned about the “day to day” work of a mentor and rehearsed engaging in feedback conversations.

Collaborate on all steps—setting standards, recruiting mentor teachers, building their expertise, and placing and supporting them.

Districts that can effectively recruit and select high quality mentors can build tremendous trust with their teacher preparation partner. “Erin’s [Hamilton County Schools] team works hard to identify the best mentor teachers; we know that when our student teachers go into the field, they have the best of the best,” said Dr. Renee Murley at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Teacher preparation partners can also help district partners recruit student teachers and residents. For example, the University of

Louisiana-Monroe launched a “residency fair,” during which Richland Parish Schools and other partner districts recruited residents and teachers. Similarly, **Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU)** holds a residency interview day, which enables student teachers to connect with and select their top district choices for clinical placements. SLU’s five district partners then assess their workforce needs and use this information to confirm placements.

- **Build mentor teacher capacity.** Once partners have selected mentor teachers, they must build their leadership and mentoring skills. **Minneapolis Public Schools’** Teacher Development Team designed a **mentor teacher survey** to understand whether their mentor teachers felt valued and supported, the challenges they faced and what the district could do to elevate the role to a position of greater prominence. They also shared titles and descriptions for trainings they wanted to roll out to mentor teachers and received valuable feedback on which ones mentors would find most helpful.

Richland Parish Schools, along with one of its partners, TNTP, built a **residency handbook**, which includes guidance on coaching adults, having difficult conversations, conducting observations, collecting data, setting goals and more. **Salem-Keizer School District** holds a **clinical teacher academy** every summer for mentors. The week-long academy includes sessions on building trust, providing meaningful feedback and having challenging conversations. The **Louisiana Department of Education** shared **Mentor Teacher Recruitment and Training Guidance** for partners to select and train mentors at various points in the school year. And, as teachers get more seasoned, partners should work creatively to keep them engaged and increase their skills. For example, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) offers three-year placements to three master teachers from the Washoe County School District to teach

methods and practicum courses to student teachers. The mentor teachers take a sabbatical from the district and are paid by UNR.

- **Place student teachers in high needs schools, when possible, and provide supports to ensure their success.** Partners must intentionally place student teachers in high needs schools, as these are often the schools new teachers are hired into. However, partners must also ensure that these schools provide a strong clinical experience and must commit to providing the support needed to help student and mentor teachers succeed.

Denver Public Schools (DPS) is leading a multi-pronged approach along these lines—one initiative is the launch of **Teaching Academies** at seven school sites. These schools, selected by recommendation and interviews, have a record of student achievement and serve a highly impacted population of students. Each Teaching Academy will work with one teacher preparation partner so that principals can engage deeply with a single institution. DPS based the selection of the partner on the role teacher candidates play at each academy—associate teacher, student teacher or resident.

To support Teaching Academies, the central office is facilitating **year-long professional learning for mentor teachers**, sharing **guidance with principals on Teaching Academy design** and providing co-funding to schools for pre-service roles. For example, to support a partnership with **Relay Graduate School of Education**, the district is offsetting 50 percent of the cost to schools for resident salaries. “Our goal is to have more teachers having pre-service experiences at high needs schools. Ideally, they will then be prepared to teach at any high needs school in the district,” Sarah Almy, Executive Director of Talent Management said.

Collaboration, Not Competition



“I don’t know how I can have an effective educator preparation program that isn’t built around the needs of districts.”

—DR. TOM PHILION, DEAN, ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Though different teacher preparation programs may have similar missions, there is a sense in which they must also compete—for students, grants and student teaching slots in districts. But when programs eschew competition to share best practices and work together to improve their programming, they can better support their students and district partners.

Dr. Tom Philion of [Roosevelt University](#) has taken this principle to heart. By working with other deans of teacher preparation programs, he has been able to gain valuable insights about how to improve Roosevelt’s offerings and better support districts, particularly [Chicago Public Schools \(CPS\)](#).

There are many colleges and universities in Chicagoland area—creating an ideal environment for collaboration across institutions of higher education. To facilitate this collaboration, the Council of Chicago Area Deans for Education (CCADE), a group of leaders from teacher preparation programs in the region, was formed. The group, which is chaired by Philion, meets monthly to discuss various issues in education and share best practices. One priority of CCADE is to engage directly with key stakeholders—in fact, they invite either CPS or state policy officials to each of their monthly meetings.

This effort goes both ways—CPS has also been proactive in working with deans. Through the district’s TeachChicago initiative, it has begun to bring deans together from local universities, including Roosevelt, in both formal and informal settings, to share data, give feedback and problem solve.

Now, deans are engaged in facilitating four work groups on four distinct topics: new teacher supports, clinical experiences, diverse pipelines and SEL and trauma informed practices. This allows all parties to learn from each other to improve their work.

The partnership has resulted in concrete, positive changes in partner programming. For instance, CPS identified its need for more secondary science teachers certified in multiple subject areas to help students meet state graduation requirements. Roosevelt responded by encouraging its students participating in the Robert Noyce Teacher scholarship program to take courses in multiple scientific disciplines. CPS student teachers were struggling to pass the state teacher certification exam; Roosevelt began offering test preparation courses. Roosevelt also switched to using a modified version of the Danielson rubric to assess student teachers, based on feedback from partner districts. Ultimately, with collaboration at the heart of their work, both Roosevelt and CPS have built the foundation for strong learning experiences for teachers and for students.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [Sample Roosevelt/CPS Data Request](#)
- [Modified Danielson Rubric](#)
- [CCADE Mission](#)

Partners should ensure coursework matches clinical experiences and district language

For a student teacher to have a coherent preparation experience, coursework and the clinical experience must be aligned to and map onto district language and priorities, so that new teachers can be classroom ready on their first day. Strong partners surface district priorities and take the time to sit down and align coursework and clinical experiences at regular intervals.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- **Identify and discuss district instructional priorities.** First, partners must identify the priorities of the district to then make critical coursework changes. For example, when Hamilton County Schools adopted guided reading strategies for its literacy program, its partner—University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC)—began to teach that same model in their classrooms. Furthermore, UTC faculty participated in district literacy-focused professional development and started taking teacher candidates into the field to observe implementation of guided reading. To make room for these district priorities, UTC has eliminated courses that were less relevant, hired district staff to serve as adjunct faculty and submitted over 40 curriculum changes over the last year for review. As a result, district principals have been quick to hire UTC graduates because they are trained so rigorously in the literacy curriculum.
- **Redesign coursework and clinical experiences together.** Partners must then engage in the complex work of re-designing coursework, often quite substantially, to align with clinical experience and with district needs. For example, to design what is now called the **STEP UP program**, a team of administrators and faculty from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District met monthly over the course of a semester. They formed design teams to research and identify successful clinically-based program elements, align them with the missions of the college and district and refresh coursework (see [sample clinical internship syllabus](#)).

Similarly, after an honest conversation between the Washoe County School District and the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) about the need for higher quality teacher preparation, especially in math and science, they decided to roll up their sleeves together. The two organizations applied for (and won) grant funding to build **NevadaTeach**, a program that allows students to earn a dual degree in secondary education and one of many STEM majors at UNR. The pipeline more than doubled the number of math and science graduates, and helped the district address a shortage area. The district also runs a library on the UNR campus stocked with current instructional resources, so students can familiarize themselves with district curriculum and faculty can structure assignments around them.

Align coursework and the clinical experience to the district's language and priorities, so that new teachers can be classroom ready on their first day.

Lincoln Parish Schools and its partners, as another example, decided to use **Teacher Preparation Inspectorate-United States' (TPI-US) Inspection Framework**, as it is a significant part (50 percent) of Louisiana's new teacher preparation quality rating system, to drive design. "We pull it out at governance meetings, talk about core focus areas and use it to develop content and processes. Aligning at that level in terms of

program quality has been really helpful,” said Julie Stephenson, Teacher Pipeline Lead at Lincoln Parish Schools.

- **Formalize regular conversations about coursework into collaborative learning practices.** As priorities continue to change in districts, partners must ensure they are consistently adjusting and learning from one another. US PREP is in the process of developing a transformational developmental framework for all of its teacher preparation sites to align teacher preparation with K12 curricular reform. It also encourages teacher preparation programs to make coursework alignment a part of regular meetings and conversation. “We encourage and support our clients having those conversations. For example, if you’re using EngageNY in your K12 schools, where do we plug that into our methods classes so that our kids are coming out ready to work in your schools?” Michelle Franco-Westacott, Regional Transformation Specialist at US PREP asked. At **Alder Graduate School of Education**, Dean Nate Monley organizes a

syllabus review for each faculty member to discuss their plans for each course in advance with other faculty and administrators at Alder GSE. Each year faculty and administrators identify a short list of questions to ask about their syllabi. For example, we have asked, “Where are you emphasizing the Common Core? Where are you focusing on specific content?” Heather Kirkpatrick, President and CEO at Alder GSE shares. “Faculty are very engaged in these conversations and find it intellectually exciting to think through their syllabus with others.” **Clark University** created **Curriculum Teams**, a collaborative learning practice between **Worcester Public Schools** teachers, many of whom are Clark graduates, and Clark faculty members. Teams meet once or twice a month, are co-led by a faculty member and a teacher and meetings focus on defining what strong learning looks like in different content areas. The teams also discuss problems of practice, develop curriculum and lesson plans, evaluate student work and engage in collaborative planning.





Partners should communicate and meet frequently

For partners to build rapport, trust and actually drive change, they must meet regularly. The frequency varies by partner, but typically strong partners meet formally once a month or quarter and have other informal interactions in between meetings. To enable this kind of engagement, partners must identify point people for the partnership, commit to a recurring meeting and be thoughtful about ensuring the right people are in the room.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

■ **Identify point people and make “partnership” a formal part of their role.** Strong partners identify (or hire) point people responsible for implementing the partnership. Point people must possess exceptional relationship-building skills, have interest or experience in the partner organization and have the skills to identify and recruit district and teacher preparation leaders who will engage deeply in discussion about instructional quality. For example, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s **faculty liaison and program coordinator**, Dr. Sandra Musanti, works closely with the district’s head of talent and professional development, organizes student teacher placements and schedules, runs professional development for mentor teachers and conducts classroom observations and debriefs.

Partners can elevate the work of the point person by including “partnerships” formally in their job description or title. When Austin Peay State University hired Dr. Prentice Chandler as dean of the College of Education, he asked faculty member Lisa Barron to take on a new role: Director of Teacher Education and Partnerships. “It was a very deliberate move to include ‘partnerships’ in my title—we wanted to send a clear message that we were prioritizing partnership work,” Dr. Barron said. In some cases, partners jointly design a role that straddles both organizations. As Alder GSE sought to partner with multiple districts, it developed a new full-time Director of Alder Teacher Residency role—one per district partner. Alder GSE embeds the directors in districts, where they lead student teacher seminars and are responsible for coordinating other supports. The directors,

experts in curriculum and instruction and new teacher training, are critical for the preparation program. “One of the biggest opportunities for us as a graduate school of education is to engage in discourse with K12 school systems and understand how that school system is defining ‘excellent new teachers’. [With the residency director role] we pay for the privilege of having someone at the table who can have that conversation with us,” said Heather Kirkpatrick, President and CEO of Alder GSE.

To strengthen and sustain the partnership, identify point people and commit to regular, formal, face-to-face meetings.

■ **Commit to regular, in-person relationship building.** Almost universally, strong partners commit building strong relationships among leaders across institutions, usually via monthly or weekly meetings, with informal connection points in between. For example, University of Nevada, Reno’s (UNR) College of Education Dean, Associate Dean and Department Chair meet monthly with Washoe County School District’s Director of Human Resources, Executive Associate Superintendent and the Associate Superintendent of Academics. They rotate meeting locations between the university and district and use the time to solve joint problems. “The key is doing all of your work *in relation with others*. Without these monthly meetings, we couldn’t do it,” said Dr. Ken Coll, dean at UNR.

US PREP and its partners have developed a structure for thoughtful, integrated professional relationships called “[governance meetings](#).” [Site Coordinators](#) (each assigned to a partner district) hold these monthly governance meetings (see [sample video here](#)) with each participating district’s principals and assistant principals. During these meetings, while the bulk of the time is spent discussing teacher candidate performance and mentor teacher support, leaders also identify trends and actively discuss other opportunities for the teacher preparation program to meet the needs of a district’s faculty and students. [Program Coaches](#), in turn, support cohorts of 8–10 Site Coordinators to ensure program integrity and to strengthen their practice.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley formed an advisory committee to ensure that leaders meet regularly. Comprised of university, district and community leaders, the committee discusses agendas around topics such as [how to create a strong clinical experience](#) for student teachers and [how to use teacher candidate data](#) to improve the program.

- **Get the right people in the room for the task at hand.** Partners often struggle to get the “right people” in the room but remark that this is critical

to drive decision-making and change. The “right people” include the point people (from districts and teacher preparation programs) who can drive processes from start to finish and staff with decision-making authority who can set vision and direction. “You have to have decision-makers at the table—one of the reasons we’ve seen partnerships dwindle is because from the outset, the team didn’t include the superintendent, assistant superintendent or dean, but just one level lower. I can’t tell you how many times their next step was to go get “sign off,”” said Claire Abbott, Educator Effectiveness Coordinator at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

When appropriate, leaders with specialized content knowledge and the ability to create high quality products must also be included. “If you are engaging in significant work around literacy, not only should there be a district administrator engaged in the conversation, but also you really need a district or school leader who is an expert in literacy,” said Amy Wooten, Vice President of Policy at Deans for Impact. As such, the point people must have the ability to include and engage leadership throughout the partnership implementation process.



Building Together



“Trying to do all or nothing is doomed to fail. We start small, building at the grassroots level, and make sure things are working as they need to.”

—DR. PATRICIA MCHATTON, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, STUDENT SUCCESS AND P16 INTEGRATION, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

A strong partnership between a district and a teacher preparation program should be mutually beneficial: Districts hope to hire talented educators and teacher preparation programs hope to provide rigorous and rewarding experiences for their students. Working together from the beginning to create a program that meets everyone’s needs can build a strong foundation for success.

The STEP UP (Student Teacher Educator Preparation: University Partnership) program, a collaboration between the [University of Texas Rio Grande Valley \(UTRGV\)](#) & [Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District \(HCISD\)](#), is a great example of partnership that spreads benefits across institutions. Starting in spring 2016, a team of administrators and faculty from both organizations began meeting monthly to design a program that would set teaching candidates up for success, while promoting the organizations’ respective missions. They agreed on a simple, yet inspiring vision: that every candidate finishes his or her first year looking like a second-year teacher.

To implement this vision, the team decided to prioritize building a rich clinical experience, including a full year of student teaching, a focus on high-leverage bilingual practices to support ELL students and a demand for processes that would allow candidates to engage in reflection. The program also includes student teacher skill-building in data literacy and evidence-based decision-making to ensure candidates can participate in a culture of inquiry. Mentor teachers also have the opportunity to grow through the program. They receive targeted professional development, participate in district planning and have the option of participating in UTRGV research efforts and serving as adjunct instructors.

This collaboration hasn’t stopped with the program’s launch. UTRGV and HCISD staff meet monthly at school sites with mentor teachers and teacher candidates to discuss their progress and how to improve. During the half-hour mentor teacher meetings, mentors share how teacher candidates have grown and where they are struggling. Then the student teachers share their reflections and receive feedback. To further foster the relationship between student teachers and schools, HCISD allows candidates to apply to be substitute teachers—giving candidates the opportunity to stay in the classroom and earn money through the school year and helping the district ensure all classrooms have a strong leader. There is also open, frequent communication between the organizations. As Dr. Alma D. Rodriguez, Interim Dean of the College of Education and P-16 Integration at UTRGV, puts it, there is a “genuine effort to listen to the school district, take their suggestions and follow their initiatives.”

Though STEP UP is relatively new, early results have been promising. As it grows, it should continue to highlight how ground-up collaboration can lead to success for teachers and students.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [UTRGV/HCISD Affiliation Agreement](#)
- [Sample STEP UP Practicum Syllabus](#)
- [STEP UP Program Coordinator Job Description](#)

Partners should spend more time in schools together

To align expectations and vision, partners must consistently spend time in classrooms to observe, debrief and support mentor and student teachers. The time spent together is invaluable; partners can calibrate their expectations for mentor and student teachers and use observation data to inform professional development topics and targeted support. Partners should also spend time at each other's sites, attending professional development and engaging with leaders and teachers.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- **Start with grounding in shared programmatic expectations.** Though partners may develop a shared vision and goals and even shared expectations for student teachers, they must still take time to establish common expectations for programs prior to spending time in schools. In some cases, this requires developing additional vision documents. When Lincoln Parish Schools found that residents were having different experiences school to school, they set a vision for residency to apply across all partners. The vision, which their partners quickly adopted, helped set expectations for components such as co-teaching, gradual release and other elements of student teaching. Richland Parish and partners TNTP and University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM) review and discuss an [Instructional Rounds Overview](#) with all observers before spending time in schools together. This tool outlines the goal and approach of classroom visits, what was observed in the previous walkthrough including the importance of noting what visitors observed in the previous walkthrough and “look fors” in math and literacy lessons. Before classroom visits, the partners also review their shared observation tool—the [Instructional Practice Guide Coaching Tool \(IPG\)](#), which is open source and developed by [Student Achievement Partners](#).
- **Conduct and debrief well-designed learning walks together.** Once expectations have been set, partners must walk through schools together, making observations, collecting evidence and debriefing what they see. Richland Parish, TNTP and ULM engage in learning walks (see [sample schedule here](#)) that consist of four major steps: first, observing mentor teachers, student teachers and students at work; second, debriefing what they saw; third, identifying one thing that could make the classroom better; and fourth, thinking through what the coaching conversation might look like. Richland Parish often invites mentor teachers to walk shoulder to shoulder with district and teacher preparation leaders on learning walks. “It is powerful to speak that common language with mentor teachers, and in the process, they often realize there are still things that they need to change,” said Rebecca Freeland at Richland Parish.
- **Extend invites to and engage in relevant partner-led events.** While this recommendation is focused on spending time in K12 schools, strong partners also spend time together at teacher preparation program campuses and districts. With partners Austin Peay State University (APSU) and Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS), there is significant reciprocity. Each semester, CMCSS leadership hosts a day of training for student teachers on the [TEAM rubric \(TN\)](#), which is also the rubric APSU uses to assess student teachers. And APSU often invites CMCSS staff to campus as guest speakers. “We want our school district partners to be seen in our buildings, classes and our coursework,” said Lisa Barron at APSU. In return, faculty and student teachers attend CMCSS professional development activities to learn about district priorities and initiatives, so they can be better prepared to incorporate them into their teaching practice.

5. Partners should jointly select and train mentor teachers and strategically place candidates

Clinical Preparation Teacher Leader Job Description <i>Indianapolis Public Schools</i>	<p>This job description for the Clinical Preparation Teacher Leader states the purpose of the role and key responsibilities and qualifications for potential applicants. Indianapolis Public Schools co-developed this description with teacher preparation partners to select strong mentor teachers.</p>
Supervising Practitioner Selection Criteria <i>MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)</i>	<p>This set of criteria lists the characteristics teachers must embody to become strong supervising practitioners (mentor teachers). Boston University and Boston Public Schools created the document to establish a clear set of guidelines to jointly select mentor teachers.</p>
Clinical Teaching Program Handbook <i>University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)</i>	<p>This handbook explains the expectations for the clinical teacher (resident), the cooperating teacher (mentor teacher) and the field supervisor (liaison between the university and the participating schools). UTRGV created the handbook to ensure all staff involved in clinical teaching understand their roles and responsibilities for the teacher-training process.</p>
Mentor Teacher Application <i>Richland Parish and TNTP</i>	<p>This application includes a short answer question, a screening activity and brief reflection. Richland Parish Schools created this application to vet mentor teachers.</p>
Mentor Teacher Training Exercise <i>Richland Parish Schools</i>	<p>This training exercise document contains two scenarios for potential mentor teachers to respond to during their interview process. Richland Parish Schools created the exercise to determine if potential mentor teachers have the skills to observe and provide feedback to teacher candidates.</p>
Cooperating Teachers Survey <i>Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS)</i>	<p>This survey asks cooperating (mentor) teachers whether they feel supported and what recommendations they have for the next year. MPS created this survey to improve ongoing supports they provide cooperating teachers.</p>
Richland Parish Undergraduate Residency Guide <i>Richland Parish Schools and TNTP</i>	<p>This handbook outlines mentor and resident responsibilities and provides guidance to mentors on how to coach adults, have difficult conversations and collect data. Richland Parish Schools and TNTP created the guide to set up-front expectations for all participants in the residency program.</p>
Clinical Teacher Academy, Standards and Selection <i>Salem-Keizer School District</i>	<p>This overview of Salem-Keizer’s five-day Clinical Teacher Academy states the purpose of the academy and establishes training topics. Salem-Keizer created the Clinical Teacher Academy to support efforts to prepare master teachers for their role as a mentor teacher.</p>
Mentor Teacher Recruitment and Training Guidance <i>Louisiana Department of Education</i>	<p>This document is a guide to recruiting, selecting, training and supporting mentor teachers. The Louisiana Department of Education created this guidance to outline the steps a district or teacher preparation program should take when recruiting and supporting mentor teachers.</p>
Playbook for Early Career Teacher Success <i>Denver Public Schools</i>	<p>This playbook identifies the skills, coaching models and coaching resources required to help early career teachers grow. DPS created the playbook to provide coaches with resources they need to support new teachers and define the criteria they need to meet to be ready on day one to support pre-service candidates.</p>
Teaching Academies Overview <i>Denver Public Schools</i>	<p>This document explains that the purpose of the DPS Teaching Academies is to create a higher quality pool of teacher candidates and provide current teachers with leadership opportunities. DPS created this document to provide teacher candidates and prospective teachers with an overview of the pilot program.</p>
Preservice Mentor Syllabus <i>Denver Public Schools</i>	<p>This syllabus provides the vision, objectives and session outlines for mentor teacher training throughout the school year. DPS created the document to map the support it plans to provide mentor teachers as they work with pre-service teachers.</p>
Academy Guide to Large Elementary Schools <i>Denver Public Schools</i>	<p>This guide illustrates the staffing model for a large single-school teaching academy. DPS created the guide to help school leaders at Teaching Academies build new teacher training programs that improve student learning and are cost-effective.</p>

6. Partners should ensure coursework matches clinical experiences and district language

STEP UP Practicum Syllabus <i>University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)</i>	<p>This clinical practicum syllabus establishes the learning outcomes, course objectives, policies and evaluation requirements for resident teachers. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and its partner district created the document as it redesigned coursework and aligned the clinical experience with district needs.</p>
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TPI-US Framework <i>Teacher Preparation Inspectorate US</i>	<p>This teacher preparation inspection framework assesses teacher preparation program quality and provides a common language to describe instructional quality. Lincoln Parish uses this in governance meetings with partners to set common expectations about how the parties should distinguish high quality instruction from instruction that is of lesser quality.</p>
Curriculum Team Guidelines <i>Clark University</i>	<p>These guidelines explain the purpose and expectations for the Clark University and Worcester Public Schools curriculum teams. The partners created these curriculum teams to define what strong learning looks like, discuss problems of practice and evaluate student work.</p>
7. Partners should communicate and meet frequently	
STEP UP Coordinator Description <i>University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)</i>	<p>This job description outlines the vision and responsibilities for the STEP UP Coordinator position, established to drive a strong clinical experience for participating student teachers. UTRGV created the coordinator position to facilitate its partnership with the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District.</p>
Manager Clinical Experiences Job Description <i>Denver Public Schools</i>	<p>This job description lists the required experience, qualifications and responsibilities for the Manager of Clinical Experiences. DPS created this position to cultivate partnerships with Denver's teacher preparation programs, place teacher candidates in the right schools and match teacher candidates with mentor teachers.</p>
Advisory Committee Agendas: March 2017 September 2017 <i>University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)</i>	<p>These agendas demonstrate how the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley provided updates to and facilitated conversation about the clinical experiences of candidates among university, district and community representatives. UTRGV instituted these and other meetings to increase communication between district and university stakeholders.</p>
Partnership Curriculum Meeting Agenda 2.1.18 <i>Fresno Unified School District & CSU Fresno</i>	<p>This meeting agenda lists the members present and topics discussed during FUSD/CSUF partnership meetings. Partners used these meetings to engage in conversations about recruitment strategies, curriculum partnerships and student teacher evaluation.</p>
Governance Meeting Protocol <i>US PREP</i>	<p>This governance meeting protocol describes the purpose of governance meetings, who should attend, how frequently members should meet and topics they should cover. US PREP created the protocol to help district and university partnerships develop deep professional relationships focused on improvement.</p>
Site Coordinator Job Description <i>US PREP</i>	<p>This job description states the qualifications, goals and duties of the Site Coordinator, a critical role US PREP partner universities leverage to drive district partnership. US PREP created the job description to help its partner universities recruit for this role.</p>
Sample Video of a Governance Meeting <i>US PREP</i>	<p>This is a sample video of a governance meeting between a university and its partner district. US PREP created this exemplar to help its partner universities plan and execute their own governance meetings.</p>
Site Coordinator Coach Job Description <i>US PREP</i>	<p>The job description states the qualifications, goals and duties of the Site Coordinator Coach, a critical role US PREP leverages to mentor and coach 8–10 site coordinators. US PREP's partner universities created the Site Coordinator Coach position to strengthen their coordination at the site level.</p>
8. Partners should spend more time in schools together	
Learning Walk Schedule <i>Richland Parish Schools and TNTP</i>	<p>This schedule details the dates, times and locations of TNTP's learning walks with Richland Parish Schools. TNTP and Richland Parish Schools conduct learning walks to observe and debrief the classroom instruction of pre-service teachers participating in the district's residency program and to consider changes to improve it.</p>
Teacher Rounds Tools Overview Presentation <i>Richland Parish and TNTP</i>	<p>This tool provides participants in "teaching rounds" or "learning walks" with an explanation of what they will look for in math and literacy classrooms. Richland Parish Schools and TNTP created the tool to set expectations for classroom observations.</p>



Continuous Improvement Stage

Technically, partners reach the continuous improvement stage once they have begun to implement key changes, but partners must engage in continuous improvement practices throughout their work together. This section of the *Toolkit* depicts what a flourishing relationship between partners looks like at this stage, and emphasizes listening, willingness to change and grow and keeping students at the center of the work.




In conversations with partners, several enabling factors surfaced as critical in the **Continuous Improvement Stage**:

Don't lose sight of students. Partners must continue to keep students at the center of their work together. "You can't lose sight of what you're supposed to be doing, and who you are working for," Dr. Renee Murley at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga said. This focus creates urgency among partners. "We always find a way. We know if we wait to get the money, then nothing will happen and we have generations of kids left in the lurch," said Dr. Patricia McHatton, former dean and now Executive VP for Academic Affairs, Student Success and P16 Integration at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Take risks. Partnership work can be risky, as partners have to make changes that may be unpopular. Leaders, especially, must be willing to make hard choices to make the partnership work. "What is the dean's role—to be a manager or a leader? I would encourage my fellow deans to be a leader, with the understanding that we are going to ruffle a few feathers. You have to be willing to take that on and deal with some discord, but really, what are your options?" Dr. Ken Coll, dean at UNR said.

Aim for long-term systems alignment. In the long run, partnerships thrive when there is deep systems alignment across both organizations and when there is collaboration at multiple organizational levels. The more partner organizations are integrated, the less partnerships depend on a few strong personalities or willing leaders and can thrive in the face of transition or change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Partners should be open to change and regularly step back to honestly discuss progress and challenges  
10. Partners should ensure that district needs drive shifts in teacher preparation programs' pipelines, structures and systems 

VIEW ALL TOOLS IN THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT STAGE HERE.



Partners should be open to change and regularly step back to honestly discuss progress and challenges

Partners must build a mindset of continuous improvement. Taking time to step back to identify unresolved challenges and areas of progress helps partners build trust and accountability while making adjustments as they move forward. As they do this, partners must keep an open mind and must be willing to make the first move to change.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- **Have regular step-back conversations, elevating district voice.** Partners must commit to regularly stepping back to discuss challenges and opportunities. To make space for these conversations, Austin Peay State University (APSU) developed an advisory council which meets every other month and invited district leadership to join. “We deliberately limited those from APSU involved, because we wanted the primary voices to be from districts,” Dr. Lisa Barron said. They started the **first meeting** with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis (see [their SWOT results here](#)), allowing the district to be “brutally honest” about the strengths and weaknesses of their work together. The SWOT continues to drive topics and agendas for advisory council meetings and each organization prioritizes attendance.
- **Learn from others to build a broader perspective.** To bring new, creative ideas into the partnership, partners must be intentional about looking to see what is happening at the national level and bringing those innovations to their work. At the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, for example, faculty attend conferences, professional development activities and trainings led by Deans for Impact and **TeachingWorks**. They also go on learning tours to see and understand better what is happening at the ground level in schools. Learning opportunities also exist at the state level. For instance, Deans for Impact created the Illinois Educator Preparation Impact Network to foster collaboration between teacher preparation programs and their partner districts. Through data analysis, partnership meetings and multi-day visits, network members identify challenges and create improvement plans to address them.
- **Be willing to make the first move.** Change is difficult for both districts and teacher preparation programs; however, partners must be willing to step up and make the first move to make programs better. For example, at APSU, the SWOT at the first meeting uncovered significant gaps in mentor teacher capacity and training. After discussion, one of the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System directors made a commitment that only teachers with a score of four or five on the **TEAM (TN)** rubric would be allowed to be mentors. Another principal volunteered to design and lead the training for mentor teachers. Similarly, at Lincoln Parish Schools, after a challenge is identified, often the district will bring a draft solution that then the partners can workshop together. “If you start from scratch, it can be really difficult to make substantial progress. We’ve had greater success when someone can draft something as a starting point,” Julie Stephenson, Talent Pipeline Lead suggested.

Deeper School Partnerships for Greater Impact



“We are Clark, and Clark is us.”

—DANIEL ST. LOUIS, PRINCIPAL, UNIVERSITY PARK CAMPUS SCHOOL, WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Many partnerships between districts and teacher preparation programs focus on the system-level work of placing teaching candidates across an entire school district. Those that focus more specifically on a handful of schools benefit greatly.

Worcester Public Schools (WPS) and Clark University have built such a partnership. As opposed to working across the entire district—which has 45 schools and over 25,000 students—over two decades Clark has fostered deep relationships with four of the lowest-income schools in the city and helped to dramatically improve their performance. Today, Clark’s imprint on WPS is undeniable. As Ricci Hall, a former WPS principal whose career started as a Clark undergraduate resident in the district, suggests, “We see Clark as a hand-to-hand partner.”

When the relationship started, the partner schools were struggling. As Tom Del Prete, director of the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice, put it, those schools “weren’t ready-made for teacher preparation.” So they started the way many successful partnerships do: by prioritizing relationships. One teacher in each school served as a teacher leader and liaison for the partnership and then worked with their colleagues and Clark faculty to customize key elements of the student teaching experience for the school. Today teachers have the opportunity to lead on-site seminars to discuss best practices and reflect on challenges; there are also regular “teacher rounds” for mentor and student teachers to learn collaboratively in classrooms.

Clark and WPS even opened a school together. University Park Campus School, which serves 232 students from grades 7–12 and is down the street from Clark, is ranked first among urban schools serving low-income students on state-mandated English

and math graduation exams and in the top quartile of all high schools in the state. UPCS seeks to “make the university part of the curriculum.” Students use Clark’s gym spaces, fields and libraries and even have the opportunity to attend classes. The approach is working: Over 95 percent of graduates from University Park’s first four graduating classes have gone on to college and nearly all are first generation college attendees.

Teachers in partner schools receive five tuition-free courses at Clark to continue their education and students from the neighborhood who qualify receive full tuition to attend Clark after graduation.

Today the relationship is getting stronger. Teams of teachers and Clark faculty come together at least monthly as “curriculum teams” to support the development of strong instructional practices, incubate ideas and collaboratively problem-solve. WPS is even involved in the hiring of education faculty at Clark. Their partnership shows what is possible when universities and districts focus their efforts to ensure students succeed.

You can learn more about this partnership in the book *Partnership and Powerful Teacher Education: Success and Challenge in an Urban Model*, to be published by Routledge in 2019.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [“Teacher Rounds” Overview](#)
- [UPCS/Clark Partnership Agreement](#)
- [Curriculum Team Guidelines](#)

Partners should ensure that district needs drive shifts in teacher preparation programs' pipelines, structures and systems

Ultimately, partnership work is in service of teachers and students and strong partners recognize this fact as they identify changes to make. To keep the focus on students and teachers, teacher preparation programs must adopt an attitude of service, listening well to district needs and taking strategic action whenever possible. Districts, too, must be open to feedback from teacher preparation program partners and make changes to strengthen the pipeline.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

■ **Listen well and act on feedback.** Partners must take the time to listen to one another, especially at the start of every new effort. “We find that the bulk of our partnerships require a lot of information gathering on the front end so we can align with partner systems and structures. Ultimately, we want to feel like a part of the district, so it doesn’t feel like an outside entity assigning extra work,” said Elizabeth Suarez, Project Director at TNTP. Partners must also consistently ask for feedback on how they are doing and what they can change and commit to taking action on. Hamilton County Schools (HCS), for example, consistently asks its partner—the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC)—what best practices other districts are implementing to build their talent pipeline. When UTC identified that other districts were offering its graduates early contracts, HCS designed and implemented an early contract system as well. UTC also invites feedback from HCS; when UTC is hiring for a new position, especially in a role that works closely with the district, it invites district staff to sit on search committees. Additionally, UTC has built a K5 licensure program, added an ESL focus and co-written a grant to develop an Early Childhood Education and K12 pathway for high schoolers who want to be teachers in high needs settings—all in response to district need. Recently, hearing HCS’s need for more diverse teachers, UTC posted a [job description](#) for a recruiter specifically to source a diverse student teacher pool.

■ **Redefine relevancy and viability in terms of serving districts.** While both partners will have to change, much of the onus is on teacher preparation programs to make the adjustments necessary for a partnership to take a student- and teacher-centered approach. This can take some hard conversations at the faculty level. At the University of Nevada, Reno’s College of Education, Dr. Ken Coll started by laying out the facts to his faculty. “The districts are clear—we are not meeting their needs nearly enough. If we don’t take that on, we are maintaining a curriculum that is not dynamic and not relevant. Our employers



(districts) need to be satisfied,” he recalls telling his faculty. Though he did not get buy-in from all faculty, he moved forward with the few and started building momentum for change. Dr. Patricia McHatton at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley shared a similar sentiment—districts must be seen as a valued consumer. “We don’t have one size fits all for all of our district

partners; instead we try to work with each district and determine how can we be most responsive to their needs and goals,” she said.

- **Consider sustainability.** For partners to continue serving the needs of districts, they must consider how to sustain their work for the long term. When CSU Bakersfield and Bakersfield City School District successfully built the **Kern Urban Teacher Residency (KUTR)**, they knew that they needed to sustain the work after initial grant funding ran out. First, the partners completed a cost-benefit analysis, showing that every non-highly qualified

teacher that did not return to the district after their first year cost the district \$70,000. “We wanted to show that if the district invested in the front end, by getting highly qualified candidates who would stay, that would just make more sense,” said Brandon Ware, coordinator of the KUTR. The result of the cost-benefit analysis was significant buy-in that allowed the district to include funding for the KUTR in its **Local Control Accountability Plan**. With these funds, the district is able to cover tuition for residents and monthly stipends for mentors (nearly \$17,500 per resident) with dollars from its own budget.



Continuous Improvement Stage

9. Partners should be open to change and regularly step back to honestly discuss progress and challenges

<p>Partnership Advisory Council Agenda 9.21.17 <i>Austin Peay State University</i></p>	<p>This agenda outlines discussion items for the first of many Advisory Council quarterly meetings. It includes a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) discussion that the partners undertook.</p>
<p>SWOT Analysis <i>Austin Peay State University</i></p>	<p>This SWOT analysis lists the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for both the university and its partner districts. Austin Peay State University used this SWOT analysis to identify topics for future advisory council meetings.</p>
<p>Building Blocks Diagnostic Tool <i>Deans for Impact</i></p>	<p>This diagnostic tool outlines what it takes for preparation programs to produce teachers who “are good on day one and on path to be great over time.” Deans for Impact created the tool to help preparation programs determine where they are on a scale of implementation for four key elements of teacher preparation: modeling, practice, feedback and alignment.</p>

10. Partners should ensure that district needs drive shifts in teacher preparation programs' pipelines, structures and systems

<p>Recruiter/Advisor Job Description <i>University of Tennessee at Chattanooga</i></p>	<p>This job description for the Recruiter/Advisor at the UT Chattanooga School of Education established the qualifications and job requirements for the position. UTC created this position both to increase the diversity of its pre-service teachers and produce more candidates eligible for high-needs endorsements.</p>
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VIEW TOOLS FROM ALL STAGES HERE.

How States Can Support Strong Partnerships

Though much of the work to create and sustain strong partnerships happens at the district and teacher preparation program level, there are many ways states can support stronger partnerships.

Develop a point of view on the state’s objectives for and role in initiating, implementing and sustaining partnerships. The state role in fostering district-teacher preparation partnerships can take many forms. Clarifying and articulating what that role is, including developing a theory of action, can help to keep state efforts aligned while communicating available supports to school districts and educator preparation programs (EPPs). For example, in October 2017, the **Illinois** Governor’s Office brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to write **Improving Teacher Preparation Policy and Programs**, a report outlining the state’s vision for teacher preparation and recommendations for recruitment, training and pathways into teaching. The report recommends that the state should “promote district/EPP partnerships across the state through data

sharing and hosting a convening of district leaders and EPP deans to share best practices on using data to steer these partnerships.”

Provide helpful data to teacher preparation programs and districts. States can most clearly add value to partnerships by providing critical data and context about what is happening in districts across the state. Data on the teacher workforce—including data on the certification status, experience and effectiveness of program graduates—can help districts and teacher preparation programs strategically design their partnerships. **Louisiana** releases an annual **Educator Workforce Report** for the state and each region that contains information on teacher certification status and effectiveness by school, subject area and student demographics. It also has information on how many teachers were hired and how they received their certification.

Develop systems of accountability to drive strong partnerships. Creating a partnership isn’t enough. States can help to improve the quality of partnerships



by setting clear expectations and/or developing accountability mechanisms for teacher preparation programs so they can define success and identify areas for improvement. A number of states—including **Louisiana, Tennessee** and **Massachusetts**—include partnerships as a review criterion for accrediting teacher preparation programs. **Connecticut** created the **Education Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC)**, which consists of State Board of Education officials, leaders of universities and alternative preparation programs, district leaders, state legislators and other community stakeholders. EPAC provides recommendations to the state board of education about how it should approve and oversee educator preparation programs. **Tennessee** produces an **annual report card** for teacher preparation programs that includes data on teacher placement rates and effectiveness, and **Massachusetts** built a Student Teaching Partnership Consortium of three district-teacher preparation partnerships to provide technical assistance and a venue for sharing best practices.

Collect, develop and disseminate tools statewide, and highlight strong examples. One of the simplest ways states can support strong partnerships is by highlighting and sharing best practices and tools partnerships have produced. Disseminating the tools, such as the ones we have enumerated in this toolkit, can help both districts and teacher preparation programs begin the work without having to start from scratch. **Massachusetts** created a **toolkit** that outlines the steps districts and education preparation programs should take to form strong partnerships. The toolkit has sample documents for the initiation, implementation, and continuous improvement stages. Examples of these documents include a partner compact, a district pipeline report, a protocol for setting a vision, and a data-sharing agreement. **Louisiana’s Believe and Prepare Toolkit** and Tennessee’s **Partnership Agreement Tools** are also instruments that partnerships can use to advance their efforts.

Encourage partnerships to collaborate and learn from one another. Though all partnerships are different, they face many of the same challenges. States can help partnerships improve by creating structures for teacher preparation programs and districts to work through problems together and apply what they’ve learned. **Tennessee** created a **community of practice** that includes teacher preparation programs and district partners. This formal collaboration and problem-solving structure allows the partnerships to tackle common issues. States can also take other steps to make partnering an attractive opportunity. For instance, through **a project** with the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR), Michigan worked to align teacher preparation program and local education agency expectations to lay the groundwork for stronger partnerships.

“The tool that we come back to most frequently is the MOU or agreement that lays out the core tenets of a partnership. We were able to help model a “next generation” version of this tool that really helped to reshape the dynamic between districts and teacher preparation programs.”

—Hannah Dietsch, Assistant Superintendent,
Talent, Louisiana Department of Education



Conclusion

Creating strong district-teacher preparation program partnerships can be difficult, painstaking work. But there is no need to go at it alone. Across the country, districts and teacher preparation programs have thought through challenges, asked tough questions, evaluated data and made smart improvements to build effective, sustainable partnerships. By taking and applying what they've learned and created, interested districts and teacher preparation programs already have a strong foundation for success. We hope this toolkit can help organizations to more effectively partner to prepare educators to provide students with the skills, knowledge and dispositions they will need to succeed in school, careers and life.

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Education First had the pleasure of interviewing many leading partnerships for this report, but we know there are more partners out there doing terrific work. If you and your district or teacher preparation program partner are doing something innovative or have tools to share, please contact Priti Sanghani at psanghani@education-first.com. We would love to hear from you.