



Investing in a High-Quality Teacher Workforce

Lessons From Texas Teacher Preparation Programs

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Executive Summary

Texas has the largest teacher workforce of any U.S. state, with over 375,000 teachers in 2023–24. However, this workforce is characterized by a revolving door of teachers entering and, too often, quickly leaving the profession, with the state having experienced persistent teacher shortages for well over a decade. To address vacancies, many Texas districts have needed to rely on short-term approaches that can ultimately undermine student learning, including the frequent hiring of underqualified or underprepared teachers.

These challenges are not unique to Texas, but they are more pervasive in-state than nationwide. The Texas teacher attrition rate exceeds the national average by over 50%, and a large majority of first-year teachers in Texas enter the profession via either alternative routes that abbreviate coursework and allow the candidate to become teacher of record while still training, or no certification route at all. These accelerated pathways enable classroom vacancies to be filled more quickly, but they are an unsustainable solution to the teacher shortage: Research shows that candidates coming through these pathways leave the profession at much higher rates than candidates prepared with a full complement of coursework and clinical experience. Moreover, students taught by alternatively prepared teachers or uncertified teachers in the state experience substantially smaller achievement gains than students taught by traditionally prepared teachers.

These circumstances warrant a deep look at educator preparation programs (EPPs) that prepare teachers who remain in their positions and help maximize their students' opportunities and outcomes. To this end, this study documents the design, structure, and content of three high-quality EPPs in Texas that offer full-year clinical teaching pathways: the University of Houston (UH), the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), and the University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). The study aims to illuminate replicable practices for other EPPs. While each of the highlighted programs feature residencies as a model for candidates' clinical experiences, with UTRGV also featuring a yearlong clinical experience called STEP UP, many of the insights shared here apply to EPPs using other preparation models. The study also seeks to inform the ongoing evolution of statewide policies—including Texas's recent statewide investment in teacher residency programs—that support preparation to develop a well-qualified, stable, and diverse workforce able to meet the wide-ranging needs of students from day one on the job.

Common Features Across Educator Preparation Programs

Each of the three programs featured in this report are situated at federally designated minority-serving institutions. They have all purposefully and successfully redesigned their EPPs to provide enriching and cohesive preparation coursework aligned with intensive full-year clinical experiences, in close partnership with local PreK–12 school systems. Each EPP has been implemented at scale, producing between 50 and 500 program completers per year. Program participants and alumni, along with school and district administrators, described the programs' successes in preparing “day-one ready” teachers equipped to deliver rich learning experiences to their students. In service of this outcome, each of the programs do the following:

- **Provide high-quality learning opportunities that scaffold relevant, rigorous coursework and link course content to a full year of intensive, gradual-release clinical practice under the guidance of an experienced mentor teacher.** Each program has undertaken a recent review and restructuring of its coursework. Programs focus on practice-based program design that tightly couples course content, assignments, and assessments with opportunities for teacher candidates to apply their learning. Assessments, formerly assessing what candidates *know*, now evaluate what candidates *can do*.

In some cases, practice-based refers to what UH and UTRGV faculty call “no-harm opportunities,” where candidates initially practice their skills on peers or with instructors, rather than on students; in other instances, candidates practice skills in classroom settings with students, but with scaffolding and support from an experienced teacher or clinical instructor. During the coursework redesign process, each EPP also intentionally sequenced and scaffolded its course content during both the preclinical and clinical years to introduce concepts and skills progressively, gradually adding more layers of complexity.

For candidates’ clinical teaching experience, all three programs offer teacher residencies; UTRGV also offers a yearlong clinical experience called STEP UP. With the expansion of traditional, semester-long student teaching into an entire year of clinical experience, candidates participate in the full scope of a school year—from the first day of school through the last—and participate in teacher planning days, faculty meetings, parent conferences, and other aspects often excluded from semester-long student teaching placements. Candidates are considered co-teachers who are expected to take on responsibilities from day one of their clinical placement. Guided by their work with US PREP, a Texas-based technical assistance provider supporting residency implementation, each EPP provides structures for candidates’ learning, delineating general timelines for candidates’ progression of responsibilities and co-teaching practices throughout the school year. Mentor teachers, purposefully selected and trained for the role, play a key role as candidates’ clinical educators by co-teaching, monitoring candidates’ progression of responsibilities in the classroom, and providing feedback and coaching.

- **Establish the infrastructure to deliver, maintain, and continuously improve upon high-quality preparation, including appropriate staffing and partnerships.** Each program has created specific clinical and administrative roles to coordinate, manage, and monitor program implementation and efficacy. An especially important role is that of the site coordinator (a role common to all US PREP residency transformation sites), who fulfills the responsibilities of traditional university field supervisors—including supervising, coaching, and conducting observations for residents during their clinical experience. Site coordinators also teach resident practicum seminars and courses on teaching methods, regularly collaborate with EPP directors and faculty, train and collaborate with mentor teachers, support residents mentally and emotionally during their clinical year, and facilitate quarterly governance meetings with each partner district. Because site coordinators’ work affects many dimensions of candidates’ experiences, support structures for teacher candidates are well scaffolded and aligned.

Collaborative structures and the strong communication lines they create enable both EPPs and partner districts to de-silo the traditional boundaries between higher education and PreK–12 education. In particular, quarterly governance meetings between the EPP and each partner district—another hallmark of each program—include key players from across the partnership who collaboratively make programmatic decisions based on candidate data from observations and walk-throughs. Shared governance meetings help establish joint buy-in, strengthen EPP–district partnerships, and contribute to program improvement. For example, UTEP and UTRGV shifted the timing of when they required candidates to take certain certification exams in response to district concerns that residents were not completing certification exams in time for the districts to make employment offers to those they wanted to hire after graduation.

Each of the EPPs is thoroughly embedded in its local community and tailors its efforts to the needs of its region's teacher labor market and the priorities of its partner districts. This locally contextualized engagement creates a shared sense that the work the EPP is doing is important for communitywide success and is embedded in community values. Additionally, because each EPP prepares a critical mass of teachers who go on to teach in surrounding districts, the EPPs can make the case that moving the needle on high-quality teacher preparation pays communitywide dividends. Similarly, the well-trained candidates that the EPPs prepare today become tomorrow's mentor teachers and administrators across the region, strengthening local educator career ladders.

In all three EPPs, program improvement is considered a continuous process, with faculty consistently engaging in reflective and collaborative processes to improve the integration of practice-based learning opportunities and to strengthen the clinical experience. Even after the initial redesign and incorporation of a practice-based approach, program faculty have invested time in shared reflection on and iteration of coursework and program structures, revisiting course content and assignments to improve learning opportunities for candidates and examining student data to determine how the programs can better serve their teacher candidates. A hallmark of each EPP's culture of continuous improvement is administrative trust and flexibility.

- **Support candidates—financially and otherwise—to successfully complete their preparation programs and attain certification.** All three programs serve diverse candidate populations who represent a variety of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other background characteristics. Many candidates, too, are the first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution. To support all candidates in successfully completing their degrees and attaining certification, the programs invest in paid residencies, with funding streams varying across partnerships. By offering stipends for resident expenses, the programs aim to offset the need for candidates to work another job while they are completing their clinical experience. Each program also offers a range of additional supports, including around course planning and sequencing; course content tutoring; certification exam preparation; and, in some cases, assistance with certification exam fees.

While these individual components are important to each program's success, so is the strategic and thoughtful way each program weaves them together. The three programs take an intentional approach to ensure that each of these components is part of a coherent system, developed in partnership with local PreK–12 districts and supported by US PREP.

Considerations for Programs, Districts, and States to Strengthen Educator Preparation and Support

The EPPs profiled here represent different regional contexts, student populations, and program redesign timelines, all of which have shaped their preparation program pathways. Despite their differences, this study finds core commonalities in the EPPs' approaches to teacher preparation that unearth considerations for other EPPs, school districts, and state policymakers within and beyond Texas.

Considerations for EPP and District Administrators

Our research suggests that key elements of the profiled programs' success were associated with the following strategies, which other EPPs and district partners can learn from and emulate.

Support the transformation of learning opportunities.

- Create the time, financial and technical assistance resources, and incentives for EPP faculty to engage in course redesign and alignment that integrates practice-based learning experiences.
- Develop a structured framework for progression of candidate responsibilities, paired with field supervisor and mentor teacher training on coaching and feedback, to create a scaffolded and tailored clinical experience.
- Engage with technical assistance providers who are experienced in supporting practice-based course redesign to support coursework transformation.
- Offer additional compensation and adjust job responsibilities for mentor teachers, thereby setting them up for success in the mentor teacher role while creating career ladders for experienced and effective teachers.

Support the development of infrastructure and partnerships.

- Delineate and fund roles for site coordinators or similar personnel who have both coaching and instructional expertise.
- Identify opportunities and sources to recruit site coordinators or similar personnel, such as educators nearing retirement, senior teachers, and instructional leaders.
- Ensure sufficient staffing to maintain a low ratio of teacher candidates to site coordinators, enabling site coordinators to provide frequent, meaningful feedback to each teacher candidate they oversee.
- Establish regular shared governance meetings that address program implementation, program quality, and the needs of candidates.
- Regularly share data and make EPP–district decisions jointly to meet the needs of candidates and the regional education system.

Support the teacher candidate experience.

- Adopt “strategic staffing” models, which redirect district funds to subsidize residency stipends by having residents take on part-time instructional support responsibilities. In implementing strategic staffing, maintain the rigor of the clinical experience by providing residents with scaffolded support in their strategic staffing roles and ensuring residents spend the large majority of their time working alongside their mentor teacher.
- Secure federal, state, and philanthropic dollars to fund paid residencies.
- Assign individual faculty advisors or site coordinators to monitor candidate progress and provide early interventions.
- Provide tutoring and testing preparation, either integrated into coursework or separately.
- Cover the costs of certification exams.

Considerations for State Policymakers

States may consider the following strategies to support the establishment, continuous improvement, and sustainability of successful educator preparation programs and EPP–district partnerships like those profiled here.

Support the transformation of learning opportunities.

- Provide guidance on and examples of integrating practice-based approaches into coursework, as Texas has started to do through its Effective Preparation Framework.
- Require or incentivize candidates to complete a full year of stipended clinical experience to earn a teaching credential.
- Fund EPPs and their district partners to develop and help sustain yearlong clinical experiences, including funding for mentor teacher compensation.
- Provide technical assistance or fund technical assistance providers to support EPPs in transforming learning opportunities.

Support the development of infrastructure and partnerships.

- Provide guidance and examples of high-functioning shared governance structures.
- Require robust partnerships between EPPs and PreK–12 districts as part of program approval processes.
- Provide technical assistance or fund technical assistance providers to support EPPs in developing partnerships with PreK–12 partners that include frequent data sharing and joint decision-making.

Support the teacher candidate experience.

- Provide guidance on blending and braiding available funds to support paid residencies.
- Provide state funding for paid residencies, especially those that incentivize teaching in high-need areas and certification fields experiencing teacher shortages.
- Reduce or eliminate testing fees.

Introduction

Texas has the largest teacher workforce of any U.S. state, with over 375,000 teachers in 2023–24.¹ However, this workforce is characterized by a revolving door of teachers entering and, too often, quickly leaving the profession. Texas has been experiencing severe teacher shortages for over a decade, largely driven by early-career teachers leaving the classroom.² Prior to the 2023–24 school year, 45,231 teachers who had taught in 2022–23 exited their districts, an attrition rate of 12%. In turn, districts hired 49,176 teachers who were either new to the profession or returning from a career break, the vast majority of whom were hired to replace teachers who had left.³ Before each of the last several academic years, more than 1 in 10 teachers in the state left the profession, with more moving between districts or schools.⁴

Teacher shortages, attrition, and turnover are challenges that are not unique to Texas. The latest data from nationally representative surveys show that 7.9% of teachers nationwide left the profession in 2021–22 and another 7.9% of teachers moved to a new school.⁵ In response to these issues, districts across the nation have predominantly implemented short-term approaches that can ultimately undermine student learning, including increasing class sizes, canceling courses, and/or hiring underqualified or underprepared staff to fill vacancies.⁶ These national trends are prevalent in Texas, where the teacher attrition rate is more than 50% higher than the national average. The noticeably higher rates of attrition and turnover in Texas hold substantial consequences for the schools and districts across the state, as well as the over 5.5 million students served in these schools.⁷

These high turnover rates are partly due to the fact that a large majority of teacher candidates in Texas now enter the profession either through alternative routes in which the candidate becomes the teacher of record while still taking coursework or, based on a waiver that “Districts of Innovation”⁸ throughout Texas can receive, through no certification route at all.⁹ This acceleration means that classroom vacancies can be filled more quickly than traditional preparation programs allow, providing a short-term solution to the teacher shortage. However, research has found that candidates coming through these pathways leave the profession at much higher rates than traditional candidates.¹⁰ Moreover, students taught by alternatively prepared teachers¹¹ and uncertified teachers¹² in the state experience substantially smaller achievement gains than students taught by traditionally prepared teachers.

Texas policymakers are actively working to address the dual challenges of strengthening teacher preparation and solving the teacher shortage. The state recently invested heavily in strengthening teacher preparation through the [High-Quality, Sustainable Residencies Program](#), established in summer 2021 as part of the \$1.4 billion [Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports \(TCLAS\) suite of grants](#). This initiative, which ran from 2021 to 2024 with support from federal COVID-19 recovery dollars, supported districts to collaborate with local educator preparation programs (EPPs) to expand the reach of teacher residency programs. In teacher residency programs, which are modeled after the medical residency approach, residents train for a full school year under the guidance and supervision of a mentor teacher—who has been rated as highly effective—while

In teacher residency programs, which are modeled after the medical residency approach, residents train for a full school year under the guidance and supervision of a mentor teacher—who has been rated as highly effective—while earning a credential from the partnering university.

earning a credential from the partnering university.¹³ One portion of the TCLAS funds provided districts with \$20,000 per resident to help pay for their living expenses while they obtained a credential. This investment was meant to increase the quality of teacher candidates' training, and thereby improve student learning, while increasing the likelihood that teachers stay in the profession.¹⁴ In another effort to address the teacher shortage, the governor appointed a Teacher Vacancy Task Force in 2022 to "examine teacher retention and recruitment challenges across Texas."¹⁵ The task force developed recommendations to reduce teacher vacancies via improvements to educator compensation, training and support, and working conditions, as well as the appropriation of funding to implement these recommendations.¹⁶

This study was designed to document the design, structure, and content of high-quality educator preparation programs in Texas. Its goals were twofold: to illuminate replicable practices, and to better understand the role state policies can play in sustainably addressing teacher shortages and supporting the development of a strong, stable teacher workforce prepared to meet the needs of Texas's diverse student body. Through in-depth case studies, this report examines the key features of three programs with reputations for high-quality practice, including their coursework, clinical experiences, governance arrangements, and funding. It serves to: (1) provide exemplars of strong educator preparation programs to inform practice and (2) inform the development of new policies, including those supporting sustainable points of entry into a well-qualified, diverse, and equitably distributed workforce.

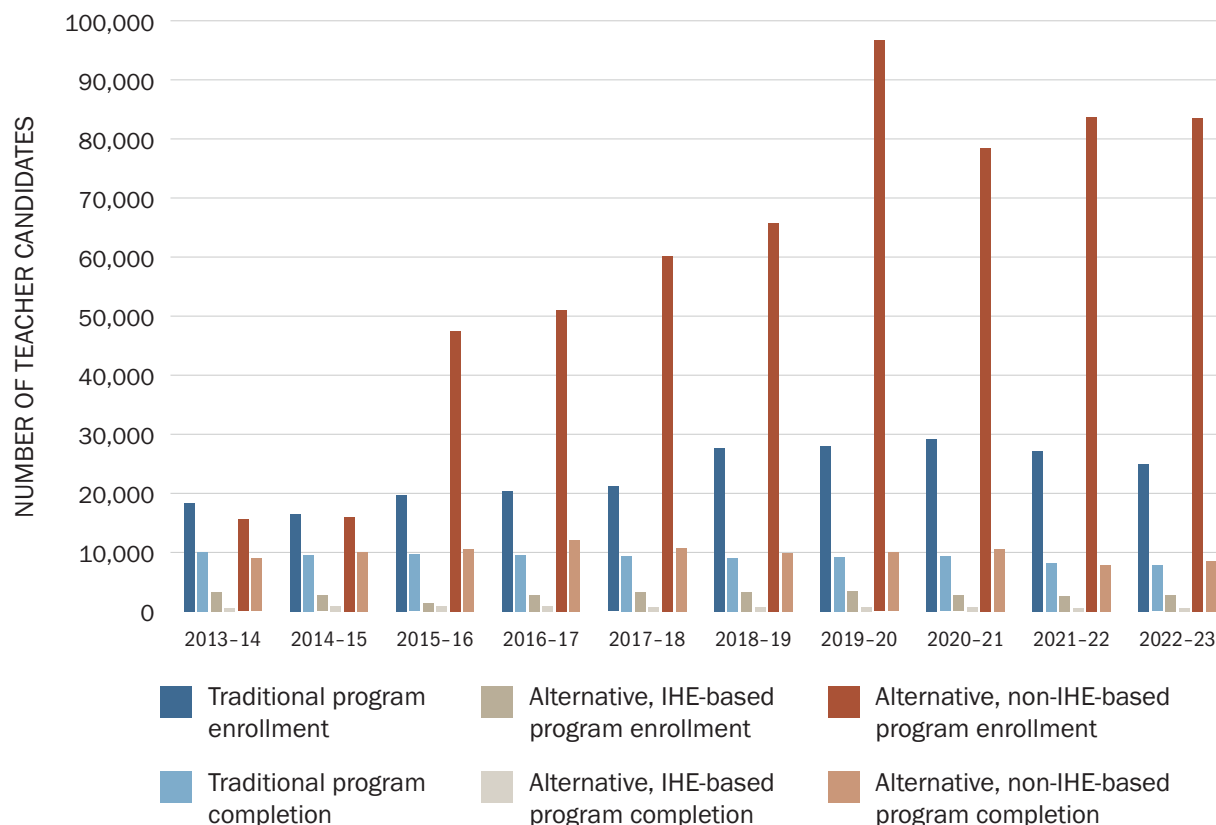
In the remainder of this introduction, we provide more details about the Texas state policy context regarding educator preparation, describe the study in more detail, and provide an overview of the rest of the report.

A Complex and Evolving State Policy Context

Texas state policy has produced a teacher preparation system unique in the United States. In 2002, the state authorized alternative certification pathways in which new educators serve as teacher of record while learning on the job with minimal preservice preparation. This authorization paved the way for many alternative certification programs run by for-profit organizations, and the number of Texas teachers certified by for-profit institutions has climbed considerably. By 2010, these institutions were producing nearly as many teachers as public universities; by 2015, they exceeded the number prepared by public universities.¹⁷ In the most recent years for which data are available, enrollment in for-profit alternative certification pathways has accounted for over 70% of all enrollment in educator preparation programs in Texas. In fact, enrollment in for-profit institutions in Texas represents over 90% of for-profit program enrollment nationwide.¹⁸ Furthermore, while the expansion of alternative certification providers in the state has driven overall educator preparation program enrollment to nearly triple over the most recent 10 years of available data, overall program completion has fallen by 14% over that same time span (see [Figure 1](#)).¹⁹

Meanwhile, state-designated "Districts of Innovation"—980 out of approximately 1,200 districts in the state as of 2024²⁰—have been empowered to hire uncertified teachers with zero preservice preparation, and the proportion of uncertified teachers in the state's workforce is growing dramatically. The percentage of uncertified teachers statewide among teachers newly entering the profession rose from 16% in the 2018–19 school year to nearly 27% in 2021–22 before jumping to 49% in 2023–24.²¹ Educators on substandard (intern and emergency) certificates made up 19% of first-time new hires in 2023–24. Together, uncertified teachers and teachers on substandard certifications made up nearly 68% of all first-time, newly hired teachers in Texas in 2023–24.

Figure 1. Texas Teacher Preparation Program Enrollment and Completion by Route, 2013–14 Through 2022–23



Notes: IHE = institution of higher education. Due to a reporting change in 2018–19, Title II published enrollment numbers from the academic years 2018–19 to 2022–23 included completers (prior years did not). To create a consistent enrollment measure over time (including completers), we updated the enrollment values for these earlier years by adding the reported completer numbers to the reported enrollment numbers.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). [Title II reports: National teacher preparation data](#) for Texas for each academic year from 2013–14 to 2022–23 (accessed 07/29/2025).

In addition to these trends, the persistently high rate of teacher attrition across the state has driven teacher residency programs’ rise to prominence as a state policy lever. These changes in the Texas educator preparation landscape are documented in the 2023 Learning Policy Institute report [Strengthening Pathways Into the Teaching Profession in Texas: Challenges and Opportunities](#).²² Residency development was supercharged in 2021 by a statewide grant program that used federal COVID-19 relief funds: the TCLAS High-Quality, Sustainable Residencies Program. This program provided grant funding for over 85 districts with paid residency placements to partner with educator preparation programs in the 2021–22 through 2023–24 school years.²³

TCLAS also prompted the creation of a “Vetted Teacher Residency” (VTR) designation to indicate educator preparation program eligibility for TCLAS participation.²⁴ The designation defines a teacher residency as an EPP in which “the teacher candidate is paired with an experienced, highly effective mentor teacher for a full year of clinical training/co-teaching in a K–12 classroom,” and requires 21 or more clinical placement

hours per week.²⁵ Residencies can be paid or unpaid and may be offered at both undergraduate and postbaccalaureate levels.²⁶ By 2023, incentivized by TCLAS partnership eligibility, 37 EPPs across Texas were designated as VTRs. Most of these programs were in 4-year institutions of higher education, but the VTR list also included two community colleges, four regional Education Service Centers, one alternative graduate school of education, and one nonprofit provider.²⁷

Additionally, as the 3-year cycle of the TCLAS grant was ending, the State Board for Educator Certification updated state EPP regulations, adding new designations and requirements for the fall of 2024.²⁸ These included a new teaching certification, the “Enhanced Standard Certificate,” for completers of residency programs.²⁹ Although the term “residency” is not in its name, an Enhanced Standard Certificate can only be earned through completion of a state-designated teacher residency program.³⁰ This new certificate will distinguish residencies and residency completers for licensure and data collection while creating continuity with previous state efforts that have supported residency programs. Individual districts can, at their discretion, also use the certificate to bump up pay for residency-trained teachers.

Along a similar timeline, Texas has also been developing a statewide Effective Preparation Framework to support educator preparation program alignment, improvement, and accountability across the state.³¹ The framework describes “five foundational levers that EPPs pull to ensure that novice teachers are well prepared,”³² and there is significant overlap between these levers and residency program features, though the framework is not specific to residencies (see [Effective Preparation Framework Foundational Levers](#)).³³ Over the next several years, the framework will be incorporated into state EPP regulations governing Texas Education Agency (TEA) EPP reporting, approval, and improvement processes.³⁴

Effective Preparation Framework Foundational Levers

The following five levers comprise the Texas Education Agency’s Effective Preparation Framework:

1. **Educator Preparation Program Leadership and Planning.** Develops, implements, monitors, and continuously improves program systems and structures aligned to the program’s vision, mission, guiding principles, and strategic plan.
2. **Talent Recruitment and Management.** Strategically recruits, selects, supports, and retains teacher candidates through successful completion of the preparation program.
3. **P–12 Partnership.** Builds and maintains strong, collaborative partnerships with local education agencies by establishing a shared vision, mutual accountabilities, and ongoing governance practices to produce well-prepared beginning teachers ready to meet the partner’s needs.
4. **Curriculum.** Designs standards-aligned curriculum that integrates meaningful practice-based experiences and builds candidates’ skills to meet the need of all students.
5. **Instruction and Support.** Structures meaningful, integrated practice-based experiences throughout the preparation program and provides ongoing opportunities for coaching, development, and continuous improvement of teacher candidates, program faculty and staff, and LEA partners.

Source: Texas Education Agency. (2024). [The Effective Preparation Framework](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

Within this state context focused on expanding and deepening residencies, the University–School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP) National Center was founded in 2015. Housed at Texas Tech University, US PREP was designed to support university-based residency programs. By 2024, the US PREP network had grown to 36 universities, organized into seven cohorts based on when they began their work with US PREP; approximately two thirds of participating institutions are in Texas.³⁵ Network members make a 4-year commitment to design, pilot, and scale teacher residencies, aiming “to ensure teachers are prepared to work in the classroom on day one after graduation.”³⁶ US PREP has influenced EPP design across Texas, as features of the US PREP model have been incorporated into state initiatives. US PREP has articulated the essential elements of a residency as:

- **A yearlong clinical teaching experience** that allows teacher candidates to experience a complete school year, spending 3 to 5 days per week in the classroom before becoming a teacher of record, and that includes strong supervision, regular feedback from mentor teachers, coaching, and professional development.
- **Highly effective, trained mentor teachers** who support candidates via co-teaching models, gradual release of instructional responsibilities, and regular observation and coaching.
- **Strong district partnerships** that include shared decision-making; aligned expectations for candidate preparation; regular sharing of data; and coordinated recruitment, placement, and hiring processes that reflect the needs of the district.
- **Site coordinators** who facilitate collaboration and coordination between the university (including faculty and coursework) and the district.
- **Practice-based coursework** aligned to the program’s instructional framework and clinical fieldwork that supports candidates in effectively using high-quality instructional materials to best develop K–12 students.
- Consistent use of **teacher candidate evaluation instruments** to measure teacher candidates’ competencies and implementation of standards-aligned instruction.
- **Collecting, analyzing, and using data for continuous improvement** via routine data use structures and protocols.³⁷

To help districts sustainably fund resident stipends, US PREP provided technical assistance to help districts implement strategic staffing as part of the TCLAS grant program. Strategic staffing models redirect district funds, typically for instructional support staff positions like substitute teachers or paraprofessionals, to subsidize residency stipends by having residents fulfill some of these responsibilities. Regional Education Service Centers across Texas, trained by US PREP, continue to offer this technical assistance. Strategic staffing may make high-quality residency pathways more affordable to more candidates and thus help shift the market dynamics surrounding candidates’ choice of pathway into teaching.

Operating in this context, each of the EPPs chosen for this study have adopted residency models and have built their programs with multiple sources of support, including US PREP. Having selected these programs for their reputations for providing strong preparation experiences that produce well-prepared teachers,

the research team sought to “look under the hood” to understand and document the elements that make these clinically intensive programs work, with an eye toward sustainability and replicability. In particular, the featured programs have redesigned and aligned coursework and clinical experiences, created shared governance structures between the EPPs and their partner districts, enhanced candidate field supervision and supports, and enacted a common vision of teachers fully prepared to lead their own classrooms after program completion.

Study Details

To document the design, structure, and content of strong educator preparation programs in Texas, we conducted in-depth case studies of three programs. The majority of data for the case studies was collected between spring 2023 and winter 2024, with some subsequent follow-up data collection to resolve remaining questions. The case studies were designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the key features of each program?
 - a. How are the content, sequence, and length of coursework and clinical experiences structured?
 - b. How are candidates’ knowledge and skills assessed?
 - c. How are partnerships and governance arrangements with PreK–12 systems structured?
 - d. How do programs measure their effectiveness?
 - e. What other features are core to program operation and success?
2. How are programs funded? What did it take to get programs operational, and what is needed to sustain them?
3. What financial and programmatic supports are provided to candidates that drive program recruitment, retention, and completion?

To identify high-quality educator preparation programs, we used an iterative process. We first consulted with experts in the field, including state-level policymakers, EPP administrators (who were asked to nominate peer institutions), and researchers, to identify programs with strong reputations. We then conducted background research on each nominated program, including a review of program websites, accreditation documents, and existing studies of programs. This background research focused on identifying evidence of program features that research suggests are especially important in producing well-prepared teachers, including a full year of supervised clinical teaching experience for candidates prior to becoming teacher of record; thoroughly and thoughtfully aligned coursework and preclinical field experiences; financial supports for teacher candidates; and a range of supportive program structures.³⁸ To seek further evidence of program quality, we analyzed publicly available surveys of program completers and the principals who employ them, and we looked for other markers of program distinction, such as grant awards and state recognition.

Once we identified programs deemed to be high quality, our goal was to select three of the programs that represent varying geographic regions and populations within Texas and that were at varying phases of developing and implementing strong programs featuring a full year of clinical practice for teacher

candidates. Confirming our selection, administrators from surrounding schools and districts who hire program alumni asserted that all three of the programs consistently produce new teachers who are better prepared for the classroom than their peers who entered the teaching profession through other pathways. Additionally, rates of retention in the teaching profession for alumni of all three programs exceed state averages.

The case studies included both qualitative and quantitative data. The research team conducted interviews with program and partner district leaders, faculty, and staff as well as with teacher candidates and program completers. Interviews covered topics such as program structure, structure of teacher candidates' clinical teaching experiences, teacher candidates' progress assessment, partnership and governance arrangements with PreK–12 systems and other relevant entities, funding structures, teacher candidate recruitment and retention, and teacher candidate placement upon program completion. We also reviewed documents such as program handbooks, institutional policies, state legislation and administrative code, research articles, policy proposals, and news stories. After compiling data and information from these sources, we conducted analyses to identify key features contributing to program quality.

The purpose of our analysis was to elevate best practices in programs that have been recognized for quality. It was not designed to comprehensively evaluate programs, examine less-effective practices, or offer suggestions for individual program improvement. Additionally, while the programs have notable similarities, they vary in their emphasis on specific program design elements; accordingly, each case study focuses on different program components to varying degrees.

We discovered shared features across the three programs that contributed to high-quality teacher preparation pathways, as well as distinctive strengths of individual programs that attend to the unique needs of each university's students and communities. The programs highlighted in this report are listed below, along with distinctive program features.

- The **University of Houston (UH)** is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institution with a well-established teacher residency program supplying an urban region. It serves as an example of a relatively long-standing program that has effectively scaled its residency pathway and improved its learning opportunities through consistent and systematic program revisions. UH has a particularly strong culture of being responsive to district-led initiatives and providing needed technical support. UH also provides strong guidance for mentor teachers and site coordinators.
- The **University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)** is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution operating the primary university-based teacher preparation program within a 200-mile radius of El Paso. It runs the Miner Teacher Residency (named after UTEP's mascot). UTEP serves as an example of a program that is an integral part of a self-sustaining regional education ecosystem that has diligently worked to bring the local community and its partner districts together to make decisions about teacher preparation and foster respect for teaching as a profession. In addition to funding its redesigned program through sustainable sources like line items in its university budget, UTEP has actively sought additional funding from a variety of federal, state, and local sources to bookend the teacher candidate experience—building robust mechanisms for teacher candidate recruitment and an induction program for recent alumni who are teachers of record in local districts—and to augment the residency program.

- The **University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)**, also a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, has two pathways with yearlong clinical experiences: its STEP UP program, established in 2016, and a recently implemented paid teacher residency, which serves as an example of a program in the earlier stages of the residency transformation process. Additionally, UTRGV exemplifies a dynamic candidate support structure that guides candidates from admission to certification, providing resources and tools through its Learning to Teach Lab and other means. UTRGV also offers an especially rich set of preclinical field experiences and a unique role as its region’s strategic staffing technical assistance provider for local districts looking to fund residencies.

Report Overview

This report offers practitioners and policymakers an opportunity to learn from educator preparation programs seeking to prepare a high-quality workforce able to meet the needs of diverse student populations from day one on the job. The following three sections offer in-depth descriptions of three EPPs purposefully designed to provide enriching and cohesive preparation coursework and intensive yearlong clinical experiences in partnership with local PreK–12 school systems. The report begins with the University of Houston, the longest-established program, followed by the University of Texas at El Paso, and finally the University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley, the newest of the programs. Subsequently, the report looks across the three cases to explore the similarities in program design and implementation that contribute to the programs’ effectiveness. The report concludes with considerations for programs, districts, and states to strengthen educator preparation and support.

University of Houston's Teacher Residency

The University of Houston's (UH) Teacher Residency prepares educators who are highly valued by the schools where they are trained and, once they graduate, are widely sought after by employers. UH has a reputation for quality and has performed above state averages on a variety of metrics, including percentage of program completers certified and employed. Of all UH program completers in 2023, 93% stayed in the teaching field after their first year on the job, compared to 89% of all newly certified teachers in the state.³⁹ Teacher retention for UH graduates across 3- and 5-year time spans also exceeds state averages—for example, by 10 and 7 percentage points, respectively, for the 2019 cohort of UH program completers, the most recent cohort for which 5-year retention data are available.⁴⁰ Over the half decade since the residency pathway was fully built out, UH has graduated and certified around 500 teachers per year, 95% of whom came through the residency (rather than other pathways at UH) and received Texas standard instructional certificates.⁴¹

UH is a substantial supplier of local teachers. According to Cathy Horn, Dean of the College of Education, “The University of Houston sees no daylight between its success and the success of the Houston region.” Across the past 5 years, 80% of newly certified educators from UH taught in a Houston-area public school, accounting for an average of 9% of all new teacher hires in the Houston region. Among only those new teachers with standard teaching certificates—i.e., omitting those hired with intern or emergency-type credentials—the proportion of UH-trained newly hired teachers in the region approaches 4 out of 10.⁴²

UH also stands out because of its active role in educator preparation program (EPP) redesign initiatives. UH joined the first cohort of EPPs supported by US PREP, a Texas-based national center that provides technical assistance to support residency implementation. UH also participated in a voluntary program review process conducted by the independent educator preparation program reviewer TPI-US; launched residency partnerships connected to the Opportunity Culture staffing model, which reorganizes educator roles within and across classrooms;⁴³ and was a member of the first cohort of EPPs to achieve state designation as a Vetted Teacher Residency.

The UH Residency Pathway

UH began transforming its undergraduate EPP to a residency pathway in 2015.⁴⁴ Among its first changes was the expansion of student teaching from one semester to two. Subsequently, in 2016, UH joined the first cohort of EPPs facilitated by US PREP. UH adopted the common goal of US PREP network programs, which itself echoes a key priority of the Texas Education Agency: that all program completers would be “day-one ready”—i.e., fully prepared to lead their own classrooms—when hired as teachers of record. The resulting redesign was comprehensive. The UH faculty revised coursework to focus on practice, deepened district partnerships through shared governance, implemented a co-teaching model in clinical placements, added new training for EPP faculty and district teachers, and adopted a performance-based system of clinical competencies and assessments.

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The redesigned program runs for four semesters across candidates' junior and senior years. It begins with introductory coursework and 40 hours of preclinical field experience. The next semester, following official program admission, includes advanced coursework and an additional preclinical field experience of 40 hours, completed in 1 week for elementary certification candidates and over multiple weeks for middle grades and secondary certification candidates. The final two semesters are centered on the yearlong clinical placement as a teacher resident. Residents spend 3 or 4 days per week in their placement schools, depending on certification grade level. The remaining days are devoted to coursework in content-specific pedagogy and a student teaching seminar. These courses support clinical teaching directly, enhancing the classroom experience and bringing authenticity to coursework. In the field, mentor teachers and UH supervisors (referred to as site coordinators) guide residents through scaffolded, graduated teaching responsibilities.

The UH residency pathway became fully operational in 2019–20. That year, the residency clinical experience became the new standard for all undergraduate teacher candidates in the College of Education (approximately 300 per year)⁴⁵—whether pursuing elementary or secondary credentials. As described earlier, the program has already garnered praise. A UH residency program director stated, “Our districts will often say that [hiring a UH graduate] is like hiring a second-year teacher.” One program graduate explained that she chose UH because “it’s the program that will get you the most prepared,” and described UH’s reputation for quality, declaring, “I wanted to have that [UH] name as part of my resume.” Another completer agreed, stating that local districts “love UH teachers.” Mentor teachers were similarly enthusiastic about the quality of preparation the UH residency provides; as one articulated, the UH residency “was more rigorous than what I experienced student teaching.” For one administrator, his district’s continuing partnership with UH was an indicator that “speaks to the quality of the program ... and the willingness to meet the district needs.”

The remainder of this section highlights four key program features of the UH residency, along with the structures and practices these program features support and enable:

1. **A practice-based model that drives alignment of coursework and clinical experiences.** Built around a yearlong clinical placement and a practice-based design, the UH residency is characterized by alignment across coursework and clinical experiences, maintained by ongoing faculty efforts, and grounded in the demands of PreK–12 classrooms.
2. **Scaffolded clinical experiences that progressively build teacher candidate knowledge and skills.** Across the yearlong residency, residents participate in an increasingly demanding, graduated progression of experiences, laid out in detail and implemented through a co-teaching model that balances guidance with growth in knowledge, skills, and responsibility.
3. **Shared governance structures that enable authentic, improvement-focused partnerships.** In a partnership-based program run on shared goals and responsibilities as well as transparency, collaboration is enabled by governance structures that create space for and maintain communication, discussion, decisions, and shared planning.

4. **The site coordinator role that enables the clinically intensive residency.** Fulfilling a role that combines the duties and responsibilities of a clinical faculty member, professional development provider, district liaison, and governance meeting facilitator, site coordinators are essential in implementing the residency programs and their district partnerships.

Together, these features, and the structures and practices that flow from them, shape the UH residency program and make it what it is: a clinically intensive preparation program designed to produce well-prepared novice teachers ready to succeed in their own classrooms from the very beginning of their professional careers. Some structures and practices are still being enhanced as they are implemented—a process that program affiliates expect to continue through partnership conversations and data-informed improvement efforts. Thus, in addition to highlighting program features that are more fully realized, the remainder of this section describes some program transformation efforts that are still works in progress and discusses the considerations that remain.

A Practice-Based Model Aligning Coursework and Clinical Experience

The practice-based nature of the UH residency—wherein UH faculty make deliberate efforts to connect theory to practice by aligning coursework and clinical experiences—is an especially important program feature. In an application for a Texas Education Administration EPP commendation, UH articulated its definition of “practice-based programming” as focused “on teaching core teaching practices ... rather than ... theory and abstract concepts.”⁴⁶ In a published interview, a UH program director described the shift, explaining that the program transitioned from requiring “a lot of written assignments that told us what our students knew” toward “a few practice-based assignments that told us what our students could do.”⁴⁷ Asked about the distinguishing features of the UH residency for this study, the residency program directors identified “multiple opportunities to practice” and defined these as “no-harm opportunities,” in which the shift toward practice-based coursework allowed “opportunities for [residents] to practice with their peers instead of on children.”

The practice-based approach to educator preparation at UH includes two areas of focus: (1) practice as rehearsal for teaching and (2) practice as teaching in clinical settings. These dual focus areas are realized through deliberate UH faculty efforts to integrate the curriculum and activities of educator preparation in university classrooms with the hands-on learning that occurs in residents’ clinical placements. The emphasis on preparing teacher candidates to be day-one ready, both a UH and a US PREP commitment, guides this integration. As one UH program director shared, graduates are expected to be fully prepared—“not still learning to teach,” but “actually ready for students.”

This coordination is evident throughout a teacher candidate’s time in the UH program: from the initial shaping of coursework to prepare candidates for their clinical teaching to the positioning of clinical teaching as a rigorous capstone experience. UH’s tight coordination of coursework with preclinical and clinical field experiences is a function of deliberate efforts to engage faculty, and faculty efforts are still ongoing to iterate on and continually improve this alignment.

Shaping Coursework to Prepare for and Support the Clinical Experience

Curricular alignment throughout the UH residency program functions as a link between junior-year coursework, senior-year coursework, and senior-year residency placement. Integrating coursework and clinical experiences is not just focused on post-program success, but also on success in the placement, a goal that “motivated reflection on what preceded the residency,” according to the dean of the college. The dean elaborated:

If we think being in the classroom for extended time, under particular conditions, is beneficial for the student, different from prior models, then what’s the antecedent to that, that really gets them set up to maximize the benefit of that year? What are the curricular experiences? What are the in-school experiences?

A faculty member echoed this sentiment: “We really want our teacher candidates to be prepared for that first day of school [in their residency placement]. We don’t want them to get there on day one and not have a clue what’s going on.” Providing scaffolded, low-stakes opportunities for candidates’ skill development without disrupting PreK–12 student learning is therefore a priority. As the faculty member reflected, “Right now, we’re focusing a lot on providing opportunities for our teacher candidates to practice teaching in our classes.” She also noted the challenges of making this happen, which she called “a big learning curve for all of us.”

How do you weave in time for everybody to authentically practice teaching when you have them for 3 hours a week? I’m still trying to wrap my head around it. When I have 30 students, how do I provide time for them to actually practice teaching in my classroom as opposed to when they’re in the field?

The reexamination of UH coursework also inspired the faculty to “tightly integrate theory and practice within senior-year courses, so that [residents] could make the most of their fieldwork during that year.”⁴⁸ This integration remains a key factor in developing candidates’ skills. As one instructor described:

They’re taking classes at the university at the same time that they’re doing the [residency placement], which reinforces—[and] it complements—their field experience so that they’re getting both sides. They’re hearing theory and practice at the university and then having the opportunity to implement that in the school setting. Then they do ... what I call “meta-teaching,” which is thinking about teaching. Reflecting. Did that work? Did it not work? Is this a possibility for the future?

A residency completer reinforced the utility of this approach with respect to her content pedagogy courses, explaining, “Some of the stuff we learned in our math and science courses helped me especially. ... I can take this [course material] and then apply it and execute it for the lesson plan.”

Coordination also takes place across courses. A professor described “coordinating with other professors, content-wise,” to create connections between those same senior-year math and science content pedagogy courses concurrent with the residency placement:

[Residents] learn [content] in science methods and they learn it in math methods. ... Now we see it here, and every time they say, “Oh yeah, I think we learned about this.” I say, “Isn’t that wonderful? Now you have a hook up here to hang something on.”

Site coordinators—clinical faculty at UH who supervise residents’ placement experiences and carry out a variety of other responsibilities detailed later in this section—also play an ongoing role in embedding the lessons of coursework into clinical experiences. Alongside their clinical supervision duties, site coordinators serve as instructors for student teaching seminars. Additionally, because site coordinators collect and share data, such as resident observation scores, with UH and partner school colleagues, they have a well-informed understanding of residents’ learning experiences and can tailor seminar topics to the learning needs of each residency cohort. “I think [site coordinators] do a good job supporting their candidates,” a district administrator told us. “They have systems in place to ensure that their candidates are supported, to ensure alignment between the university and the campus.” As another district administrator described:

The [site coordinator] is going to partner with the campus administration and make sure that they’re supporting the priorities of the district and they’re supporting the priorities of the campus. ... I do think that that’s a huge evolution, and it continues to be a strength. ... They work to ensure that their support matches what the district is pushing and what the campus needs.

The Centrality of the Yearlong Clinical Experience

The centrality of the yearlong clinical experience to the residency program also drives the program’s practice-based emphasis. District administrators, principals, and mentor teachers consistently cited the yearlong placement as a distinguishing feature of the program and emphasized its importance. One mentor teacher stated:

I think that there’s a benefit that we get to have them for a year. ... I think that they learn a lot. They get to see both semesters, [from] opening up a new school [year], [to] springtime and end of the year, and all the testing.

A UH faculty member shared a similar reflection:

I think about the students who graduated from our [previous] program, who only had that one semester. If you’re a fall student teacher, you get one picture of what schools are like. If you’re a spring student teacher, you get the other picture. ... Now we get our teacher candidates to experience the opening of school and the closing of school. ... It gives them lots of opportunities to observe and practice teaching in different environments.

UH program directors also draw a clear connection between the length and scaffolding of field experiences and teacher candidates’ readiness for full-time teaching, explaining that “it takes time” for teacher candidates to build the knowledge, skills, and stamina needed to be a teacher of record. A program director explained that without the residency:

I wouldn’t know how to explain what it is to be in a classroom for 7 hours with 25 kids and be responsible for everything—from the bathroom breaks, to the learning, to the physical and emotional safety, to the navigating friendships and personalities, and pushing through physical exhaustion. As a classroom teacher, if things get hard ... you can’t just say, “I’ve got to step out for a minute.”

Interviewees widely noted positive results of the rigorous yearlong placement. One PreK–12 administrator said that UH graduates are “very front-loaded and well prepared ... to take on the challenges of being in the real world of a classroom” and attributed this to “the day-to-day experience” of the yearlong residency. Graduates of the UH program also praise the value of the clinical experience. “There’s no fear when stepping into the classroom for the first time,” one stated, reflecting on her transition to being the teacher of record. Another completer, with a year as teacher of record under her belt, cited the residency as critical for her preparation: “Although it’s very rigorous, it’s worth every single minute. I don’t feel confused or lost. ... I know what I’m doing when it comes to planning and differentiating for kids and even asking for help.” In comparing her colleagues who had been through yearlong placements with others who received shorter and less intensive clinical training, she said, “You can see the difference in how they manage their classroom, how they plan.”

Continuously Engaging Faculty in Aligning Coursework and Clinical Experience

Integrating clinical practice with coursework was a vital task in the UH program redesign. A US PREP report emphasized that this integration was an early UH priority, describing how “the faculty began its own internal redesign work by getting professors on the same page” and focusing on “what new teachers needed in order to succeed.”⁴⁹ This ethos of collaboration in service of the teacher candidate experience has persisted. Even though the residency program has been the sole undergraduate pathway in the college since 2019, faculty continue to build and improve connections across courses and sites. One faculty member maintained that collaboration “has to be done regularly” and noted, “It can’t just be done one semester and then you leave it for 5 years. It has to be revisited because new people come in and teach courses, and new assignments make their way in. [There] has to be good communication.”

A sense of community also drives shared reflection even in the absence of direct guidance. The same faculty member explained:

[Further efforts at practice-based alignment are] ad hoc at this point, but I think part of it is [that] we all feel really strongly invested in the program. So, if we see something that we feel we can improve, we don’t have any qualms with just emailing and saying, “Hey, let’s all get on the same page about this idea.” Nobody needs to come down from the top telling us we’ve got to do that.

As the process of aligning coursework and clinical practice continued during and after the redesign, it also expanded to include pedagogical training for faculty. “That’s one of our newer shifts,” a program director shared. The training initially accompanied a reorientation of coursework toward assignments built on the “structured cyclical process” of the Teacher Education by Design framework. In this framework, candidates are introduced to a practice, prepared to enact it, observed as they do so, and analyzed on their performance.⁵⁰ One UH program completer touched on this cycle when describing how coursework and clinical experiences were integrated:

Especially toward the second, the final semester, we had a lot of assignments where we had to actually go out in the field and do them. ... [We would] plan at the university and then take it into the classroom. We would actually record ourselves practicing whatever it is that we were learning back in class.

Other such training stemmed directly from US PREP coalition activities, such as when UH faculty traveled to the TeachingWorks center at the University of Michigan for professional development. Upon their return, these faculty facilitated similar professional development for their colleagues, sharing practice-based assignments and pedagogical strategies such as in-class rehearsals and coaching.

Training connected to residency partnerships also builds upon and reinforces coordination between coursework and clinical experiences. As stated by UH in its EPP commendation application, “Shared governance and partnerships are integral to practice-based teacher preparation” because they allow partners to “build shared understanding of the teacher competencies that candidates need.” Accordingly, in addition to providing training for instructional faculty on practice-based coursework and alignment with candidates’ clinical experiences, UH extends this training to its district partners’ mentor teachers. A US PREP report described an example of this training for faculty and mentors as “watching videos of teachers, discussing objective evidence of the competencies, and scoring each of the competencies together.”⁵¹

Alignment Across Courses and Role Types: A Work in Progress

The programmatic transformation creating the alignment between coursework and clinical experience is a work in progress, and there was some evidence from multiple interviewees that coursework and clinical experiences are not entirely aligned. One program completer, for example, was critical of her preclinical coursework because she perceived it as disconnected from classroom practice. “Those [senior-year] classes were great. They were solid because we take whatever we learned in class straight into the field,” she explained, but declared of her earlier, prerequisite classes, “We do not need these.” This alumna’s assessment indicates the potential for perceived misalignment between preresidency course content and residency practice.

Another alignment-related issue reported across UH faculty and staff was a desire for more frequent and substantive communication between site coordinators and course instructors. Site coordinators noted that communication with course instructors varied—with formal meetings typically just once per semester—and contrasted this cadence with the “constant communication” that occurs between site coordinators and the two residency program directors. Site coordinators also expressed a desire for more opportunities to provide feedback to program faculty directly. Program faculty teaching courses also expressed an interest in having more communication with site coordinators, particularly about problems of practice. After having worked with two site coordinators, one such faculty member reflected, “I would say I would love to be working with them for ... a few more hours. ... We were barely starting to scratch the surface of a deeper conversation.”

These disconnects were, in most cases, described as solvable, though one tenure-track professor described a structural divide between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty stemming, in part, from their different roles and responsibilities. Site coordinators at UH, at the time of this study, were mostly retired educators serving in part-time, non-tenure-track (or “adjunct”) faculty positions, though this was not always the case. As a program director noted, earlier in UH’s transition to a residency program, “We had more site coordinators that were teaching classes and more full-time faculty that were doing a little bit of site coordinating work.” As the program evolved, there was less crossover of the roles, leading to “kind of a pulling apart of the two groups.”

UH moved toward part-time site coordinators for several reasons. Tenure-track faculty have job responsibilities related to teaching and university service that can interfere with availability for site coordinator work. Faculty also bring different experiences and backgrounds than many site coordinators, whose professional backgrounds are largely in PreK–12 schools. As a residency program director explained, “A number of our faculty have come up through pathways that didn’t lend themselves to ... deep experience with coaching and mentoring [teacher residents].” Another reason for hiring part-time, adjunct faculty members to serve as site coordinators was financial. As the other residency program director explained, “One of the ways that we were able to pay for [site coordinators] is that we don’t have to pay ... full-time salary and fringe [benefits]. We can save money and still have the complete role and all the support by continuing to use the part-time faculty. It’s a way to keep it sustainable.” This program director also acknowledged that shifting away from full-time faculty was a trade-off: “You have to let go of something.”

A Scaffolded and Supportive Clinical Experience

The structure of the candidates’ full-year clinical experiences is another key program feature. A clinical teaching handbook at UH characterizes this yearlong placement as “the capstone experience for a novice teacher,” “critical, challenging, and rewarding to all involved,” and “a time of great professional growth.”⁵² For teacher candidates, the residency is where they build the skills and knowledge needed to be “day-one ready” to take over their own classrooms.

It is not just the length of the placement that contributes to readiness, but also the scaffolded progression of responsibilities residents tackle with the support of mentor teachers in a co-teaching arrangement. The UH Student Teaching Handbook states, “Our experience has shown that the strongest preparation ... is not time alone but rather constant modeling by an experienced mentor teacher.”⁵³ A UH program director echoed this idea, asserting that “there’s just not a substitution for having time to practice alongside somebody who knows what they’re doing.”

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The yearlong clinical placement is demanding for residents and for mentor teachers. In the UH Student Teaching Handbook, residents “are urged to consider [the teacher residency] as full-time employment.”⁵⁴ The extensive duties of mentor teachers are detailed in an accompanying mentor teacher handbook. Mentors must make space for residents to complete “course assignments and performance assessments,” direct them in “developing the skills and dispositions of an effective teacher,” and collaborate with site coordinators to “guide improvement of [residents’] instructional competency and professionalism.”⁵⁵ One mentor teacher provided this account of their responsibilities:

By the end of semester one, you want to ensure that they have taught every subject, because when they return for semester two ... they’re taking over for the majority of the day. And as a mentor, you have to be comfortable and flexible stepping back, but also ... make sure that the work is still being done. You have to communicate with [the resident] effectively, communicate with the site coordinator effectively, so everybody is on the same page.

The intensive clinical experience is complex in operation and dependent on close collaboration between UH and districts. Given this complexity, it is understandable why US PREP, in naming the three “essential elements” of its residency model, identified the yearlong placement, highly effective mentor teachers, and district partnerships: All three are connected to the clinical experience.

A Demanding Clinical Experience, Enabled by Resident Stipends

The quality of the yearlong clinical experience depends in part on residents’ capacity to be fully engaged. The model leaves little room for outside activities. Residents described “giving up” their senior year, juggling their preparation experiences and family lives, and struggling to support themselves and their families while paying for school and forgoing opportunities for outside work. Stipends thus play an important role in yearlong clinical experiences.

Some UH residents received stipends through the statewide Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) grant program—which funded \$20,000 stipends for up to 20 residents per year in each participating district—to offset costs of living during their yearlong clinical experience. One UH program completer described the difference this stipend made for her, comparing her residency experience favorably to that of her cousin, who did not receive a stipend, and illustrating the connection between funding and engagement:

I could definitely see the difference between my experience versus hers. For her, she would do a full day for free and then she would still have to go home, finish any homework or assignments, and then she would also have to go to work. So I felt really grateful that I didn’t have to worry about that. I didn’t have to worry about, “How am I going to pay my next bill? What shift do I need to pick up?” all on top of classes and test prep.

Along with their influence on the experiences of individual residents, stipends also affect the potential pool of residents. A UH program director asserted that “the biggest barrier” to educator preparation program completion “is unpaid student teaching.” Going beyond questions of candidates’ time and capacity to fully participate in residency experiences, she added that many teacher candidates are “decreasingly willing” to take out loans while “offer[ing] free labor” in clinical placements.

A Clinical Experience Shaped by Extensive EPP Guidance

Even though the yearlong residency is situated in classrooms with mentor teachers managing residents’ clinical experience on a day-to-day basis, the residency experience is nonetheless substantially shaped by UH through a progression of assignments, assessments, and co-teaching methods unfolding across the clinical year. To this end, UH has issued guidance to continually inform and support mentor teacher actions and shape resident experiences.

Instructional guidance for mentor teachers can be divided into two broad categories. First, there are generalized orientations toward teacher candidate preparation that apply to the entire clinical experience. For example, a UH training presentation tells mentor teachers that “teacher candidates are required to be actively engaged in as many of the elements of the classroom as is possible from the very beginning.”⁵⁶ The UH Student Teaching Handbook encourages mentor teachers to share “planning, organization, delivery, and assessment” and to divide up instructional responsibilities in a variety of ways, not only “co-teaching the same lesson,” but also “parallel teach[ing], working with centers or workstations, or

pulling small groups or individual students.”⁵⁷ The handbook includes descriptions of these models of shared instructional practice, as articulated by US PREP (see [Table 1](#)), and mentor teachers have access to worksheets for shared planning and debriefing co-teaching lessons.

Table 1. Co-Teaching Strategies in Place at UH

Co-teaching strategy	Description
One teach, one assist	One teacher has primary instructional responsibility while the other assists students with their work, monitors behaviors, or corrects assignments.
One teach, one observe	One of the advantages in co-teaching is that more detailed observation of students engaged in the learning process can occur. With this approach, for example, co-teachers can decide in advance what types of specific observational information to gather during instruction and can agree on a system for gathering the data.
Team teaching	Both teachers are responsible for planning, and they share the instruction of all students. The lessons are taught by both teachers, who actively engage in conversation, not lecture, to encourage discussion by students. Both teachers are actively involved in the management of the lesson and discipline.
Station teaching	The teachers divide the instructional content, and each takes responsibility for planning and teaching part of it. In station teaching, the classroom is divided into various teaching centers. The teacher and teacher candidate are at particular stations; the other stations are run independently by the students or by a teacher’s aide.
Alternative teaching	In alternative teaching, one teacher manages most of the class while the other teacher works with a small group inside or outside of the classroom. The small group does not have to integrate with the current lesson.
Parallel teaching	In parallel teaching, the teacher and teacher candidate plan jointly but split the classroom in half to teach the same information at the same time.

Source: University of Houston College of Education. (2023). *Student teaching handbook* [Internal document].

The second type of instructional guidance provided to mentor teachers is more specific, laying out the responsibilities of mentor teachers, residents, and—to some extent—UH site coordinators. These requirements describe what is to be done, and when, with expectations for resident performance delineated across the yearlong residency. Much of this specificity is provided in the form of the UH “Progression of Student Teaching Responsibilities” document. [Table 2](#) shows a section of this document, which lays out a structure for the first few weeks of the yearlong placement. (See [Figure A1](#) in the Appendix for the full progression.) Resident responsibilities are divided into four categories: planning, minimum

teaching, co-teaching, and observation. For mentor teachers and site coordinators, responsibilities include programmatic and assessment activities, support for resident responsibilities, and detailed lists of teaching techniques that the mentor teacher and the site coordinator support the resident in developing.

Table 2. UH Progression of Resident Teaching Responsibilities, First Semester, Weeks 1–3

Time	Resident responsibilities	Mentor teacher responsibilities	Feedback focus areas from mentor teacher or site coordinator
Weeks 1–3	Planning expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to resident	• Complete mentor teacher orientation	Support resident in working on: • Setting and reinforcing expectations • Clear directions • Scan[ning] and awareness • Respond[ing] consistently • Strong voice • Lesson preparation and facilitation • Framing the learning: ◦ Sharing objective(s) ◦ [Setting an]agenda ◦ Do now or opening activity • Coaching techniques: ◦ Whisper coaching ◦ Side-by-side coaching ◦ Model coaching
	Minimum teaching expectations: • Assume partial responsibility for leading classroom routines (e.g., attendance, bell work, dismissal) • Teach the first few minutes of class once per week (e.g., do now, opening/framing the lesson) • Co-plan and lead small group activities	• Complete mentor teacher form in Tk20^a • Host introductory meeting with resident • Weekly check-ins with resident • Schedule daily observations of yourself and other teachers for the resident	
	Co-teaching expectations: • One teach one observe • One teach one assist • Alternative teaching	• Observe and provide feedback [continues every month]	
	Observation expectations: Observe school transitions. Daily observation of mentor teacher with a focus on large and small group instruction, positive classroom culture (set, reinforce, clear directions, positive narration, awareness, responding consistently, strong voice). Attend and observe department and grade-level planning meetings.		

^a Tk20 is a management system for instructional and assessment information.

Source: University of Houston College of Education. (n.d.). *Progression of student teaching responsibilities* [Internal document].

A Scaffolded Candidate Experience With Graduated Responsibilities

The yearlong clinical placement demands progressively more of teacher candidates over time. This progression toward a more central role in the classroom, known in the field of educator preparation as “graduated responsibility,” supports teacher candidates as they assume teaching duties with the aim of challenging them without overwhelming them.⁵⁸ According to the Student Teaching Handbook, UH candidates in the first semester progress by “gradually leading more of the planning and instruction” until, by the final month of semester one, the candidate “is the primary lead for most of the day.”⁵⁹ This co-teaching arrangement is maintained through the entire second semester of the residency. As one UH program completer described, “Toward the second semester, you’re taking care of that classroom by yourself.” Even with the mentor teacher present, she said, “You’re [the one] teaching. ... Everything was on you.”

Because of this expectation for graduated responsibility, UH provides scaffolding as candidates deploy increasingly advanced skills and as performance expectations become more demanding. Table 3 offers an overview of the co-teaching progression over the course of the residency, wherein responsibilities are slowly increased until residents and mentor teachers are engaging in all six forms of shared instructional practice. After this ramp-up, mentor teachers and residents then have flexibility to implement co-teaching as appropriate for the situation and classroom context.

Table 3. UH Progression of Co-Teaching Responsibilities Throughout the Residency

Weeks 1–3	Weeks 4–6	Weeks 7–10	Week 11–End
• One teach one observe • One teach one assist • Alternative teaching	• One teach one observe • One teach one assist • Alternative teaching	• One teach one observe • One teach one assist • Alternative teaching • Station teaching • Parallel teaching • Team teaching	• Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting

Source: University of Houston College of Education. (n.d.). *Progression of student teaching responsibilities* [Internal document].

This co-teaching progression is relatively complex, specific, and directive. Still, the guidance offered by UH is, by necessity, somewhat open-ended, given the many hours that teacher candidates spend in classrooms. The UH Student Teaching Handbook prefaces its description for how teacher candidates progress through the semesters with “As a general rule,” and this flexible approach continues throughout the residency. For example, the handbook states, “It is important to note that the mentor teacher—the teaching professional—maintains the authority in pacing,” and “The mentor teacher decides when to use which [co-teaching] strategies.”⁶⁰

A principal who has hosted multiple UH residents described the flow of the residency co-teaching model as a “mind shift” for mentor teachers from more traditional student teaching. She described traditional student teaching as the “you take over” model, in which the student teacher starts by passively observing and then is handed full responsibility for the classroom relatively quickly, unlike the gradual assumption of teaching duties in co-teaching. A UH program administrator drew a similar distinction:

It’s not that model of “You watch for a little while, and then you help out for a little while, and you take over for the rest of the year.” They’re co-teaching from day one, so they’re able to practice the craft with the support of a mentor teacher.

Accordingly, although candidates take on immediate responsibilities in the co-teaching model, they are not left to their own devices. This, too, is a feature of the graduated responsibility approach: Part of preparing teacher candidates to take over successively more classroom responsibilities is making sure that they are not overwhelmed initially, thereby better equipping them to build the skills and knowledge to successfully meet the increasing demands placed upon them over the rest of the year.⁶¹

Mentor teachers—expected to facilitate this balance between guidance and independence for residents—are supported by initial training from UH and with regular check-ins from site coordinators. A site coordinator described such a session as “kind of the same thing as I do with my [residents],” including a review of expectations and “of what the semester is going to look like ... and [what to] focus on each month.” In some cases, schools and districts provide additional training for their mentor teachers beyond that specified by the EPP residency model.

Mentors interviewed for this case study expressed satisfaction with the level of communication about their responsibilities, while some drew contrasts between UH and other EPPs. “The other program [I served as a mentor teacher for] was kind of messy,” one mentor teacher noted. “You got the student teacher, but you never really knew what the expectation was.” A colleague described a similar experience with a different EPP, explaining, “I never really received any correspondence from their [university regarding] what expectations were. I was the one saying, ‘Do you want to do this? Would you like to teach this?’” This was not true of UH, they maintained. As one mentor teacher said, “They’re pretty clear about what they wanted.”

Resident Performance Assessments and Gateways

The co-teaching progression is marked by regular performance-based assessments conducted by the site coordinator with support from the mentor teacher. Residents have two required observations per semester, bolstered by at least two additional walk-throughs and one coaching visit. Interviewees shared that informal visits and conversations are more frequent than the formal ones. Performance assessments during formal observations follow the “POP cycle” process (preobservation, observation, postobservation),⁶² including meetings before and after lessons to provide input and feedback. Candidates create a video recording of each lesson, score their own teaching against the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) rubric (Texas’s teacher evaluation tool), and discuss these scores at the postconference. Mentor teachers also complete monthly online candidate performance reports.

The POP cycle represents a change from previous observation practices at UH. One site coordinator described how “back in the day,” the preconference was a quick interaction during which the field supervisor “would pull you out in the hallway and say, ‘What do I need to know before I walk in there in 2 seconds?’” After that, “They [would] do the observation and sit at a table and immediately debrief.” The site coordinator went on to contrast the EPP’s prior approach with the current implementation of POP cycles. “Now the preconference is about 48 hours before,” the site coordinator explained, which allows time for a conversation and early feedback. “They’re really being coached through that plan, making adjustments.”

The video recording candidates create when they teach their formally observed lessons also becomes a tool for reflection. A site coordinator explained that “the candidate goes home, watches the video, and also scores themselves” before coming back in for a postconference and focused feedback. This feedback is kept short to increase its usefulness—another contrast from preresidency candidate observation practices at UH. As another site coordinator explained, the feedback is “very specific in choosing one reinforcement and one refinement ... rather than going through the laundry list. ... It’s a way more focused observation” compared to the “more compliance-based” approach used previously.

Data from residents’ formal assessments is explicitly evaluated against standardized checkpoints, known as “performance gates,” to ensure their progress through and successful completion of the residency. According to the UH Student Teaching Handbook, residents must “meet the performance gates for both teaching practice and professionalism” in order to continue through the program.⁶³ The site coordinator who laid out the differences between observations in the old and new systems also touched on clinical experience checkpoints, explaining:

There are stakes attached to it now. ... That wasn’t necessarily true before. ... Unless they score a 2 on each indicator, they can’t move to the second semester ... and unless they score a 3 on each indicator in the second semester ... we won’t certify them.

This site coordinator connected clinical checkpoints to the program’s focus on preparing educators to take over their own classrooms, “meaning that when they start on the first day [as teacher of record], they are a proficient teacher and those [PreK–12] students can be expected to make progress.”

Still, if a resident does not meet performance gates, they are not left to fend for themselves. As one site coordinator explained:

Whenever I observe something where I feel that ... [the candidate is] really lacking in proficiency and it needs to be developed for the sake of the students they’re going to be working with, I begin to talk to them about ways they might want to address that. And then, of course, I point them to research and anything that might support them. And I also talk to the mentor ... because they spend a lot more time with them than I do.

Site coordinators also described tailoring seminar content to residents’ needs and providing additional coaching or resources to help support teacher candidates in attaining the skills necessary to clear performance gates.

Shared Governance Structures

Shared governance structures are another key feature essential to both the transformation and the ongoing operations of the UH residency program. The clinical experiences and district partnerships that the UH residency emphasizes depend in large part on buy-in from and alignment between the EPP and each of its district partners. UH's residency governance model enables coordinated decision-making grounded in reciprocal data sharing "to ensure schools have a voice in shaping the teacher preparation program as well as to foster joint responsibility and innovation."⁶⁴

Shared EPP–district governance structures revolve around three types of required meetings that take place regularly throughout the school year: governance meetings, mentor teacher meetings, and site coordinator meetings (see [Table 4](#)). Bringing together administrators and faculty from UH and its partnership districts, these meetings create the time and space for the communication, discussion, training, and decision-making that define shared program governance. Mentor teacher meetings include mentors from across the UH partner districts, and site coordinator meetings likewise involve all site coordinators. Separate governance meetings are held between the EPP and each of its partner districts. Four times per year, UH program leaders and site coordinators meet individually with each district.

These meetings are part of the system of shared governance adopted by US PREP network residency programs. US PREP documents and technical assistance sessions provide guidance on planning and scheduling meetings, creating meeting agendas, sharing data, choosing discussion topics, and following up. Required and suggested attendees are listed for each type of meeting. Though detailed, this guidance is viewed by EPP administrators as supportive rather than prescriptive. As one of the UH residency program directors explained, governance meetings with partner districts allow UH to ensure the residency program is addressing the district's specific context and needs, and that the EPP is receiving what is needed from the district: "How do you support us? How do we support you? ... It could vary from campus to campus. It could vary from district to district. And that is part of the design."

While the shared governance model is demanding in terms of time and resources, cross-institutional meetings are characterized by information sharing geared toward collaboration in decision-making and continuous improvement efforts. Meetings do not merely allow for exchanges of information, but also for shared engagement in running the residency program. In addition to changing the nature of the EPP–district relationship, adopting shared governance structures has resulted in changes to EPP administration, resident clinical placement processes, and district policies and practices. Several such changes are detailed in the sections that follow.

Table 4. UH University–District Governance Structures

Meeting type	Governance meetings 2x per semester	Mentor teacher meetings 2x per semester	Site coordinator meetings Monthly (Aug.–May)
UH program directors and leaders (department chair, assistant dean)	X		X
Site coordinators	X	X	X
District and school leaders (superintendent, assistant superintendent, human resources director, other administrators, principals)	X		
Mentor teachers		X	
UH faculty (instructors)			X (once per semester)

Sources: University of Houston College of Education. (2023). *Student teaching handbook* [Internal document]; US PREP. (n.d.). *Partnership governance meetings: A guide to planning, executing, and following-up partnership governance meetings*.

Formalized Meeting Structures to Enable Shared Governance

Each UH–district residency partnership holds two shared governance meetings per semester. Attended by UH, district, and school administrators, each meeting is facilitated by a UH site coordinator who works with residents in that district. Governance meetings serve several purposes. Early in a partnership, they are a venue for mutual familiarization with the structures and roles of the residency partnership and the development of a shared vision and goals. Once the residency is established, the meetings allow UH and the district to share and discuss data on residents’ performance; develop plans in relation to teacher candidates and mentor teachers; align UH curriculum and assignments with district priorities and practices; and, in general, coordinate the roles each partner plays, the responsibilities they hold, and their goals in the partnership.⁶⁵ As one site coordinator articulated, “We look at data, we look at trends, and make decisions based on that, because [the] ultimate goal is for them to hire the teacher candidates.”

District personnel expressed their appreciation for the communication from and relationship with UH. One district administrator characterized UH as flexible and collaborative, “always open to new adventures.” Another described the advantages of “knowing that if I needed to talk to someone I could just text. ... I could email and I’m going to get a response.” A colleague added that it was reassuring “just knowing that you can reach out to them,” explaining, “You’re going to get in touch with somebody. You’re going to be heard. They’re not just blowing you off. ... They’re going to set up a meeting and they want to hear what you’ve got and what they can offer.”

Site coordinators also hold two mentor teacher meetings per semester to facilitate collaborative relations between site coordinators and mentor teachers. Early in the year, site coordinators use these meetings to survey mentor teachers on their experiences, strengths, and needs. These exchanges inform the training and resources provided throughout the year. As the year progresses, site coordinators and mentor teachers use meeting time to review residents' performance and plan approaches to coaching. One site coordinator explained, "We look at data. ... What do we need? We provide professional development in coaching, and how to give feedback, and how to help [the candidates] grow [and] improve in their lessons."

Mentor teachers described the benefits of this data sharing. "Whenever [residents] get observed, we get the feedback," one explained, allowing mentors to "see what ... the site coordinator saw." The meetings also provide opportunities to review expectations and share observations, to discuss "This is where [residents] should be right now," or "This is a pattern."

UH has also implemented monthly site coordinator meetings. Facilitated by the site coordinator leader, these meetings are attended by all site coordinators and the two residency program directors. UH course instructors attend on occasion, when the topic requires it. Program directors highlighted the importance of these monthly meetings as check-ins with site coordinators to ensure residents are receiving needed supports and feedback in their classroom placements. Site coordinators share and discuss the challenges and successes of their residents with their colleagues and program leadership. These meetings also create space for site coordinators, program directors, and course instructors to engage in shared training and professional development. Finally, as one site coordinator described, bringing in faculty who teach UH courses offers a "dual perspective":

Every semester one or more of those sessions is a combination of site coordinators and university professors. We all sit down at the table and we often score a lesson, a video, ahead of time and then come back as a group and discuss our observations and next steps. We look at the data together.

On these occasions, site coordinator meetings serve to bridge the experience of clinical supervisors and course instructors who fulfill different roles.

Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that the monthly site coordinator meetings were a significant change for the program. Previously, the program held only two meetings for clinical faculty over a one-semester clinical placement, which was the only formal communication between clinical faculty and the program, and the meetings were primarily procedural. One of the residency program directors laid this out candidly, stating, "The meeting at the beginning was a meeting to go over ... all the logistics. The meeting at the end was to turn in all your papers. And unless there was some big issue, we really didn't talk to them." The same director described how the new structure was different: "Now [we're] in really strong contact with the site coordinators. I mean, we talk to them all the time."

Shared Governance and Data-Driven Continuous Improvement

UH residency program leaders and site coordinators regularly engage with district partners in continuous improvement efforts grounded in open access to teacher candidate performance data and UH EPP information. Data-driven improvement efforts occur through regular EPP–district collaboration to improve the UH residency program writ large and to attend to individual candidates' learning experiences. Iterative data sharing for program improvement is vital for shared governance and is a commonly instilled value

across US PREP partnerships. US PREP has described these data-sharing practices as being “at the heart of many components of the yearlong residency,” and a US PREP report specifically described the strength of UH’s “culture of data sharing and improvement efforts.”⁶⁶

At the instructional level, this orientation toward data-informed improvement plays a fundamental role. Specifically, according to a 2021 UH report to the Texas Education Agency, “Data are used to examine the impact of each course on [resident] learning and development” and “to inform coursework revisions.”⁶⁷ In the same report, UH leadership asserted that “structures for using data for continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making by each [interested party]” are “embedded throughout the year-long residency.”⁶⁸

Data used for shared continuous improvement efforts come from course instructors, site coordinators, program directors, and even residents themselves.⁶⁹ Sources include clinical assessments of residents conducted by site coordinators and mentor teachers, as well as data from nonassessment sources like district satisfaction surveys.⁷⁰ A UH administrator explained that, at UH, “We do a lot of our own analytical work because we have access to district data.” These data are central to program operations and are used, as described in the UH report to the Texas Education Agency, “to inform decision-making and resource allocation” and to create “program improvement plans ... [that include] actionable next steps for implementing programmatic changes.”⁷¹ Data are also shared across partnerships, according to a UH administrator who said, “We will, with some regularity, bring our partners together, and we will have them talk about their data.” She characterized these meetings as “kind of like a professional learning community or a network improvement community.”

Transparent communication between UH and districts also facilitates UH’s responsiveness to district needs and priorities. Faculty regularly share internal program information such as current enrollment, expected number of residents and graduates each semester, and graduates’ certification areas. District partners also communicate with the university, offering insights into differing district needs, priorities, and capacity to support teacher residents. These exchanges have allowed districts to be more responsive to resident needs, shaping placements and policies to enhance the partnership. One district administrator articulated:

I think University of Houston’s willingness to just kind of share really anything—data, resources, or time—I think it goes a long way. ... When we go back to our directors and our superintendents and tell our district leaders what we’re doing [and] how they’re supporting us, it makes them supportive of the partnership too.

On a more granular level, UH faculty, particularly the site coordinators, engage regularly with district administrators, school leaders, and mentor teachers to examine candidate-level data from observations and evaluations. Much of this engagement takes place during governance meetings and mentor teacher meetings. These data provide university staff and district partners with a holistic view of candidate progression as well as opportunities for growth and support during the yearlong residency, enabling a highly responsive, data-driven, and continuously improving approach to coursework, coaching, co-teaching, and school-level supports.

District Engagement in the Resident Clinical Experience

UH residents’ placements are arranged, when possible, to create cohorts of multiple residents at single campuses. This arrangement is expedient for site coordinators’ scheduling and is useful in developing collegial relationships between residents. It also provides opportunities for district partners to play a more

direct role in resident development. Because residents are expected to participate in the same meetings and professional development sessions as other teachers, districts can use these opportunities to teach residents the norms, values, and priorities of the district, thereby enhancing residents' fit for future employment. According to a UH program director, "Our data show that, by and large, candidates stay in the district where they student teach." Therefore, "For the districts to develop them in that district [specific] way ... that's a strength."

District engagement with shared governance can also influence residents' clinical experience and preparation in other ways. Some of the UH district partners have elected to take a larger role, beyond what is required, in supporting their resident cohorts. One partner district offers two trainings a year for residents, specifically aimed at helping them get hired in the district. They follow these trainings with support creating resumes, filling out applications, and preparing for interviews. Another partner district has restructured recruiting and hiring events around the schedules and needs of residents to boost hiring rates.

The process of choosing mentor teachers is another example of the connection between shared governance and clinical experiences. At UH, partner district principals—sometimes along with district central office staff—are responsible for choosing mentor teachers for their schools. Given the important role mentor teachers play in the residency program, this represents a meaningful district responsibility. Though UH provides mentor training, as the dean of the UH College of Education emphasized, the districts are "making final choices" in mentor selection and investing significant time in doing so. Districts are also approaching their role in the process in new ways. Districts are no longer looking for a mentor teacher who is "just a warm body ... taking a student [teacher]." Nor are they placing residents just because, "Well, this teacher really needed some help in her classroom." Instead, the dean explained, "They're selecting qualified mentors." A mentor teacher described this process at his school:

Our principal recommends us to UH and then they reach out and ask if we would like to be part of it. And then there is an initial meeting with the site coordinator, and they go over what that would look like for us throughout the year, the expectations for student teachers, expectations for mentors.

After that, the teacher said, potential mentors had a choice: "You say yes or you say no."

The Importance of the Site Coordinator Role

One of the most important elements of the UH residency model is the site coordinator role. Introduced as part of UH's adoption of the US PREP residency framework, site coordinator positions are filled by clinical faculty members and replace the "field supervisor" positions that previously supported UH student teachers. This change was a meaningful one. At UH, as at many traditional EPPs, field supervisors in the preresidency era had been non-tenure-track faculty members responsible for working with student teachers in their clinical placements. They conducted classroom visits, informal observations, observational assessments, and coaching. Site coordinators, in contrast, have additional responsibilities, including residency seminar instruction, facilitating district–EPP shared governance, liaising with site principals and mentor teachers, and helping to coordinate mentor teacher training. With these added responsibilities, site coordinators are cited as "critical levers" in the residency, according to one EPP director. "When we think about all the components of our program that make it what it is," she elaborated,

“all of it runs through the site coordinator.” A partnership school principal concurred, stating that the program “rides on them,” while US PREP refers to the site coordinator as “the linchpin to program success”⁷² (see [Site Coordinators in the US PREP Residency Model](#)).

Site Coordinators in the US PREP Residency Model

Site coordinators are integral to every US PREP residency program. According to US PREP, site coordinators are university faculty members who:

- Evaluate residents and teach seminars and methods courses
- Conduct walk-through observations, formal observations, and coaching of residents
- Are trained and calibrated on the resident evaluation tool
- Have demonstrated proficient coaching practices
- Facilitate observation tool norming
- Are embedded in the district, with relationships with administration and mentor teachers
- Plan and facilitate data-driven quarterly mentor trainings and ongoing mentor meetings and support
- Plan and facilitate data-driven quarterly governance meetings
- Attend university meetings and programs, including faculty meetings and professional development, as appropriate

Source: US PREP. (2022). [Scaling the site coordinator role](#).

Recruiting Site Coordinators

UH looks for site coordinators with knowledge and skills that span instruction, pedagogy, clinical coaching, and relationship building. UH prioritizes hiring experienced educators into the site coordinator role, including former classroom teachers, instructional coaches, and school and district administrators. Some site coordinators have worked within partnership districts and can draw on their existing relationships to bolster UH–district partnerships. Additionally, many UH site coordinators are themselves graduates of the UH EdD program. In the words of one faculty member, describing UH’s clinical faculty, “Most of us have deep connections to public education in this area.”

A UH program director who noted the importance of “hiring the right site coordinators” also highlighted needing site coordinator candidates who share UH’s vision for quality preparation. Site coordinators frequently work independently and, as the director put it, “Some decisions they need to be able to make without us ... and we can trust that they’re making those decisions well.”

One additional attribute in vetting potential site coordinators is purely pragmatic: They must be available for work during PreK–12 school hours. “Finding adjuncts who are available to teach during the day is so difficult,” a program director shared. “Many of us are reaching out to former colleagues who have retired from [Pre]K–12.” She also noted that the demands of the job can be challenging to square with

the responsibilities of full-time, tenure-track faculty members: “If we use full-time people ... they will have to plan their support of the candidate around coursework, around faculty meetings, around service obligation. ... It might keep them from being as responsive to candidate needs.”

UH’s emphasis on hiring experienced site coordinators has several benefits. Their varied experience means they can work across contexts or, as a faculty member put it, “make connections between our teacher candidates and teachers in the field.” Another noted that hiring site coordinators who were local administrators means that “they not only know the principals in that district, they also know [human resources].” Site coordinators’ prior experience also helps them develop relationships with mentor teachers. As one site coordinator noted, “I was a principal for over 20 years. I understand how valuable people’s time is. I do not try to bother teachers during their conference period, their lunch period, or too long after school, or on Fridays. ... They appreciated that.”

Indeed, mentor teachers expressed appreciation for such norms. “They’re flexible with our scheduling too, because they know that we’re busy,” one explained. “[My site coordinator] keeps it short and straight to the point,” said another. The latter mentor teacher also shared, “When [site coordinators] do walk-throughs ... they check in with us, too. ... We have the opportunity to talk to them if we need to.”

Site Coordinators and the Clinical Experience

To the outside observer, the meaningful differences between site coordinator and field supervisor roles may not be clear. Site coordinator positions and the previously existing field supervisor positions have been filled, for the most part, by the same population at UH: experienced PreK–12 educators and administrators, often retired, who serve in part-time, non-tenure-track faculty appointments. The roles are frequently described as comparable, as when a faculty member explained, “In a traditional program that would be your student teaching supervisor, but in our program we call that person a site coordinator.” Although this faculty member added that site coordinators “do so much more than go in three times a semester and do an observation,” the comparison still suggested a field supervisor with a few additional duties.

In fact, the site coordinator’s additional duties include important clinical responsibilities. As the UH Student Teaching Handbook lays out, site coordinators “supervise, coach, and evaluate teacher candidates during field placements,” with each site coordinator responsible for 17 to 18 residents. Site coordinators “understand teacher candidate goals and recognize strengths and weaknesses related to instructional competency and professionalism” and “assist the teacher candidate to develop and excel.” They also convey “all communication” from mentors and candidates to UH.⁷³ In addition, UH site coordinators serve as instructors for the weekly UH student teaching seminars held throughout the residency year. In 2024, the UH residency had 18 site coordinators overseeing residents in 12 districts.⁷⁴

That site coordinators provide close support for residents was affirmed by faculty and residency completers alike. A recent residency alumna described this support in detail:

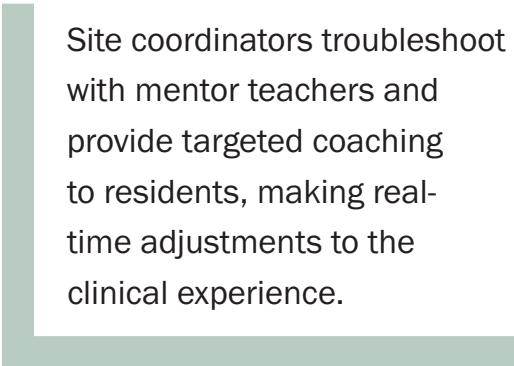
She was on speed dial for me. She would check in on me. She’ll call me at 6:00 in the morning. ... She’s like, “Do you need anything? Let me know.” She [set up] meetings with my mentor and me. She had a checklist of what I need to be doing in the classroom, and she’d constantly pull my mentor teacher to check in on how I’m doing and saying, “Oh, is she doing this in the classroom?”

UH provides resources and training to the site coordinators through the monthly site coordinator meetings; UH also issues a monthly newsletter with scheduling and assignment reminders. The monthly site coordinator meetings focus on ongoing program events, requirements, assignments, and deadlines. They are also used to identify and address professional development topics as they arise. For example, during the 2022–23 school year, several site coordinator meetings focused on improving feedback for teacher candidates, and site coordinators emerged from this series with a new, comprehensive coaching guide.⁷⁵

Site Coordinators and Governance Structures

As important as site coordinators are to the residency program, clinical and instructional duties are not site coordinators' only responsibilities. Site coordinators play a key role in the governance structures that define residency partnerships, including by preparing for and facilitating the quarterly EPP–district governance meetings that are central to each district's residency partnership with UH. Furthermore, site coordinators provide much of the shared data that participants analyze in governance meetings, compiling resident clinical assessments and feedback from mentor teachers and administrators. The site coordinator role, thus, is a central locus of communication for a program that emphasizes the clinical experience.

Site coordinators also serve as crucial liaisons between UH and partner districts in contexts beyond the shared governance structures. In addition to leading mentor teacher training and acting as communication conduits between mentor teachers and UH administrators, they also keep program directors updated on the state of the clinical experience.⁷⁶ The site coordinator role is designed to build a strong foundation for EPP–district collaboration, and the web of communication they maintain builds trust across the partnership and enables cross-partnership coordination to address district priorities.



Site coordinators troubleshoot with mentor teachers and provide targeted coaching to residents, making real-time adjustments to the clinical experience.

Some issues raised by districts are handled by site coordinators themselves, and at UH they have wide latitude to do so. Site coordinators troubleshoot with mentor teachers and provide targeted coaching to residents, making real-time adjustments to the clinical experience. At times, they work with a district to problem-solve. As one district administrator illustrated, “Sometimes ... a candidate’s need is a little bit greater. The [site coordinator] may reach out and say, ‘We’ve identified this candidate ... that needs some more support. What support can you offer them?’” The administrator described a variety of potential responses, both individual and programmatic:

Then we can look at ... is the mentor doing a great job? Can we offer another mentor? Do we need to ramp up PLCs [professional learning communities]? Do we need an instructional coach in there working with them? ... In what ways can we offer more support?

Funding and Sustaining the Site Coordinator Position

With all that the site coordinator role demands in both actions and qualifications, these positions require consistent and dedicated funding. Compared to the field supervisor role, the site coordinator role requires higher compensation. As one program director noted, “It is a bigger lift. It’s a much bigger lift. So we

cannot continue to pay them what we were paying them for only three observations.” According to the program directors, the shift from field supervisors to site coordinators effectively doubled their budget needs for clinical teaching supervision.

Fully funding the positions at UH required several years of braiding money from a variety of sources. Program leadership started by advocating for more funding in the site coordinating budget line in the EPP’s annual budget. They combined this funding with an additional student teaching fee, reallocated funds from failed faculty searches and new hire pay differentials, and even freed up funds by extending the timelines for computer hardware replacements. While their persistence ultimately paid off, one of the program directors acknowledged that “it was not as simple as sometimes I think it’s portrayed,” explaining that they “had really good people who were really creative in finding money.”

The UH EPP directors acknowledged an additional factor that has been vital to financing the site coordinator role: A key reason why site coordinators are not hired as full-time staff with fringe benefits is because most are retired educators already receiving health care coverage and a pension. One administrator described the pay that site coordinators receive from UH as “supplemental income for them to stay connected in the schools.” It is, in other words, the status of many site coordinators as retirees, with other sources of income and benefits, that makes the site coordinator role financially viable.

Summary of the UH Teacher Residency

UH has adopted a variety of programmatic features to facilitate implementation of its residency program. The residency program was put into place through a comprehensive redesign effort that strengthened district partnerships and enhanced teacher candidate preparation. Program staff and partners have continued to refine and scale the program since UH began the redesign process in 2015, and the residency model is now well established and well regarded in the metropolitan Houston area.

The UH residency program is organized around four key design features. (1) A practice-based model drives the alignment of candidates’ coursework and their clinical experiences. (2) Scaffolded clinical experiences progressively build teacher candidate knowledge and skills. (3) Shared governance structures enable authentic, improvement-focused partnerships. (4) The site coordinator—whose role combines the duties and responsibilities of a clinical faculty member, professional development provider, district liaison, and more—is crucial to facilitating the clinically intensive residency. Additional practices and features that stand out as supporting UH’s residency program implementation include the detailed guidance that UH provides for mentor teachers and site coordinators; the deep experience that UH faculty provide as they iterate on their program design and work with partner districts; and UH’s practice of combining funds from numerous sources to support site coordinators in its residency model.

University of Texas at El Paso's Miner Teacher Residency

As a key player in its local educator preparation system, The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has garnered substantial recognition over the years for preparing teachers capable of addressing the diverse needs of its local student population and reducing local educator shortages. Educator preparation program (EPP) administrators estimate that UTEP's EPP writ large (including, but not limited to, the residency program) prepares 70% of the teachers filling local teaching vacancies each year. Teachers prepared by UTEP remain in the classroom at rates above the state average. One year into teaching, 93% of UTEP alumni teachers were still in the classroom, compared to 89% statewide. This trend holds 3 years (85%, compared to 70%) and 5 years (72%, compared to 58%) into the profession.⁷⁷ The quality of UTEP-prepared teachers contributes to UTEP's recognition—by the state and federally—as an asset to El Paso and the larger Paso del Norte region. At the state level, the university has been designated as a Vetted Teacher Residency.⁷⁸ Federally, it has received grant awards from both the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence and Teacher Quality Partnership programs. These recognitions collectively include over \$3.3 million in federal grant funding to support features above and beyond the core of UTEP's residency program to further invest in UTEP's efforts to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers.

UTEP is nestled within the city of El Paso, which is situated at the western tip of Texas and along the United States–Mexico border. El Paso, with a population of just under 700,000, is the largest majority-Hispanic city in the United States. Within the broader El Paso County, nine school districts serve over 164,000 students, over 90% of whom identify as Hispanic or Latino/a and over 75% of whom are classified by the state as economically disadvantaged.⁷⁹ A quarter of students are emergent bilingual students, reflecting the linguistic heritage that El Paso shares with its sister city, Ciudad Juárez, on the Mexico side of the Rio Grande. UTEP, a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, provides postsecondary education to around 24,000 students, 80% of whom identify as Hispanic or Latino/a and 5% of whom identify as Mexican nationals. Over half of UTEP students are first-generation college students, and over 70% are eligible for the federal Pell Grant Program.⁸⁰

UTEP is the primary university-based educator preparation program (EPP) within a 200-mile radius of El Paso. In 2023–24, UTEP certified 249 individuals, with a large proportion staying in the area to teach.⁸¹ These conditions situate UTEP's EPP as an integral part of the community's education ecosystem, since each cohort of UTEP-prepared teachers plays a significant role in educating the community's next generation of PreK–12 students. Furthermore, according to Clifton Tanabe, Dean of the College of Education, approximately 80% of UTEP's student population comes from the nine local PreK–12 districts in the region. The recruitment and retention of locally based teachers creates a self-sustaining loop in which the preparedness of today's teacher candidates directly influences the preparation of tomorrow's students for college and career. In Tanabe's words, "That's an incredible context-based reality. It's also an unbelievably powerful place to imagine incredibly positive impact. And it's a tremendous responsibility."

This case study focuses on the primary undergraduate pathway within the College of Education: the Miner Teacher Residency (named after UTEP's mascot). The subsequent sections describe the program's key features and explain how the program works collaboratively with local PreK–12 districts to develop teachers with the knowledge and skills to serve the diverse needs of students in the region, thereby building and maintaining this self-sustaining local education ecosystem.

In addition to the undergraduate pathway that this case study focuses on, UTEP operates a postbaccalaureate “resident apprenticeship” pathway that provides a yearlong clinical experience to teachers seeking certification and/or a master’s degree in education.⁸² It also offers an internship certification wherein candidates are teachers of record during their clinical experience, as well as a Grow Your Own “resident instructional aide” pathway for currently employed paraprofessionals or instructional aides.

The Miner Teacher Residency

UTEP’s College of Education runs an educator preparation program that culminates in the Miner Teacher Residency. The residency is the core structure for clinical practice for teacher candidates pursuing an undergraduate degree in education and teacher certification. According to the college, the Miner Teacher Residency has a goal to “prepare the highest-quality teachers who are “day-one ready” to meet the needs of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse learners and to provide rigorous, high-quality learning experiences for all students.”⁸³ The majority of UTEP’s teacher candidates now pursue the residency route; EPP leadership shared that 149 candidates completed the undergraduate residency program in 2022–23. Of those UTEP undergraduates who earn their teacher certification through a one-semester student teaching clinical experience, most are secondary education credential candidates whose content area majors are outside the College of Education, though UTEP’s EPP is currently working on developing dual degrees with other UTEP colleges to make residencies feasible for these candidates.

Prior to entering the EPP, candidates must complete 42–44 hours of core coursework and 24–27 hours of supplementary coursework, which are typically introductory, foundational, or general education courses. Candidates then take 20–25 hours of preservice teaching coursework, focusing on pedagogical practices for various content areas. After these sets of coursework and formal admission into the EPP, candidates complete 9–12 credit hours of additional preservice coursework on pedagogical practices and classroom management. They then enter their yearlong clinical experience as residents, with each resident placed in the classroom of a carefully selected and trained mentor teacher. Residents typically work alongside their mentor teacher 3 days per week. Another day of the week is reserved for UTEP coursework, and the last day is set aside for residents to fill strategic staffing roles. (Strategic staffing models reallocate district funds, typically for instructional support staff roles like substitute teachers or paraprofessionals, to residency stipends; in return, residents fulfill these instructional roles on a part-time basis.) During the residency year, residents also take 15–21 credit hours of pedagogically and practice-focused coursework that augments their clinical experience. Most residents pursue Elementary with ESL or Bilingual certifications, but the College of Education also offers certifications in Special Education and Middle Grades.⁸⁴

Aiming to become the “superhub for teacher preparation” in its geographic area, the college made a series of programmatic changes in 2019 to improve the quality of teacher preparation.⁸⁵ The redesigned program anchors itself on five key nonnegotiable features developed through its partnership with US PREP. (As described in the introductory section, US PREP is an organization that provides technical assistance to design a sustainable and scalable residency model.) As explained by an EPP leader who oversees residency operations, “For us, fidelity to the model has been really important. As we scale up and scale out, we keep [the nonnegotiables], and we make adjustments as needed. But [these] five components, I would say, are the core features of the model.” The five features are:

1. **Aligning scaffolded and sequenced coursework with clinical experience through substantive faculty engagement.** UTEP’s leadership team engaged with faculty when redesigning their curriculum, collaborating to create a scope and sequence aligned to candidates’ clinical experiences.

2. **Engaging in data-driven district partnerships to build mutual trust.** UTEP developed a structure of systematic collaboration and communication with its partner districts. UTEP's program leadership analyzes teacher candidates' performance alongside its partner districts and supports teacher candidates' growth throughout the residency program.
3. **Scaffolding co-teaching with selected and trained mentor teachers.** Teacher candidates co-teach for an entire academic year alongside a matched mentor teacher selected by UTEP's district partners. UTEP's site coordinators train mentor teachers before the start of the residency, with additional trainings throughout the year, and continue to support mentor teachers' work with residents over the full school year.
4. **Providing intensive coaching and feedback from site coordinators.** Site coordinators provide intensive data-driven feedback and coaching to teacher candidates throughout the residency year using walk-throughs, observations, and feedback cycles.
5. **Funding the residency year.** UTEP ensured that all residents received a stipend of up to \$20,000 to help them pay for their living expenses during the yearlong clinical experience. The program blends and braids various funding sources from local philanthropies and district partners to fund these stipends.⁸⁶

Each of these five features is enhanced by UTEP's focus on continuous program improvement and an ethos of elevating the teaching profession so that teachers receive the recognition and support they deserve.

As a result of UTEP's program transformation, some partner districts have reported early evidence of promising outcomes. These outcomes include reductions in the number of teachers who leave the school and who leave the profession entirely; higher ratings on formal and informal evaluations for beginning teachers relative to beginning teachers' evaluation scores prior to program transformation; improvements to mentor teachers' instructional quality, also based on evaluation scores; and improvements to district capacity to operate and scale residencies sustainably.⁸⁷ Taking these initial outcomes in stride, UTEP has continued to sustain and scale up its efforts to partner with the districts in the region that do not yet host residents and expand its pathway offerings to recruit a wider net of teacher candidates.

This case study first describes the transformation process of UTEP's preparation program. It then examines the key features of the transformed preparation program, identifying the actions that UTEP leadership took to improve the EPP's ability to provide high-quality, differentiated candidate preparation. Next, it discusses the college's plan to sustain and continue scaling its preparation program. The section concludes with a summary that highlights key practices that support strong program design and implementation.

Transforming Preparation at UTEP

UTEP's steady progress and promising outcomes in the span of a few years did not develop by happenstance. The university's central role in shaping the future of its community and educator workforce led Dean Clifton Tanabe, upon his appointment in mid-2018, to challenge college faculty to redesign UTEP's EPP in service of creating day-one ready educators. Tanabe called upon the EPP to "roll up our

sleeves and own that responsibility, and let people know that we are an important part of the outcomes for students in the region.” He continued, “That’s the role I played—framing how important our work was and where the key linchpins were [for the EPP].”

In turn, UTEP engaged in intentional, relationship-based undertakings to root its teacher preparation program in the community, implement structural improvements with the aid of technical assistance providers, and engage its faculty to redesign the program’s coursework and align it with teacher candidates’ preservice clinical experience.

Establishing a Symbiotic Relationship With the Local Community

A crucial step toward UTEP’s EPP transformation was formalizing structures to routinely involve community partners. As an EPP leader described, they had a “driving goal of raising educational outcomes in the community,” with an eye toward creating “a regionwide approach and having systemic mechanisms for collaborating and making shared decisions together.” In close collaboration with local philanthropic organizations, UTEP formed the El Paso Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice (CoP) in early 2019 to strengthen the local teacher pipeline and elevate the profession. The CoP

involved members from the El Paso Community Foundation, the Council on Regional Economic Expansion and Education Development, El Paso Community College, the regional Education Service Center serving the El Paso area, local philanthropic organizations, and local school districts. These entities represent the breadth of interested parties that together have the motivation and resources to strengthen educator preparation at UTEP and improve teacher quality in the schools they serve.

A crucial step toward UTEP’s EPP transformation was formalizing structures to routinely involve community partners.

The CoP established by UTEP grew out of a long history of community partnership.⁸⁸ For example, under previous leadership, UTEP had been cultivating relationships with district and community partners by conducting certain methods courses within partner district schools. Dean Tanabe and the EPP built on this groundwork with listening sessions to learn about the perceived misalignment between UTEP’s level of teacher preparation and districts’ needs for well-prepared teachers. Findings from these listening sessions were brought into CoP conversations, enabling UTEP to work with its closest partners on improving teacher preparation. According to an EPP leader, the CoP enabled UTEP EPP leadership to refine the program’s “responsibility to the community, knowing that we wanted to strengthen the teacher workforce, [and] be held accountable for that.”

In collaboration with the CoP, UTEP codesigned its teacher pipeline priorities, key goals, and progress metrics and indicators, landing on paid teacher residencies as the primary preparation route to support affordable, high-quality preparation. One UTEP administrator attributed both the speed and the success of the program’s recent transformation progress to the CoP, explaining how a collective approach “has been a critical part of getting toward these driving goals” for both the community and the profession.

In addition to providing input on UTEP’s approach, CoP members provided initial seed funding to support UTEP’s transformation. Given the new structures and staffing roles that accompanied a residency model, some philanthropic and local workforce development organizations that participated in the CoP provided

initial funding for residency stipends and other expenses. This funding enabled UTEP to partner with two local school districts and support 19 residents in the 2019–20 academic year. The resident stipends demonstrated the CoP members' symbolic and financial investment in ensuring the residency was accessible and affordable. This was a crucial step because, as one EPP administrator noted, the residency “wasn't even imaginable without being able to provide a paid pathway for candidates.”

Partnering With US PREP for Program Transformation Technical Assistance

Nearly simultaneously, UTEP's College of Education formally entered into a partnership with US PREP—also a member of the CoP—in late 2018. US PREP worked with UTEP to launch its pilot residency year in 2019–20.⁸⁹ US PREP provided a host of supports on the clinical teaching experience and the structures needed to support that experience, allowing UTEP to adapt US PREP structures to each district partnership's needs and assets.

Adopting US PREP's residency features was no small feat; it required UTEP to invest significant time and material resources to introduce new elements to its EPP. Accordingly, the leaders of the College of Education first worked to reach consensus among themselves as well as with faculty members to adopt these transformational changes. One instructional faculty recalled:

The dean brought a whole faculty meeting together, and we spent half a day figuring out whether we wanted to do US PREP or not, and what it would mean. Because the idea is transformation, that really is at the heart. We had to analyze what we had now, what it should be, what it could be.

EPP leadership gauged the faculty's reactions and eventually reached consensus on adopting US PREP's transformation model. Consequently, as UTEP turned to US PREP for technical assistance in programmatic transformation, the consensus primed EPP faculty and administrators to begin planning for the programmatic and curricular changes needed to make the US PREP residency model work for UTEP.

Engaging UTEP Leadership and Faculty

The financial and visionary support of the CoP members, technical support from US PREP, and internal UTEP leadership to secure university investments worked in tandem to enable UTEP to establish residency partnerships with districts throughout the region after the pilot year. This momentum was crucial given administrators' desire to bring this work to scale. As one administrator noted, “We very quickly realized that we did not want a boutique residency program” that only served a handful of teacher candidates per year. UTEP was well equipped to expand the Miner Teacher Residency to other school districts, as both the CoP's input on teacher preparation and US PREP's technical assistance for residency implementation offered what an EPP leader described as a “constellation of influences that converged” and provided resources to shape the EPP's transformation.

Prior to the pilot year, program leaders leveraged the EPP's position within the region's educator ecosystem and worked with the university to commit two full-time faculty site coordinator positions into the institutional budget. Leadership also secured a university agreement to fund another two faculty lines contingent on program scaling. Program leadership highlighted this up-front investment as one critical effort to advance the residency program from pilot to scale.

One component of the efforts to revamp and bolster UTEP's preparation program was an explicit focus on restructuring the program's curriculum to ensure that candidates were prepared for their yearlong clinical experience and to support resident learning throughout the residency year. This focus complemented US PREP's practice-based coursework framework, which aims to prepare candidates for their yearlong clinical experience. An EPP leader affirmed these efforts as "one core piece of work toward that goal [of] quality [that] shouldn't be separated from the clinical side and the residency." EPP leadership, including the cochairs of the College of Education's Teacher Education Department, thus sought partnership with university faculty to redesign course content, sequences, and scaffolds. These intentional faculty engagement efforts included focus groups to discuss coursework requirements for current degree programs. Additionally, following a state-level legal change in 2019 that allowed for bachelor's degrees in education, EPP leadership and faculty also collaborated to map out the coursework and clinical experience requirements for this degree.⁹⁰ Additional legislation passed in the same year removed limits on the number of education courses that secondary education candidates were permitted to take, making room for dual degrees and secondary education minors. Thoughtful conversations between program leaders ensued to help the College of Education navigate these legislative changes, working to enable UTEP to create a preparation program wherein residents-to-be could receive intentionally designed field experiences and other relevant preparation coursework prior to their residency year.

UTEP's Postbaccalaureate Residency Pathway

UTEP's program redesign did not end at the undergraduate level. In summer 2020, soon after the undergraduate residency pilot, UTEP launched a postbaccalaureate residency program. As one administrator reflected, "We couldn't have a yearlong residency and have the gold standard of teacher prep on the undergraduate side and not do that in our postbaccalaureate program." The new postbaccalaureate residency program was designed for candidates with a bachelor's degree seeking certification to teach in PreK–12 classrooms. Teacher candidates pursuing this route can work toward certification with an additional accelerated Master of Arts in Education. While the undergraduate program is 2 years in length, the postbaccalaureate residency pathway can be completed in a shorter time frame. Because candidates are required to pass a preadmission content test, they have reduced content coursework.

Crucially, the program length does not compromise quality; the yearlong clinical experience in the postbaccalaureate route is the same as that offered for undergraduate students, ensuring that the rigor of training is consistently high. The main differences between the undergraduate and postbaccalaureate pathways lie in the preresidency coursework, the latter of which is accelerated, more pedagogically focused, and does not include content courses. During the residency year in both the undergraduate and postbaccalaureate pathways, residents take integrated coursework that focuses on pedagogy and instructional practices. These courses augment residents' clinical experience; for example, weekly seminars are designed to relate classroom instructional situations to corresponding instructional theory.

Sources: University of Texas at El Paso. (n.d.). [Admission requirements](#). (accessed 08/30/2024); University of Texas at El Paso. (n.d.). [Elementary education courses](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

UTEP's Residency Match Day and the Professionalization of Teaching

UTEP's biannual Match Day, a key component of the university's teacher preparation program, illustrates the College of Education's perspective on the importance of elevating the teaching profession. Celebrations, through the Match Day commemoration of teacher candidates' entrance into their clinical experiences, as well as through a separate pinning ceremony held when candidates enter the EPP, are not just procedural formalities. Rather, as an EPP leader explained, the events illustrate the reciprocal relationship the program shares with the community as "a way of building that cohesive identity as a program and work[ing] with our students to build their identities as future teachers." EPP faculty noted that these ceremonies reflect the cultural salience of celebrating important milestones in communities like El Paso's. They suggested that these events may resonate especially strongly for families with first-generation college students and families from immigrant backgrounds. As one EPP faculty member commented about the frequency of these celebrations, "We can't just wait until the end to celebrate. We've got to start celebrating the milestones because these milestones are huge."

As an EPP leader described, through Match Day and other commemorative events, candidates and their families "are seeing how incredibly invested the campuses, the principals, the district leadership, [and] the mentor teachers are." UTEP faculty aim to demonstrate that they stand alongside teacher candidates to invest in the community through "joint ownership over this program and this feeling that we do it together." As such, building teachers' sense of professional identity by grounding it in the value of the profession to the community is a key manifestation of UTEP's driving values and its resulting mission to prepare high-quality teachers.

More broadly, UTEP's program transformation and resulting features demonstrate its effort to align the values of UTEP's program, its partnering districts, and the communities these districts serve. Implementing and ensuring fidelity to the five hallmark programmatic features enables the program to construct systems of support and provide clinically intensive teacher preparation for the future teachers of the El Paso region.

UTEP Residency Match Day in Action

There is a palpable buzz in the air as teacher candidates, families, district and school personnel, and UTEP faculty enter the auditorium for Match Day, a ceremony held just before teacher candidates begin their yearlong clinical experience to announce candidate placements in school districts throughout the El Paso region. Much like the Match Days now common in medical schools, when students receive their placements for the next iteration of their training, this event combines the seriousness and the celebratory air of a milestone reached with another journey just beginning.

As the event begins, UTEP's dean, EPP leadership, and a pair of outgoing residents set the stage for what is to come for the newly hired residents: a challenging journey, to be sure, but one that is supported, scaffolded, and incredibly worthwhile for both the resident and the community in which they will be learning to teach. Later, as each incoming teacher resident is announced and their residency placement school and district are read out as they walk across the stage, a roar

of excitement comes from the audience—none louder than from the section where that district's representatives are seated. One district has even brought cheerleaders to help welcome the newest class of residents.

After the ceremony, new residents rush out of the auditorium to meet their placement school and district administrators at tables each district has set up. The atmosphere is joyous, with districts in open friendly competition about who can provide their new residents with the best swag. A mariachi band from one district plays in the background, directed by a recent UTEP resident who is now a full-time music teacher, as principals eagerly exchange phone numbers with incoming residents. “Text me if you have any questions at all!” is a common and welcome refrain.

In the building's atrium, the new residents and their loved ones mill around eating catered food, which was donated by a local credit union along with a giant balloon arch where the new residents take pictures. The new residents seem energized and joyful as they contemplate the work to come, and the family members in attendance appear to leave with a heightened sense of UTEP's vision for the importance of teaching in the community.

Source: Learning Policy Institute observations. (2023).

Aligning Coursework With Clinical Experience Through Faculty Engagement

When UTEP partnered with US PREP to redesign its residency program, UTEP did not exclusively build on US PREP's structures to reimagine the relationship between preparation programs and partnering school districts during a candidate's yearlong clinical experience. To the EPP, more thoroughly redesigning the university's preparation coursework to align with the skills needed before and during a resident's clinical experience served as a necessary lever in fulfilling UTEP's mission of preparing day-one ready teachers.

Over the course of 2 years, the Department of Teacher Education worked to redesign its curricula. As one department faculty member described:

There was a lot of thinking about what had been happening for the decade before and throwing a lot of it away. Keeping the good, and hardcore recycling, with this underlying [question] of how can we do the best for children in our region?

Notably, UTEP faculty and program administrators were able to deeply engage in curricular transformation because they were well supported in other aspects of program redesign. In particular, US PREP provided technical assistance to implement structures that deepened relationships with district partners and shaped the features of UTEP's residency model, while the local community's financial backing helped subsidize portions of the Miner Teacher Residency. By addressing other key aspects of the residency transformation, this external support provided the College of Education's faculty the time, attention, and care needed to undertake a wholesale redesign of their curriculum.

Aligning the Coursework Sequence With Candidates' Preparation Needs

The process of redesigning the curriculum was twofold: vertical alignment from the beginning of teacher preparation to the end and horizontal alignment to ensure consistency of coursework quality. However, the complex structure of the Teacher Education Department in the College of Education made curricular redesign no easy task. There are two divisions within the department: (1) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and (2) bilingual education, early childhood education, literacy/biliteracy, and sociocultural studies. Within each division are the various certification area strands (e.g., bilingual, early childhood) that teacher candidates can pursue. This complexity demanded extensive coordination across the college's various fields of certification. Program leadership and faculty needed to collaborate on rearranging courses and calibrating across courses to align with teacher candidates' progression toward their yearlong clinical experience. They also needed to ensure that candidates were progressing at similar paces across course sequences within the EPP. One faculty member recounted this process:

We had a lot of faculty focus groups. We had a ton of [bilingual education, early childhood education, literacy/biliteracy, and sociocultural studies] strand meetings, where faculty really needed to think about “What do we have? How many credits should go toward that? How are we best supporting the EL nature of our region?” It was a whole year of vertical alignment.

Faculty input helped the college work through this complex departmental structure, as well as the need to be pragmatic about staffing and class sizes. The college created flexible degree plans that required candidates to take courses in phases, or blocks, with each phase signaling a candidate's entry into the next stage of their degree program. Faculty then provided input to place the courses into the right phases. The result was a course plan like that depicted in [Table 5](#), a sample course sequence for candidates pursuing the elementary with bilingual certification undergraduate degree—one of the most common certification routes that candidates pursue at UTEP. As one faculty member explained, candidates in a given phase might be in “some combination of those [courses]; you and somebody else could be in phase three taking different courses at a given point, but by the end you will all have done your phase three [courses].” Candidates can take courses within a given phase in any order they wish, but all credits for each phase are required before moving on to the next.

Throughout the course redesign process, faculty also realized that shifting into a residency model would require adequate preparation before candidates began their residency year. In response, UTEP introduced new requirements; for example, that candidates take Seminar in Applied Critical Pedagogy, a specialized foundations course on pedagogy, teaching, and the residency program, prior to the residency year. During this course, as an EPP leader noted, candidates are “introduced to the profession, what it's like to be a teacher, to the residency. It gives them a preview of what's to come. That's been really important to start building their professional identities and also the identity of the program.” Though the course itself was not new, it was redesigned through a candidate-centered lens and taught by site coordinators who are able to bring perspectives directly from the field into the UTEP classroom. As another UTEP administrator described:

It used to be in our degree plan that they take it during the residency. It's [about the] disposition to being a teacher, professionalism, all of that. We found out that it would be helpful to move the course earlier so that they know what it entails to be a teacher. When it was first taught during the residency, we found out that, hey, these students need all of this *before*. [Emphasis original]

Table 5. UTEP 2024–25 Required Course Sequence for Elementary With Bilingual Certification Undergraduate Degree

Phase	Credit hours	Summary of course offerings
Phase 1: University Core Curriculum	43	• Courses in writing, history, statistics, natural sciences, politics and government, cultural geography, public speaking • Creative arts elective • <i>Seminar/Critical Inquiry</i>
Phase 2: Supplementary Coursework	27	• Courses in math and physical sciences • <i>Development in Young Children & Youth</i> • *<i>Seminar in Applied Critical Pedagogy</i> • *<i>Principles of Bilingual/ESL Education</i> • <i>Foundations of Literacy & Learning</i>
Phase 3: Preservice Teaching Coursework	20	• Pedagogical courses in teaching social studies and science in bilingual elementary classroom and schools • Pedagogical courses in teaching literacy and physical education • <i>Health Education Elementary School Teacher Lab</i> • <i>Early Childhood Courses: The Arts, Play, and Learning</i> • Elective on pedagogy for English or Spanish literacy
Phase 4: Post-EPP Admission Coursework	9	• <i>Responsive Classroom Management</i> • *<i>Biliteracy Development</i> • *<i>Special Education Services for Students in General and Special Education Settings</i>
Phase 5: Residency (All coursework taken during the residency year)	21	• <i>Teaching Literature and Language in Bilingual Elementary Classrooms</i> • <i>Teaching Math in Bilingual Elementary Classrooms</i> • <i>Teaching Academic English</i> • <i>Bilingual Elementary Student Teaching Residency I</i> • <i>Educational Technology</i> • <i>Bilingual Elementary Student Teaching Residency II</i>

Notes: Courses marked with an * are taken in tandem with fieldwork to fulfill Texas's requirements to complete 50 hours of preclinical field-based experience. Italicized entries represent specific course names.

Source: Reproduced from University of Texas at El Paso. (2024). [Pathways to success: Elementary with Bilingual Certification, 2024–2025 catalog](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

Calibrating Coursework Quality to Ensure Day-One Readiness

Following the year of vertical alignment, UTEP's College of Education faculty and leadership worked together to ensure that the courses were calibrated for quality and consistency. During this process, as one department faculty member remarked:

We started figuring out course DNA. What are the key pieces of the course that they need to walk out having [learned]? Because everybody teaches [in] a different way ... [which is appropriate] as long as we have some consistency across [courses]. Everybody put their time in, and when they were doing it, they were really looking at what is aligned to the TEA [Texas Education Agency] standards.

Instructional faculty, who knew the courses well, and EPP leaders, who were well positioned to assess course sequences against broader state requirements, collaborated and jointly created a cohesive curriculum aligned to support residents' yearlong clinical experience. One department faculty member recalled the constructive synergy between program leadership and instructional faculty:

It was a lot of reenvisioning down to the strands and then building back up to the whole, and then the leadership team [asking], "Do all these pieces fit? What's the whole picture? What are [residents] not getting that TEA requires?"

The processes to create candidate degree plans included designing and embedding competency-driven, practice-based experiences throughout the curriculum that offered opportunities for candidates to understand the realities of classroom teaching and to respond to diverse student learning needs. One residency site coordinator—who, like all other UTEP site coordinators, is an instructional faculty member at UTEP—reflected on the extent to which coursework is linked with residents' clinical experience. According to the site coordinator, coursework at the beginning of the residency school year focuses on classroom culture, which "we embed within our seminar. How do we build relationships [with students]? We use videos of our classrooms and of other residents. [We also] did a unit on body language with our new residents this semester." Other topics covered at the beginning of the residency school year include classroom culture, opening and closing a lesson, and time management. By aligning residents' coursework to the academic calendar, the program allows residents to apply learnings from their courses directly to their clinical experience.

As the year progresses, the residency seminar curriculum layers in higher-order topics. One site coordinator recounted that, as residents increase their instructional responsibilities, "I'll have them reflect on how [their lessons and activities are] going to be beneficial to the student. How is it aligned to our standard of rigor?" Another site coordinator noted that pedagogical coursework on differentiation, such as to support emergent bilingual students, also gets reinforced in lesson planning:

What are we going to do for our emerging bilingual [students]? Is there going to be any language support? What kind of translating skills are you going to be embedding? ... We go through every single student need and make sure that [residents] have listed the supports they are going to provide these students. We make sure that we [explain] these supports during their [bilingual education] courses previously learned.

UTEP's curriculum redesign work did not stop after the first iteration of the degree plans. At shared EPP–district governance meetings, other UTEP instructional faculty join EPP leadership and site coordinators, alongside district faculty and resident candidates, to engage in data sharing and candidate performance review. These meetings, described in detail in the next section, offer the entire team a space to identify opportunities for fine-tuning. Another UTEP structure for data sharing is Teacher Preparation Data Dialogues, which are semesterly convenings to engage in curriculum dialogue and revision informed by candidate data. At one of these dialogues, a participant recalled:

We showed [our faculty] a video of students teaching during their observations. The respective faculty of the courses they're teaching [realize], "Oh my gosh, my students are not getting this, so I need to do a better job in aligning or lesson planning." So they change, they make improvements to the syllabus so that they will be aligned to where the students are.

This spirit of continuous improvement has been critical to UTEP's approach to building programmatic reflexivity to provide each candidate the supports they need.

Building Rapport and Coordinating With Other Institutions of Higher Education in the Region

UTEP faculty and leadership also placed a heavy emphasis on ensuring that they were serving candidates from the entire community. Though UTEP plays a major role in the region's self-sustaining educator preparation ecosystem, faculty realize that UTEP is not the only higher education institution in the area. As such, UTEP faculty sought to ensure seamless transitions into the preparation program, regardless of where candidates were previously enrolled.

Specifically, College of Education administrators noted that over half of its students transferred from El Paso Community College (EPCC). With such a large share of candidates entering the EPP as transfer students, UTEP leadership understood that deepening the relationship and co-leading teacher preparation efforts alongside EPCC was crucial. One member of UTEP's EPP leadership described how the changes from its larger transformational effort shaped UTEP's curriculum redesign:

When I came, [UTEP] didn't have a solid [set of] articulation [agreements] with [EPCC]. We were concerned with the overall picture, and I was like "We're going to establish—reestablish—our relationship with EPCC." ... Those are our students. Why are we not talking to them? So, the first thing we did [was have] our articulations in writing signed off by deans. We started meeting biweekly and have ever since. We had to build trust back with them. And now ... we go to events together, we are recruiting together, we have programs that we get funded together. ... I moved forward our EPCC [relationship]. I can't change their curriculum, I can't direct it, and I can't decide what the sequence is, but knowing what they're doing there lets me figure out what holes we have.

UTEP faculty also listed other steps they took to strengthen their relationship with EPCC, such as meeting with EPCC academic counselors to crosswalk EPCC and UTEP's new degree plans so students could transfer between institutions smoothly. UTEP and EPCC also co-organized transfer fairs, helping EPCC students with their applications into UTEP's EPP.

Engaging in Data-Driven District Partnerships to Build Mutual Trust

Another foundational keystone to UTEP's preparation program is its approach to building and strengthening its relationships with partner districts. School districts not only host teacher candidates during their residency year; they also supply qualified mentor teachers. As they host the practice-oriented component of UTEP's preparation program, the dean sees district partnerships as a linchpin of their EPP:

[We're trying] to build a program on the ground that's built on building relationships, trust, and efficacy—actual tight-knitted rollout that is codesigned and mapped together. [You] say, “So let me understand the things that are important to you. Here's some things that we think are important as well. How do we work these in together?”

To formalize this ethos into the preparation program, UTEP leadership—with the assistance of US PREP—integrated frequent shared governance meetings between the EPP and partner school districts, drawing on data at these meetings to make decisions about teacher candidate supports and continuous improvement to their preparation program.

Sharing Data for Programmatic Decision-Making Through Frequent Joint Governance Meetings With Each District

UTEP built its relationships with partner school districts by establishing and standardizing quarterly shared governance meetings, working to develop trust with each district partner. Governance meetings, which involve faculty and administrators from both UTEP and the partner school district, occur four times per academic year and offer an opportunity for both preparation program staff and district faculty to share programmatic and performance data and make joint decisions about teacher preparation. The data reviewed during governance meetings include teacher candidate performance on UTEP's Miner Assessment Tool, a UTEP-specific formative version of the state's teacher evaluation framework. More recently, governance meetings have evolved to also include “Pulse Check” survey data from both residents and mentors. These data serve as important qualitative feedback that enables UTEP and partner districts to listen and respond to on-the-ground experiences and perspectives. Reviews of teacher candidate performance data allow for timely course correction. The ability to adjust the breadth and depth of support goes far in preparing teacher candidates for day-one readiness. One district administrator provided an example:

When we really focused in [on differentiated instruction] at governance [meetings] and talked about the data and provided [residents] that support, we saw that growth and saw [residents] go into their first year as a teacher and say, “Oh, differentiation isn't even a concern.”

A substantive portion of the data reviewed at shared governance meetings is quantitative in nature, ranging from formal observation scores to resident survey responses. However, meeting attendees also highlighted the importance of looking beyond numbers to create a comprehensive view of each candidate's development as an educator. One principal, for example, appreciated having “an opportunity to also talk about [their] experiences—the good, bad, and ugly.” Toward this end, these meetings aim to incorporate residents' experiences, helping to contextualize and expand the stories behind quantitative data points. A site coordinator described one approach:

One thing I did push for at governance was being in the classrooms, because it's my own belief that the further we are removed from the classroom, the harder it is to remember. So, part of the governance structure is to go on learning walks. That's another way that I really try to elevate what's happening.

In addition to classroom visits, the governance teams occasionally host resident panels where residents can share their classroom experiences directly with the team. The coupling of multiple data sources offers the governance team a more holistic and nuanced view of candidate progress, which can be used to determine the best supports to boost candidate learning, such as pedagogical or instructional topics to reinforce during the residency seminar.

Over time, both preparation program and district faculty have started to view governance meetings as a forum for information transparency, thereby facilitating opportunities to engage in collective learning, consensus building, and joint decision-making for both individual resident success and overall program improvement. In the words of an EPP faculty member, the governance structures help to break down “some of those traditional boundaries between universities and [Pre]K–12,” allowing both parties to be more proactive in providing an intensive clinical experience. In fact, one university administrator captured the developing relationship between their district partners as one with “a mutual sense of humility. None of us has all the answers, but working together with this spirit of openness [shows] that we can effect the change we want to see.”

Scaffolding Co-Teaching Opportunities With Selected and Trained Mentor Teachers

Another pillar of the Miner Teacher Residency is the strong set of supports provided to residents throughout the preparation program, particularly their opportunity to learn under the auspices of a carefully selected and well-prepared mentor teacher. Residents spend the majority of their residency hours in the classrooms of expert mentor teachers, who are vital to the success of UTEP's program. Residents shadow mentor teachers in these classrooms and observe them implementing various teaching practices. Residents gradually gain experience and acclimate to teaching through a series of gradual-release co-teaching strategies with their mentor teachers.⁹¹ Teacher candidates highly value their relationships with effective mentor teachers. “It really helps, because I learned pretty much everything from my mentor,” one teacher candidate noted. Another candidate remarked, “I love to be in class because I have a good relationship with my mentor.”

Selecting Well-Prepared Mentor Teachers

UTEP has established robust processes to ensure that its partner districts' mentor teachers can provide a rigorous and intensive clinical experience. An EPP leader overseeing the residency explained that “each district goes about the process a little differently, but all adhere to the standards for mentor teacher quality that we have codeveloped together.” These standards and selection criteria, building on Texas's required qualifications, include requirements for years of experience, teacher evaluation ratings, attendance, and prior evidence of high-progress student outcomes, among other factors.⁹² These criteria are meant to ensure that residents are well supported. One site coordinator—a UTEP clinical faculty member who liaises between the EPP and partner districts—described quality mentor teachers as follows:

“Not only are they great at teaching, but they’re great at coaching someone, being there for the resident, and [having] that time to make sure that they’re providing feedback and a ‘glow and grow’ weekly.” One district has added a priority to recruit mentor teachers who score highly on the Professional Practices and Responsibilities domain of the state’s teacher evaluation tool, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), with one district staff member emphasizing, “We want our mentor teachers to be that model of professionalism for our residents.”

Compensating and Coaching Mentor Teachers

UTEP has also invested in providing tailored resources to ensure that mentor teachers are well prepared and continuously trained for this crucial role. Mentor teachers are typically offered district-funded stipends between \$1,000 and \$3,000 for taking on the additional mentor responsibilities.⁹³ In addition to a daylong orientation and training session before the start of the academic year, mentor teachers receive regular trainings from site coordinators on topics that mentor teachers identify as areas of needed support, totaling over 15 hours of training by the end of the academic year. Training topics have included implementing co-planning and co-teaching strategies and tracking residents’ progress on demonstrating the professional practices and responsibilities called for by T-TESS Domain 4. Site coordinators also trained mentors on how to review POP cycles, which are assessment cycles consisting of a preconference meeting to walk through a lesson plan, an observation of a lesson delivery, and a postconference reflection and feedback session.⁹⁴ Table 6 shows a sample mentor teacher training schedule from Clint Independent School District, one of UTEP’s partner districts.

Within professional learning communities, mentor teachers share their experiences with and strategies for effectively supporting residents. Additionally, residents often join mentor teachers during professional development sessions, an approach that helps the EPP standardize and calibrate its expectations of the residents. One mentor teacher recalled a session in which mentors reviewed data from a POP cycle with their residents:

We saw the data side by side—[mentor teachers] would pull up the data from the POP cycles. For example, differentiation: “You guys are the lowest in here, how are we going to [address] it?” We were able to have a discussion, and we were able to tell [residents]... “Hey, don’t be hard on yourselves. Maybe as a district, or even as a state, teachers are having difficulty with differentiation.” We were able to have that experience, talk to them, and say, “It’s OK, we can just get better from here.” It was super powerful [to be] able to do it side by side, just because [residents] knew that we knew what they are supposed to know.

UTEP’s approach to mentor teacher preparation supports resident growth. In line with US PREP’s residency model, as residents receive real-time feedback from mentor teachers and engage with students through co-teaching strategies, residents gain experience while gradually assuming the responsibilities of a teacher of record. Simultaneously, preliminary evidence suggests that mentor teachers also appear to grow professionally from serving as teacher leaders. One UTEP district partner, where mentor teachers receive support from both UTEP site coordinators and an in-district residency coordinator, found that two to three times as many mentor teachers as non-mentor-teacher peers increased their observation scores relative to the prior year. This district partner additionally found that, on average, mentor teachers improved their observation scores by larger margins than non-mentor teachers.⁹⁵

Table 6. UTEP Sample Mentor Teacher Training Schedule

Month	Training topics
July	Mentor Teacher Summer Training: Co-Teaching Strategies, POP Packet, Miner Assessment Tool, Mentor Teacher Self-Assessment
July	Mentor Teacher Summer Training: Domain 4 (Professionalism)
September	UTEP/Clint Mentor Training: Co-Teaching
October	Co-Planning Strategies, Mentor Teacher Self-Assessment, Domain 4 Progress Report
November	Mentor Teacher 1-Pager, Co-Planning Strategies, Data POP #1 Review
February	UTEP/Clint Mentor Training: Gradual Release of Responsibility, Co-Teaching Approaches UTEP/Clint Mentor and Resident Training: Co-Planning Time, Reflection on POP #2 Data
March	Ways of Knowing: Feedback, Mentor Teacher Self-Assessment, Domain 4 Progress Report

Source: Reproduced from US PREP. (2023, September 12). [Texas residency webinar series 2023: University of Texas at El Paso](#) [PowerPoint slides]. (accessed 08/30/2024).

Expanding the Types and Length of Mentor Teacher Supports for Residents

Mentor teachers provide more than just pedagogical preparation; they also share with residents the classroom structures, relationship-building strategies, and other wisdom necessary to succeed as day-one ready teachers. As a site coordinator elaborated:

We have within our goal for the university, which is being day-one ready, to create those lesson plans for all of our [teacher candidates'] needs. And it's ... through their hands-on experiences; they're not just someone who goes in from 7:00 to 3:30. No, they go in before that to co-plan and to decide what co-teaching approach to implement with their mentor. They stay after school for tutoring, for any community events. They go to [professional learning communities], they're a part of [professional development sessions] with their mentor teacher. ... They're not going to be there and left behind to cover your class while you go to [professional development]. ... It's exposing them to *everything* that teaching entails. [Emphasis original]

When they are well supported, mentor teachers and trained residents operate in concert to improve residents' instructional capacity and focus on student learning. According to mentor teachers, equipping residents with the practical knowledge of various teaching strategies has increased residents' capacity to differentiate instruction to each student's needs. One mentor teacher noted the impact that their resident has provided to their classroom, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between the two educators:

I am able to meet the needs of my students with ease and automaticity. Students are able to receive more and on-time corrective feedback. Students are able to work in small groups more often and [with] differentiation. This has resulted in an increase of significant progress while closing gaps.⁹⁶

In short, mentor teachers provide support in all aspects of being a teacher during the residency year, and mentor teachers receive frequent tailored and data-driven trainings to ensure that the supports are the right ones necessary to prepare day-one ready teachers.

Providing Intensive Resident Coaching and Feedback From Site Coordinators

Site coordinators are a hallmark of US PREP's residency model, and UTEP has embedded this role within its residency program to ensure continuous support throughout candidates' tenure at UTEP. UTEP predominantly employs site coordinators as full-time instructional faculty, many of whom transitioned from a PreK–12 instructional or leadership role (e.g., teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal). Typically, each site coordinator for the undergraduate residency supports 20–25 residents across one to three partner districts. Some site coordinators oversee specific components of preparation, such as the EPP's beginning teacher mentoring and induction program. As of academic year 2024–25, UTEP employed eleven full-time and two part-time site coordinators, including three lead site coordinators who oversee the team of coordinators, all of whom play a crucial role in ensuring coherence throughout the Miner Teacher Residency.

To varying degrees, site coordinators interact with teacher candidates from the moment they declare their education major: They teach preresidency courses, lead residency seminars, and ensure that teacher candidates are prepared to enter the classroom as day-one ready teachers. They also serve a critical role in liaising between the preparation program and school district partners, such as by facilitating the shared governance meetings and keeping in close contact with mentor teachers and school principals to monitor candidate progress. Despite the wide range of responsibilities, leadership at the College of Education noted that centralizing the myriad job functions of a site coordinator into one role improved the residency's efficacy. As one program leader said:

To support our candidates in the field, we've hired folks—full-time faculty to be able to do that, rather than redistributing workloads of tenured or tenure-track faculty. It's really [about] building out our clinical faculty. They do so much, and that's just been another transformative aspect of our program: bringing on full-time folks who are dedicated to the residency.

Consolidating the range of responsibilities into one role has helped UTEP create and deepen relationships with residents by offering a source of readily available support. One site coordinator described their role as “not an 8-to-5 job. It's a 24-hour, email, text, call, weekends type of job.” Candidates, too, see these efforts during their preparation. One candidate highlighted that their site coordinator “made me so much

more cognitively aware, because everything that is good for effective teaching, she modeled it for us.” This candidate continued, “My site coordinator has shown that they care for us from day one, [when] we weren’t even residents, technically.”

Investing in Site Coordinators Through the University Budget

With a hand in almost every part of the preparation program, each of UTEP’s site coordinators serves as a key asset in preparing day-one ready teachers. Thus, ever since the pilot launch of the transformation, UTEP has worked to integrate the site coordinator position into the Miner Teacher Residency, treating and funding site coordinators as full-time clinical faculty, including by establishing university budget lines for some site coordinator positions. As the EPP dean explained, advocating for the university to invest in site coordinators served as a means to improve EPP enrollment; preparation quality; and, ultimately, the teaching profession:

It’s not a small investment, and it was a new investment. So, on a program that was in decline in enrollment 10 years before I got here, that would be significantly more expensive. How do you float that? I think it’s back to the core, driving reason for the program and its mission responsibility. The real return on investment for the university [in funding site coordinators] is [that] more students within our region are prepared academically and ... are then more likely to consider university as a pathway. And where do those students go? Right here. If the work happens in the way that I dream it will, they’ll not only be more ready for college, but when they get to college, they’ll be ready to succeed once there. And it’s probably the most powerful [student] enrollment and retention initiative we can invest in.

This sustained funding for site coordinators helps ensure that the residency program is able to thrive as a model for quality teacher preparation.

Tailoring Site Coordinator Supports to Local Preparation Needs

UTEP site coordinators design, develop, and use program-specific tools that enhance the suite of supports they provide to residents. As part of their role to ensure that teacher residents are day-one ready, site coordinators regularly visit teacher candidates during their residency year to conduct, observe, and provide feedback during candidates’ POP cycles. They also make more frequent visits to provide formative feedback. Building on the resources other preparation programs use with respect to POP cycles, UTEP has adapted specific tools to enhance this process. During the observation stage of the cycle, site coordinators employ the Miner Assessment Tool, a locally developed rubric that mirrors the state’s T-TESS evaluation rubric.⁹⁷ This assessment tool provides valuable information to candidates, site coordinators, mentor teachers, and UTEP EPP faculty and administrators in identifying a candidate’s strengths and areas for improvement. The Miner Assessment Tool is particularly valuable when candidates and faculty review POP cycle results together and jointly identify areas in which intensive coaching or other supports are needed. Observations during POP cycles are videorecorded to help facilitate candidate self-assessment. One governance meeting attendee reflected on how they witnessed this type of review in action:

One of the [resident] panelists talked about her experience with the site coordinator looking at her video of her practice. When I hear something with that level of specificity, like [a resident saying] “I didn’t really want to do group discussions for my classroom, but when I looked at the video and heard that the kids were discussing the topic, but yet they weren’t participating [in the whole group discussion], I knew I needed to [change]”—it’s that kind of discovery, through the coaching they get, [that helps improve practice].

Such processes have become commonplace in UTEP's residency program, due in part to the norms of data transparency and to the culture of feedback and continuous improvement that UTEP has built throughout its transformation.

Training Candidates to Address Diverse Student Learning Needs

Site coordinators also focus on preparing teachers to meet the diverse academic and developmental needs of students, which is particularly important given the high concentration of students from historically marginalized groups in the Paso del Norte region. For every POP cycle completed, site coordinators facilitate resident reflections on their observed lesson delivery and Miner Assessment Tool results. One site coordinator described these reflections as processes to understand how residents' instructional approach "addresses specific and varied student learning needs" and where "growth for individual students will float to the top."

Throughout the residency year, site coordinators also help residents strengthen their ability to meet diverse learning needs by guiding them through a UTEP-specific, yearlong action research project. This project builds on a US PREP-wide Student Perception Survey adapted from the Colorado Department of Education.⁹⁸ The action research project extends the survey in a novel and meaningful way by empowering residents to gather and respond directly to student feedback while building relationships with the students in their residency classroom. A site coordinator described the project:

Throughout the residency year, site coordinators help residents strengthen their ability to meet diverse learning needs by guiding them through a UTEP-specific, yearlong action research project.

We frontload, and we give them [residents] almost 9 weeks to get to know their students and [for] their students to get to know them as a teacher. They then administer a "preassessment" [survey] to their students. Based on the results, during seminar in the second 9 weeks our residents choose interventions to address their lowest-scoring statements. Typically, one of the [most consistently] low-scoring [statements] is "My teacher knows what my life is like outside of school." ... And [residents] use interventions for [their students] for 18 weeks, during [which] [the residents] are progress monitoring. Then, [residents administer] a postassessment [survey].

Funding the Residency Year

One of the key problems of practice UTEP encountered when going through its programmatic transformation was the need to balance the benefits of investing in a full year of clinical experience with the financial realities faced by many teacher candidates. According to an EPP leader, candidates are often "juggling many different, multiple responsibilities outside of their studies: work, employment, caregiving, household responsibilities." For these teacher candidates, choosing an unpaid residency over other routes into teaching—such as a paid, district-employed intern route—was impractical and unrealistic. The dean also noted that it was futile to run a "robust, immersive, yearlong experience for our students without some way to fund [the residency], to put stipends in their pockets." A paid residency, whether at the undergraduate or postgraduate level, was thus necessary to incentivize entry into this comprehensive preparation experience.

Since a paid residency year was not initially guaranteed for every resident, it was essential to secure a sustainable source of funding for resident stipends. Program leaders realized that “access and affordability [were] critical from the very beginning.” According to one program leader, “We designed it that way. It wasn’t just some of our residents getting paid and others not. Everyone has gotten paid from the time we piloted the residency.” The initial funding from local philanthropies within the El Paso Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice (CoP) was sufficient to support the program’s 19 residents during the 2019–20 pilot year, with the funding tied to an agreement for UTEP to work with partner districts and technical assistance providers to identify and shift toward sustainable funding sources. Additionally, an EPP leader expressed a desire for stipends higher than the \$11,000 to \$14,000 initially provided, which were not viewed as sufficient to supplant the need for additional employment during the residency year. Moreover, as more teacher candidates joined the Miner Teacher Residency, UTEP needed to seek funds beyond local philanthropy to ensure that the program could sustain the residency model. To work toward sustainably funded residency stipends, UTEP collaborated with US PREP to design and implement sustainable funding reallocation strategies in their partner districts, which preceded and would ultimately inform the statewide strategic staffing efforts during the Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) grant program.

US PREP’s Strategic Staffing Models

A frequent challenge when implementing a residency is ensuring that the model is financially sustainable, especially under limited funding and district budgetary constraints. US PREP’s technical assistance included supporting educator preparation programs in working closely with districts to implement strategic staffing models—a process of redesigning school budgets so districts can reallocate underutilized funds toward resident stipends while still meeting school instructional needs. In practice, adopting a strategic staffing model allows districts to provide residents both financial compensation for their service and a robust yearlong residency experience.

US PREP proposes an array of strategic staffing models, allowing districts to choose a model that best suits their instructional needs by reallocating underutilized funds. Strategic staffing models, which vary in the clinical experiences provided to residents and the instructional needs they fill, include:

- Substitute teachers—to fill daily substitute needs on campus
- Long-term substitute teachers—to provide long-term coverage for parental leave or unfilled positions
- Paraprofessionals and teacher aides—to provide additional student support
- Tutoring and enrichment teachers—to promote student learning acceleration
- Release time support—to provide mentor teachers time to fill leadership or other roles in the school
- Vacancy strategies, such as pair teaching and team teaching—to teach more students directly and fill teacher vacancies

Sources: US PREP. (n.d.). [Strategic staffing](#). (accessed 08/30/2024); US PREP. (2024). [Transforming teacher preparation through residencies and strategic staffing](#); US PREP. (2023, October 4). [Texas residency webinar series 2023: Strategic staffing](#) [Presentation slides]. (accessed 08/30/2024); US PREP. (n.d.). [Instructional needs and models descriptions](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

Supporting Districts to Identify Underutilized Funds Through Strategic Staffing Models

As more teacher candidates joined the Miner Teacher Residency, UTEP needed to seek funds beyond local philanthropy to ensure that the program could sustain the residency model. In early 2020, UTEP’s initial partner districts—the Socorro and El Paso Independent School Districts—went through a US PREP–led design process to identify sustainable internal sources of funds for resident stipends. The partner school districts reallocated substitute teaching funds and had residents work in their district as a substitute teacher 1 day per week—typically on Fridays, which is usually the highest-demand day of the week for substitutes. Eventually, this strategy was formalized into the substitute teaching strategic staffing model that some of UTEP’s partner districts continue to employ. Table 7 shows a sample weekly schedule for UTEP teacher residents at Socorro Independent School District, which uses the substitute teaching strategic staffing model.

Table 7. UTEP Substitute Teaching Model Sample Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Clinical teaching with mentor teacher	Clinical teaching with mentor teacher	Attending courses at UTEP	Clinical teaching with mentor teacher	Substitute teaching at their campus

Source: Reproduced from Tanabe, C. S., Mein, E. L., Delgado, M., Martinez, J. I., Parker, J., Castanos, C., Carman, N., Borrego, L., Eksaengsri, J., & Bland, J. A. (2024, April 12). *Strengthening the Latinx teacher pipeline through residency and research-practice partnerships* [Conference presentation]. 2024 AERA Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, United States.

Using the substitute teaching strategic staffing model allows the district to reallocate funds set aside for substitute teachers and direct them to fund residency stipends. Having residents serve as substitute or “guest” teachers is an attractive proposition for districts: Residents are already familiar with their district and school’s expectations and instructional approach, and they have likely already established strong relationships with other teachers and residents at their placement site. As one principal described:

They [residents] were used to the instructional materials we’re using, so they knew how to navigate through those; our teachers didn’t have to leave as detailed lesson plans as they typically would for a substitute. When we had our residents come in, teachers were excited because the instruction would continue. They continued with the reading [or] math lesson exactly the way a teacher would.

Before residents are permitted to begin substitute teaching 1 day per week, site coordinators provide training during residency seminars on the competencies and skills required to substitute teach so that residents are not going in without any prior support. Residents who substitute or “guest teach” have received an additional opportunity to practice leading a classroom independently. These opportunities build on the preparation residents receive during the remaining 4 days of the week and afford them the opportunity and safety net for practice and for trial and error—helping residents refine their teaching

strategies before they graduate and are leading classrooms independently as teachers of record. These opportunities can also expose residents to other grade levels or subjects outside of their primary residency placement, positioning them to better understand how course content aligns across grade levels and subject areas. These benefits, in addition to the ability to fund resident stipends, have provided proof of concept that has enabled UTEP administrators to expand on this strategy with the rest of its partner districts.

Strategic staffing opportunities can also expose residents to other grade levels or subjects outside of their primary residency placement, positioning them to better understand how course content aligns across grade levels and subject areas.

Increasing the Residency Stipend

Funding from the TCLAS Decision 5 residency program support grant, combined with local philanthropy and strategic staffing, allowed UTEP to offer resident stipends of up to \$20,000 per year from 2021–22 to 2023–24. The stipend offsets some of the costs of preparation while reducing residents' need to work elsewhere during the residency year. One resident noted, "If I had to do [the residency] without [getting paid], I don't think I would pass my exam, because all those exams are expensive. I have to go buy the sources [and study materials]." Still, an EPP leader noted that more work remains to make residencies truly affordable and available for teacher candidates: "We also know that when we ask them if the stipend is enough, it's not. ... This is to pay their rent, to cover the cost of childcare, to fix the tire on their car so they can come to work." Though this financial challenge requires a balancing of aspiration and fiscal realities, UTEP's acknowledgment of this barrier and efforts to address it signals the EPP's willingness to continuously improve its Miner Teacher Residency.

The Future of the Miner Teacher Residency

The key features of the Miner Teacher Residency—aligned and scaffolded curriculum, data-driven and trusting district relationships, co-teaching with an expert mentor teacher, coaching and feedback from site coordinators, and financial supports—have, thus far, worked to allow residency graduates to enter classrooms with both robust preparation and strong relationships in the local education community. The value of these features has become evident in the retention and effectiveness outcomes documented earlier in this section, and they are also exemplified in how districts view teachers prepared through the Miner Teacher Residency. The dean recounted:

We've had a district hire every single resident that was in their district, and they've hired them before knowing vacancies. ... The rationale was, "Well, we could not hire these [residents and] have them go [teach in another district]." Then, the question the superintendent asks is, "Are we going to get better candidates from any other program pathway?" The answer—from their own team—is no. So he said, "Hire everyone, we'll figure it out."

Indeed, many UTEP teacher candidates end up staying in the schools in which they completed their residency year. EPP leadership shared that, on average, more than 80% of their candidates who complete the Miner Teacher Residency and are certified to teach do so in a partner district.

As the Miner Teacher Residency becomes a more cohesive program working to provide a seamless transition into the profession, efforts to improve the residency continue to become ever more detailed and oriented toward sustainability and scale.

Continuing to Make Programmatic Improvements

As the preparation program evolves, EPP leaders plan to continue using cycles of continuous improvement and drawing on the program structures implemented throughout the transformation to work toward their goals, even if upcoming issues are substantively different from the ones faced during UTEP's initial transformation. UTEP's intentional actions to foster close relationships with the greater El Paso educator preparation community and local districts help program leadership garner sufficient buy-in to make program adjustments swiftly without compromising programmatic quality.

In large part, decisions at the College of Education have been and continue to be made in service of the community and the profession at large. For example, prior to fall 2023, UTEP required residents to pass their content exams before completing the program. Starting in fall 2023, however, the program shifted its policy to require candidates to pass their content exams prior to entering the residency. This change was made to ensure that residents were eligible to be hired as soon as they completed the residency. According to an EPP leader, prior to the policy change, “No matter what we did, we weren’t able to get the results that we needed, which is have them be exam-complete prior to hire.” She further explained that they were “talking about building an education pipeline and a teacher pipeline. If they get to the end of their residency experience and they don’t have the requirements to be hired, then we’re not holding up our end of the deal.”

As program leaders expected, the resulting policy change—made in response to data from district partners and candidates, as well as the EPP’s vision for the profession—led to an initial decline in the number of candidates who entered the yearlong residency. However, the dip was short-lived, as the EPP initiated a host of strategies in the following semesters to bring the numbers back up. Strategies included meeting with faculty to realign curricula and integrate different types of test preparation into course assignments to expose elements of content exams without taking up instructional time. The EPP complemented the curricular rework with monthly boot camps focused on content exam preparation, providing monetary incentives to compensate residents for the additional time spent at the boot camp. In turn, the EPP has returned to previous residency enrollment numbers.

UTEP made these program improvements to support candidates, the broader community, and the profession as a whole. These priorities have continued to influence UTEP’s strategy in scaling and sustaining the Miner Teacher Residency. Current and upcoming continuous improvement activities include efforts to:

- continue offsetting the costs of the exams and preparation material for teacher licensure (e.g., the Bilingual Educational Supplemental exam required for Dual Language Immersion or Transitional Bilingual Educator classrooms⁹⁹);
- continue building out the “Resident Instructional Aide” pathway to recruit current paraprofessionals or instructional aides into the teaching profession;
- systematically track residency graduate outcomes regionwide;

- establish formal residency partnerships with the remaining two districts in the Paso del Norte region that do not currently host residents; and
- establish and deepen relationships with other local institutions of higher education and the regional Education Service Center.

Securing Sustained Funding

Funding is central to the success of UTEP's EPP, and program leaders have needed to be creative in weaving together external funding streams for initial program investments while working to find sustainable funding sources. For example, the El Paso Community Foundation and other local funds supported resident stipends during the first 2 years of the residency program; later, the TCLAS Decision 5 grant enabled UTEP to increase stipends to \$20,000. With the sunset of the TCLAS funds at the end of the 2023–24 academic year, UTEP turned to the structures it has built with its partner districts to ensure the sustainability of both the residency stipend and the residency overall—as designed from the beginning of the program's transformation.

To manage some anticipated post-TCLAS funding challenges while maintaining a commitment to the key features of its program, UTEP began convening regionwide shared governance and decision-making summits to discuss with its partner districts how to distribute the shared responsibilities to sustain residencies. These regionwide summits, designed to foster cross-district dialogue and learning, also responded to partner districts' requests about a process to reach consensus on district-facing responsibilities.¹⁰⁰ At one such summit, UTEP and its partner districts recognized that the stipend amount might vary by district due to individual districts' budget capacities and their ability to identify and reallocate funds (e.g., by adopting strategic staffing models). At the same time, districts acknowledged that varying stipend amounts across districts could unevenly distribute residents' district placements. UTEP and its partner districts had previously decided that districts would shoulder the responsibility of funding residency stipends, and by the end of the summit, districts had agreed to standardize the stipend amount across districts, though the means to source the funding might continue to vary across partner districts. This agreement helped to create an equitable landscape for residents by ensuring consistent stipend amounts regardless of residency placement district. Still, with TCLAS funding ending and districts taking over responsibility for funding resident stipends, UTEP program leaders have identified the need for additional supports to ensure that every candidate has access to a paid residency.

Federally Funded Efforts to Bookend the Residency Experience

Of note, UTEP has drawn on federal investments to expand the residency program, building out bookends to the residency experience—recruiting candidates to enter the program and providing teacher supports after completers exit the program—on top of what was already designed during the initial program transformation. UTEP's program was awarded one of the inaugural grants for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program to “help increase the number of, and retain, well-prepared teachers from diverse backgrounds, resulting in a more diverse teacher workforce prepared to teach.”¹⁰¹ The grant funding thus far has been used to partner with districts to recruit prospective teachers into the “high-needs certification areas of bilingual education and special education” and to “provide wrap-around supports to candidates in bilingual education and ESL pathways.”¹⁰² These areas of focus are particularly important given the high proportion of emergent bilingual students in the region and the persisting

shortage of special education teachers in Texas.¹⁰³ Hawkins grant funding also has allowed UTEP to scale up its efforts to strengthen the Miner Teacher Residency. For example, UTEP has spent grant funding to fund additional site coordinator positions and to offset the costs of test taking and preparation—especially the additional tests required for Bilingual or English as a Second Language certification.

Additionally, the grant funding has allowed UTEP to increase its recruitment efforts by building out its Grow Your Own pipelines.¹⁰⁴ Specific to paraprofessionals, an EPP leader explained that UTEP has used the funding to find “coordinated ways to recruit support staff [like] instruction[al] aides interested in being certified and then get them into our program.” These strategies include building a curricular program of study prior to paraprofessionals’ entry into the yearlong residency, funding support outreach coordinator positions to help connect prospective students with districts, and building site coordinator capacity to support this new pathway. UTEP is also building out its high school Grow Your Own pipeline.

UTEP also received a Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant in 2022. The TQP grant program is a federal program that aims to improve student achievement, primarily by way of improving the quality of prospective and new teachers. For UTEP, the grant focuses on supporting the yearlong residency and funds the Miner Teacher Mentorship Program, a “cohort-based induction model that provides data-driven, individualized coaching and support” to new teachers in the region.¹⁰⁵ The TQP-funded induction and mentoring program was based on a pilot mentorship program catalyzed by the Community of Practice and initially funded by local philanthropy. Within the TQP-funded program, induction site coordinators, who receive the same training as the site coordinators, provide “cohort-based biweekly seminars, walkthroughs, and T-TESS aligned observation cycles twice a year.”¹⁰⁶ Site coordinator and mentor teacher training work to ensure that the induction supports are appropriately structured to build on the residency clinical experience. In addition, there is some overlap of residency mentors and induction mentors.

The induction and mentoring program has helped to address many problems of practice that partner districts previously identified, including prior “insufficient readiness and effectiveness of first-year teachers,” “teacher retention issues, especially in rural [districts],” and “persistent supply issues in high-needs certification areas.”¹⁰⁷ The TQP funds enabled UTEP to expand pilot induction and mentoring efforts to additional districts, which has helped UTEP further scale its preparation program.

Summary of UTEP’s Miner Teacher Residency

UTEP’s Miner Teacher Residency provides an example of a high-quality EPP that is the primary provider of new teachers in its region. The Miner Teacher Residency is the result of a comprehensive program redesign effort made in partnership with US PREP, motivated by the appointment of a new dean in 2018. UTEP engaged in intentional, relationship-based undertakings to root its teacher preparation program in the community, implement structural improvements with the aid of technical assistance providers, and engage its faculty to redesign the program’s coursework and align it with teacher candidates’ preservice clinical experience.

UTEP has maintained its focus on program improvement and financial sustainability throughout its transformation, which has resulted in investments in the program to provide robust supports for its teacher candidates. As UTEP’s program continues to evolve and to work toward becoming fully self-sustaining financially, leadership at the College of Education continue to execute its vision for the program in service of its current and future candidates; the education profession as a whole; and, by extension,

the next generation of El Paso area students and community members. UTEP's proactive actions and attention to continuous improvement have thereby helped to professionalize teaching while strengthening the education ecosystem in both the Paso del Norte region and Texas writ large.

This case study highlights five key programmatic features that UTEP's EPP has made central to its residency model. (1) The EPP has aligned scaffolded and sequenced coursework with clinical experience through substantive faculty engagement. (2) EPP leaders and site coordinators have engaged in data-driven district partnerships to build mutual trust. (3) Residents' co-teaching experiences alongside selected and trained mentor teachers are scaffolded such that the residents' responsibilities gradually increase throughout the year. (4) Residents receive intensive coaching and feedback from site coordinators. (5) UTEP and its district partners have blended and braided funds from a variety of sources to ensure that all residents receive living-expense stipends during the residency year.

In addition to these key program features, notable practices that help support UTEP's strong program design and implementation include the structures UTEP has built to leverage and organize around partnerships, such as the El Paso Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice and the regional partner district summits, as well as the ways in which UTEP has adapted program features to better meet its local context and regional needs. For example, UTEP developed a specific tool for site coordinators to use when observing residents and built projects into its coursework, including a yearlong action research project around a student perception survey that better prepared its candidates to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of a diverse student population. The EPP also created opportunities to commemorate residents' progress, such as Match Day and pinning ceremony celebrations, to make the profession more visible and enhance respect for teachers and teaching.

University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley’s STEP UP and Teacher Residency Programs

The University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) College of Education and P–16 Integration’s educator preparation program (EPP) has built a reputation for preparing educators who are fully prepared to support their students from their first day as teachers of record. The program has a strong influence on its regional educator workforce. Out of 18 active EPPs in the southernmost region of Texas, including online and alternative certification programs, it is consistently the largest supplier of teachers.¹⁰⁸ In 2023–24, UTRGV produced 34% of the newly certified teachers in the region. Looking only at EPPs situated within institutions of higher education, UTRGV’s share was 79%. Additionally, most newly certified graduates from UTRGV choose to work in the Rio Grande Valley. In 2023–24, 320 of 339 newly certified teachers from the EPP were teaching in area districts.¹⁰⁹ Faculty reported that the college has been in high demand and experienced an increase in enrollment during the 2 years following the pandemic, a time when many other higher education institutions saw a decline in applicants.¹¹⁰

From 2019 to 2023, UTRGV was one of the top three university-based producers of certified Spanish–English bilingual teachers in Texas.¹¹¹ After several years of intentional transformation, which began in 2016, the EPP earned a Texas Education Agency (TEA) and State Board for Educator Certification commendation in 2022–23 for its high first-test pass rate on the special education certification exam as well as for the percentage of teachers who identify as Hispanic.¹¹² In the same year, the college also earned national accreditation through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Programs.¹¹³ The quality of the preparation UTRGV provides is evident in the skills of the educators it produces. As one school administrator attested, “You wouldn’t think they’re a first-year teacher.”

To show the evolution of offerings at the EPP, this section focuses on the candidate experience in two UTRGV pathways. The relatively long-standing Student Teacher Educator Preparation: University Partnership (STEP UP) program was introduced in 2016, and the paid teacher residency, which builds on many features of STEP UP, was more recently introduced and is still being built out. Both programs provide yearlong clinical experiences for teacher candidates prior to their becoming teacher of record.

The UTRGV Campus and Community Context

The University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley is located in far South Texas a few miles from the United States–Mexico border. A relatively new university, UTRGV was established by the state legislature in 2013—combining the faculties and infrastructure from the previously established University of Texas–Brownsville and University of Texas–Pan American—to address the shortage of health care workers in the region.¹¹⁴ The university first opened its doors to students in fall 2015. The only 4-year university serving the Rio Grande Valley, nearly all of its students are from the region (93% in 2023).¹¹⁵ The Rio Grande Valley is composed of four counties in deep South Texas: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy.¹¹⁶ The most populous county is Hidalgo, with a population of 870,781 and 27.6% of people living at or below the federal poverty level (nearly double the 14% rate statewide in Texas).¹¹⁷ Many university students are the first generation in their family to attend college—70.5% in 2023.¹¹⁸

UTRGV is a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, and more than 94% of its students are Hispanic, representing one of the highest Hispanic student populations in the nation.¹¹⁹ UTRGV faculty are proud of the university's role in creating economic mobility in South Texas. In 2022, 62% of undergraduate students enrolled were Pell grant-eligible, nearly double the average across Texas (34.1%) and nationally (32%).¹²⁰

Within the university sits the College of Education and P-16 Integration (hereafter UTRGV or “the college”), under the leadership of Dean Alma Rodriguez. The college was described as an integral part of the university's mission.¹²¹ It is a midsize college, enrolling 3,218 students in fall 2022—about 10% of the university's student body of 31,559.¹²² Faculty members described the crucial role the teacher preparation program fills in building regional economic mobility. As one faculty member stated:

Many of my colleagues and I, as natives to this area, [have] watched—over several decades—so much amazing change and transformation. Our legacy institutions are responsible for developing a middle class in this area. There were only two classes before, and [those were] low and high. I think our passion comes from the fact that, for many of our students in our local public schools, teachers are the first profession that they're exposed to.

Teacher candidates at UTRGV share a commitment to returning home to make a difference locally rather than seeking employment outside of the region after graduation. One teacher candidate explained, “If you want there to be something good, you need to make it good. ... We need to grow the Valley.” Similar perspectives were shared by district administrators and teachers, highlighting a collective mission of regional development.

One of the region's strengths is that many families raise children who are bilingual in Spanish and English. Accordingly, the college has a Department of Bilingual and Literacy Studies to address the “linguistic and literacy strengths of traditionally underserved populations.”¹²³ Aiming to meet the high demand for bilingual teachers from local school districts and across Texas, the bilingual teacher preparation program is the largest of the certification areas offered at UTRGV, with about 1,500 students enrolled in 2024, according to faculty.

There are significant barriers for students in the Rio Grande Valley to attend college and complete a degree. Describing the college's teacher candidates, one faculty member said, “It hasn't been an easy path for them, so I really respect and admire them.” It is not uncommon for students to work full time, care for family members, experience food insecurity, and lack access to reliable transportation. Many are nontraditional college students who have taken time off between semesters to work and raise children. One faculty member noted that these factors are “a reality of the region ... of our community,” given that it is “one of the lowest-income regions in the United States.” Geopolitical issues may also affect students' access and persistence through the program. As a faculty member explained:

We would just look outside the window, and you would see Border Patrol. ... I have students that come across the border to come to class. And so, am I going to get upset because they're 10 minutes late? Because they're in line, either by foot or by car, because they couldn't cross? ... People don't understand that unless you live here.

Educator Preparation Program Pathways at UTRGV

After students are admitted to the educator preparation program, the college offers three clinical pathways to certification: a single-semester clinical teaching experience, a yearlong clinical experience called STEP UP, and a newly introduced yearlong teacher residency. UTRGV administrators expressed a commitment to maintaining multiple clinical pathway options to align with student needs. In addition to the three pathways just described, candidates pursuing secondary and all-level certification areas who major in their subject area (for example, biology or music education) receive pedagogical training through the EPP. Across all of these pathways in 2022–23, there were 483 teacher candidates who completed coursework and clinical teaching requirements, 52 of whom were in STEP UP or the residency.¹²⁴ While these two yearlong clinical pathways are currently small in comparison to the rest of the program, the college plans to continue increasing the number of spots for candidates to participate in these programs.

UTRGV administrators expressed a commitment to maintaining multiple clinical pathway options to align with student needs.

While there are other pathways to certification offered at UTRGV, including postbaccalaureate and graduate programs, in this report we focus primarily on the two pathways that offer yearlong clinical experiences—STEP UP and the residency. [Table 8](#) provides basic structural information about these two programs. Additional differences between them related to program administration and resident learning opportunities are discussed later in the case study. For a sample course schedule for a teacher candidate pursuing certification in elementary education, see [Table A1](#) in the Appendix.

Table 8. Yearlong Undergraduate Clinical Pathways at UTRGV

Pathway	Pilot year	Coursework (overlaps with preclinical field-based experiences)	Preclinical field-based experiences (overlaps with coursework)	Clinical experience	Certification areas
STEP UP	2016–17	3 semesters of coursework (third semester is 4 days/week)	3 semesters of field-based, integrated with coursework	Unpaid, 1 day/week in fall (overlaps with final coursework) and 5 days/week in spring, including first and last day of school	EC-3, EC-6, Special Education, ESL/Bilingual, All-Level/Secondary
Residency	2021–22 (design), 2022–23 (first cohort)	4 semesters of coursework (third semester is 2 days/week & fourth is 1 day/week)	2 semesters of field-based, integrated with coursework	Paid, 3 full days/week in fall and 4 full days/week in spring (overlaps with final coursework), including first and last day of school	EC-3, EC-6, Special Education, ESL/Bilingual

Sources: Information synthesized from participant interviews; University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P–16 Integration. (n.d.). [Clinical teaching program](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

Transforming Teacher Preparation at UTRGV

With a goal of responding to the region and preparing teachers differently, in 2018 the EPP dean and a faculty member applied for and received a grant, working with the technical assistance organization BranchED. The 3-year, \$374,998 grant was awarded to “transform the teacher preparation program” and ensure that UTRGV graduates are prepared for the realities of their first year of teaching.¹²⁵

The program transformation led to four key features that we describe in detail.

- 1. Redesigned preclinical coursework integrating practice-based learning experiences that prepare teacher candidates for clinical teaching in local districts.** Program leadership and faculty engaged in professional development to incorporate practice-based learning opportunities for teacher candidates across all programs. These preclinical course elements are designed as scaffolded experiences to develop candidates’ understanding of teaching skills, especially those that are important for serving students in the Rio Grande Valley region.
- 2. A lengthened and strengthened clinical teaching experience that thoroughly prepares candidates for their first year as a teacher of record.** To better prepare teacher candidates for the realities of teaching, UTRGV partnered with local school districts to develop a yearlong clinical pathway called STEP UP and later built on this foundation to create a paid residency pathway. District administrators are enthusiastic about hiring new teachers from these pathways, and UTRGV has committed to sustaining them through shared governance and by providing technical assistance to districts.
- 3. Flexible and varied candidate support structures that sustain teacher candidates to and through certification.** Reviewing enrollment, completion, and certification data, the college determined that many teacher candidates were leaving the program or even graduating without completing certification requirements. In response, the college implemented new strategies to meet student needs, including program-specific advising, tailored exam preparation options, and candidate monitoring.
- 4. Intentional, ongoing collaborative structures that promote data-driven continuous improvement and innovation to meet candidate and district needs.** Across the faculty as well as district partners, participants in EPP meetings expect to begin with data and to collaboratively engage about the implications and options for improvement. UTRGV has built this culture over time by developing robust data dashboards and implementing structures like faculty standing committees, district shared governance meetings, and student feedback opportunities.

One especially innovative new structure that came out of this transformation is the Learning to Teach Lab (see [The Learning to Teach Lab: Scaling and Sustaining Transformation at UTRGV](#)), which, as the dean described, encompasses “both a physical and virtual space for supporting teacher candidates to become effective teachers.”

The Learning to Teach Lab: Scaling and Sustaining Transformation at UTRGV

The UTRGV Learning to Teach Lab exists to “support and challenge teacher candidates from admission to certification” by providing resources and activities for practice-based teacher education, digital pedagogies, and successful certification. It was established in 2019 as part of UTRGV’s 3-year transformation work with BranchED to transform and sustain program features aligned with UTRGV’s vision for high-quality teacher preparation, including practice-based teacher education, pedagogies designed to serve all students, and technology for the 21st century.

Currently, the UTRGV Learning to Teach Lab encompasses five initiatives:

1. **The Empowered Educator Program** is an award-winning online curriculum aligned to the seven International Society for Technology in Education standards for educators. The curriculum contains a pretest, seven modules, and a post-test and must be completed by all teacher candidates during their preclinical coursework. The purpose of the Empowered Educator Program is to support preservice teachers in developing the art of teaching with technology.
2. **Practice-Based Teacher Education** is an initiative in which faculty instructors from across the college engage in mapping practice-based assignments, practices, and field experiences into certification coursework and curricula. The instructors gather student data each fall semester to make decisions to adapt, adopt, or change practice-based assignments. They also meet every 2 weeks to create or revise case scenarios within the Mixed Reality Simulation lab.
3. The **Mixed Reality Simulation** is a virtual learning tool designed to help students improve their performance in various areas of pedagogy and practice. Case scenarios are designed by the faculty involved in the Practice-Based Teacher Education initiative, and the scenarios are integrated into courses to supplement candidate learning. Simulation scenarios can also be customized to meet candidates’ individual goals and objectives.
4. The **Certification Exam Support Hub** helps students prepare for their certification exams. The Hub offers tutoring and study resources, as well as guidance on the testing and certification process.
5. The **Teacher Educator Development Initiative** is for UTRGV faculty instructors. It includes four modules that introduce teacher educators to the “central principles and approaches to [UTRGV’s] teacher preparation transformation,” including cognitive coaching, co-teaching strategies, pedagogies designed to serve all students, and digital communities of practice. Field supervisors and cooperating teachers can also access the modules, supporting alignment across candidates’ preparation experience.

Sources: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (2024, January 10). [AACTE announces 2024 national awardees for achievements in educator preparation](#); Interviews with UTRGV faculty members; University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley. (n.d.). [Learning to Teach Lab](#); University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley. (2019, January 22). [UTRGV joins three other minority-serving institutions in BranchED initiative to help train teachers](#). *The Newsroom*; University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P–16 Integration. (2021). [Annual report: 2020–2021](#).

In the remainder of this section, we discuss the major elements of the transformed program and note where and how the Learning to Teach Lab fits in.

Practice-Based and Community-Focused Coursework

As part of the college's efforts to redesign its EPP, the college leadership and faculty implemented a course redesign for the undergraduate teacher preparation program beginning in 2019. The transformed preclinical coursework is scaffolded, connects theory with practice in innovative ways, and is grounded in the regional context.

Scaffolded, Practice-Based Coursework

The preclinical curriculum for all UTRGV pathways is designed to ensure that every candidate is fully prepared for their clinical teaching. As one faculty member noted, “Nothing should be a surprise” when a teacher candidate enters their clinical placement. To connect coursework to the technical skills needed to be a teacher, UTRGV uses practice-based learning to bridge theory and practical application.¹²⁶ Practice-based learning includes various instructional strategies that allow the candidates to rehearse tasks they will use as teachers and helps candidates build their skills while they are supported by experienced practitioners.¹²⁷ A mentor teacher commented on the college's strength with practice-based learning:

I think it is partly coursework [that makes their candidates stand out]. ... They'll teach them something, and then they'll be like, “OK, we've made an arrangement for you to go to this campus at this time, this day, to look for this.” That doesn't happen in other universities that I have mentees come from.

Through the work of the 3-year BranchED grant, faculty were introduced to TeachingWorks,¹²⁸ an organization that provides faculty with professional development on practice-based teacher education pedagogies. To facilitate the transformation of coursework, the dean established a faculty champion position for practice-based teacher education in 2019.¹²⁹ The faculty champion is responsible for leading cross-departmental curriculum mapping and professional development related to integrating practice-based pedagogies in the college; the current faculty champion became certified in practice-based teacher education through a yearlong training sequence with TeachingWorks.

Administrators described practice-based teacher preparation as “continuous opportunities to engage in genuine field experiences and clinical practice, which are embedded in coursework, and which are authentic to the context of the learner.” Instructors use scripts, rehearsals, video analysis, and reflective coaching in their courses to bring classroom practice into the university setting. As one faculty member explained:

It's creating these experiences within the class, even if you're not in the field, that approximates what they do as close to practice as possible. ... Ideally, we'll be having our students rehearsing within the classroom ... giving each other feedback, doing it again. So [getting exposure to] that cycle of, you plan something, you do it, you get feedback, you do it again.

In 2021, under the leadership of the faculty champion for practice-based teacher education, a committee of faculty and college leadership convened as the practice-based teacher education design team to map out practice-based learning objectives across the two to three semesters of preclinical coursework that

teacher candidates in all programs experience.¹³⁰ As a faculty member noted, the design team’s intention was to articulate learning experiences “in a structured way” by building on prior concepts, increasing the rigor of the task, and increasing the number of students they teach:

First, they’re working together one-on-one, getting to know the student, getting to know the context, then getting to the point where they might be teaching small groups. And then they can go into clinical teaching. ... Plus, at the same time, every semester we will be looking through different lenses. ... [For example] in semester two, they’re looking through the lenses of English language learners. ... Then the next semester is more through the curriculum, specifically English language arts. ... In semester one, it might be looking at the context and [pedagogies designed to serve all students].

As an example of a practice-based experience, Early Childhood candidates visit a school in their first semester to complete the “Young Child Case Study.” For this activity, they work with a student, read to them, and evaluate them over the course of 6 weeks, guided by their course instructor. Before the last day in the field, they prepare a lesson using a strengths-based approach, which the teacher candidate has learned about in their coursework. Finally, they implement the lesson and reflect on what went well and what they would revise. This lesson planning cycle is scaffolded over the course of the semester, connecting theory to practice as candidates apply their learning from class to experiences in the field.

Teacher candidates reported that the scaffolded, practice-based preclinical learning opportunities were a strength of UTRGV’s preparation program. One teacher candidate described how each course added complexity to their teaching skills:

As we advance ... other professors are [saying], “OK, now, your objectives—how do you use your ELPS [English Language Proficiency Standards]? How do you connect your TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills]?” And then we have bilingual classes, so that’s, “How do you make the language objective?” Each one of the classes connects with another.

Faculty agree that the way they introduce new skills and concepts within a course is to “guide [teacher candidates] by chunks,” with opportunities to apply new learning, either in the field or in a reproduction of it. For example, teacher candidates in one elementary methods course develop a lesson plan throughout a semester, iterating as new instructional concepts are introduced. They begin with a basic format, with a learning goal, standard, and objectives, and they script the steps. Next, they consider teaching the lesson in different contexts, imagining it virtually or in small groups. Later, they add complexity by differentiating for students with special needs, bilingual, and gifted and talented students. Each week of the course adds a new layer to their lesson plan, with opportunities for feedback from the course instructor. Finally, they receive feedback from their peers through a role-play of a teacher development meeting.

Faculty report that the integration of scaffolded field experiences supported by coursework has contributed to better success on candidates’ certification exams (see [Table A2](#) in the Appendix). According to a faculty member who served on the practice-based teacher education design team, linking requirements to certification exams was intentional. They noted:

We rewrote [the curriculum] and recreated it in a way that will help familiarize students with the structure [of the exam] and with some of the requirements, so that when they get to clinical teaching, when they need to do the edTPA [performance assessment], they’ve seen a lot of this.¹³¹

Innovative Practice-Based Learning Opportunities

As part of its scaffolded, practice-based curriculum, UTRGV has implemented three innovative learning practices: structured preclinical field-based experiences, key assessments, and mixed-reality simulations.

Transformed Preclinical Field-Based Experiences

As part of the redesign of preclinical coursework, UTRGV placed a priority on field-based experiences in which candidates spend time in classrooms not only observing, but also actively participating in teaching. Under the direction of the dean, the Teaching and Learning department, and the practice-based teacher education design team, UTRGV developed field-based requirements for teacher candidates in the STEP UP and residency programs that substantially exceed the minimum state requirement for preclinical observation hours.

To create learning experiences for the candidates that are as rich and authentic as possible, college leadership also worked closely with district partners. According to one faculty member, faculty provide partner districts with “guidance on what our [preclinical teacher candidates] need to do and what that will look like.” A mentor teacher noted that schools serving as sites for preclinical placements are “excited” to have UTRGV teacher candidates on their campus because of this intentional shift away from the traditionally more passive format of field-based hours in which the teacher candidate’s role is often only to observe. They noted that the UTRGV candidates “come with things to offer,” including new ideas for introducing concepts, small-group reteaching, or enrichment, layered on top of a strong pedagogical foundation.

All candidates at UTRGV receive this substantial practice-based field experience before entering the clinical practice phase of teacher candidacy. The frequency and structure of practice-based field experience varies depending on a teacher candidate’s certification area, but the college strives to provide all candidates with richer and more sustained preclinical experiences than are the norm in teacher prep.¹³² For example, one early childhood education course begins with the candidates and instructor convening at a nearby school. The instructor may give a mini-lesson and remind candidates of concepts to look for when they visit the classrooms. The instructor also reminds the candidates to engage with the children, advising, “Get on the floor. Sit at the table. ... Don’t wait for your mentor teacher to assign you a task. You take initiative.” After their time in the classrooms, the candidates and instructor reconvene for a guided reflection in which they make connections between their coursework and their experiences in the classrooms.

The faculty for secondary certification areas work with local schools to match preclinical candidates with a mentor teacher in their content focus area, with whom the candidate will spend 5 hours per week over 8 weeks. After each classroom visit, candidates prepare a written reflection—guided by a sequence of topics from their coursework—which includes differentiation strategies, student engagement, and the context of the school community. During their coursework, they also discuss their field experiences with their peers to, as a faculty member said, “establish those connections more meaningfully.” One teacher candidate assigned to a high school geography class described their deeply immersive experience, stating, “Around my fourth or third time visiting, I had already given a lecture ... [on] Texas history and the geography of Texas. From there I was just helping out the students one-on-one. ... But the [teacher whose classroom I was in] allow[ed] me to kind of take control.”

Key Assessments

As part of its teacher preparation curriculum revision, UTRGV developed three “key assessments.”¹³³ All teacher candidates complete these assessments, in courses paired with preclinical field experiences, as a core element of UTRGV’s practice-based approach to learning. Depending on a candidate’s certification area, the key assessments may be assigned over one to three semesters. These assessments showcase how UTRGV has woven together practice-based learning, pedagogies designed to serve all students, and scaffolded teaching skills to prepare candidates for clinical teaching.

The first key assessment all candidates complete is the Pre-Teaching Experience Community Case Study, in which teacher candidates study the school and district community of their field placements. After collecting and analyzing relevant data, candidates synthesize their learning and reflect on possible implications for teaching. For example, as a faculty member relayed, candidates may conclude that assessments should be inclusive of different Spanish dialects, or that parent outreach may be more effective through a specific organization. A faculty member described the supports provided to teacher candidates as they learn about the communities where their students live:

[We] provide a detailed list of the resources that are available to [teacher candidates] and their future students, in terms of accessing knowledge about the history as well as the community. We actively want [teacher candidates] to move beyond what they know ... and purposefully think about how these community resources are something that can be useful to their teaching and future. The resources aren’t necessarily something you take from a book or a textbook. The resources are around you. You live the resources. You live among the resources.

Candidates complete the community case study over a semester while receiving feedback from their course instructor. One candidate shared that after completing the first part of the assessment they were “surprised how many students have intellectual disabilities” and planned to study how the school supports this population.

The learner characteristics identified in the community case study are the foundation of the second key assessment teacher candidates are assigned: the Developing Teaching Mini Unit and Lesson Plan. As teacher candidates move from observation to analysis to application in this assessment, they are iterating on the teaching concept with increasing complexity. The third key assessment is the Applied Teaching Data Literacy Project, which is typically assigned in the semester before clinical teaching. It builds on the skills from candidates’ previous work and culminates in candidates teaching a small group lesson in the field. [Table 9](#) provides more details about the three key assessments.

Table 9. Learning Progression of UTRGV Key Assessments

Assessment	Purpose	Targeted teaching skills
Pre-Teaching Experience: Community Case Study	To assess the teacher's ability to identify and analyze relevant contextual factors that affect the learning-teaching process	• Description of district and school factors based on data gathered from the school website, social media, and state accountability dashboard • Description of the community based on visits to various locations and interviews • Analysis of the data collected • Reflection on student, school, and community characteristics with implications for instruction and assessment; displays application of cultural and linguistic resources to connect student learning
Developing Teaching: Mini Unit and Lesson Plan	To assess a teacher's ability to plan instruction, including learning goals, assessments, and activities, using backward design principles	• Creating behavioral objectives as measurable learning goals aligned with state learning standards • Planning an assessment with clear criteria, including diagnostic, formative, and summative modes; includes evidence of technology integration • Planning a sequenced lesson with evidence of pedagogical practices to serve all students and academic language supports; includes evidence of differentiation; is aligned with objectives and assessment planning
Applied Teaching: Data Literacy Project	To assess a teacher's ability to analyze assessment data and reflect on instruction	• Observation of a lesson taught by mentor teacher, with description • Analysis of assessment data from the observed lesson • Focused learning objectives based on assessment outcomes • Planned reengagement lesson aligned to student needs • Reflection on data analysis after reassessment and next steps

Sources: University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P–16 Integration. (n.d.). [3 key assessments](#). (accessed 08/30/2024); Internal documents for key assessments.

Mixed-Reality Simulations

Another innovative learning environment used by UTRGV for practice-based learning is a mixed-reality simulation of a classroom, designed through a partnership with Mursion, a company self-described as creating immersive learning simulations for the workplace.¹³⁴ The simulation service is one of five initiatives of the Learning to Teach Lab. The simulation is “mixed” reality because it uses a live actor in an AI-generated setting to create low-stakes learning opportunities for teacher candidates during their preclinical coursework.¹³⁵ At UTRGV, a faculty committee developed several strategic scenarios for candidates to rehearse “core teaching practices,” according to a faculty member. For example, scenarios require teacher candidates to practice higher-order questioning in a lesson with elementary students, engage students who are disrupting or not participating in class, and have a parent conference about a student’s English language acquisition. As the dean noted, these opportunities are meant to be “very intentional places in the teacher preparation program, where candidates get to practice certain skills and refine those before they go out ... in the schools.”

Faculty use the mixed-reality simulation both synchronously and asynchronously, during classroom time or virtually. In another arrangement, teacher candidates work on simulations in teams. Still another model has a recording of a completed simulation shared asynchronously with teacher candidates. After teacher candidates work through a scenario, the instructor may choose to model how they would approach it.

Mixed-reality simulations provide a powerful opportunity for teacher candidates to begin seeing themselves as professional educators with experience navigating challenges.

Mixed-reality simulations provide a powerful opportunity for teacher candidates to begin seeing themselves as professional educators with experience navigating challenges. One candidate said the simulations helped them with “thinking as an educator.” An instructor described the transformation they saw after using a parent conference simulation in class, saying, “[Teacher candidates] said it was nerve-racking. They said they were intimidated by it at first, but then at the end they said, ‘You know what? It’s an eye-opener. This is the reality of working with families.’”

Candidates noted that interacting with computer-generated characters feels realistic. The simulation software includes details like body language, side conversations, and vocal tone. These become teaching points, giving candidates the opportunity to experience their own emotional response in a no-harm situation, without actual students. One candidate shared that initially, “just being put in that situation, it was like in one ear and out the other for me. I forgot completely ... what I’m supposed to do as a teacher.” The candidate was able to work through their initial instinct to freeze and went on to rehearse a more productive reaction.

Mixed-Reality Simulations in Action

In one secondary education methods course, a candidate volunteers to be the teacher within the simulation. This “teacher” and the faculty instructor can pause the simulation at any time for feedback, through which other candidates observing the simulation share ideas in real time. One candidate who was observing the simulation noted, “The [faculty instructor] would also interrupt or ... help them try to change up the momentum, or to get the students’ attention. ... I feel like it gave me more [to] critique and more engagement after seeing that.”

As each new volunteer takes the role of teacher, they test and refine different methods for redirecting a simulated student. Faculty remind students of strategies learned in their coursework. One teacher candidate reflected on the impact of the simulated scenario, saying, “I always thought that if I had that situation come up, I would know how to react,” but practicing a challenging situation with a student in the simulation caused them to realize, “OK, I don’t know how to react, but now I know how I should after seeing other people do it.” They elaborated:

I realized that, after I saw the other two [volunteers], I should have done something a lot different because it was a lot of me going back and forth with the student instead of actually defusing [the situation]. Because the people who went after me were able to defuse the situation very quickly. ... They tried to connect more with the student on a personal level, like, “Hey, are you OK? I’m here for you. I care about you. I want you to be here.” ... That was definitely a better approach than trying to keep everything contained. [I learned to] focus on the problem, fix it, and then move on instead of just trying to push ... past [it].

Source: From interviews with University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley personnel. (2024).

Pedagogies to Serve All Students

Undergirding the college’s transformation is a guiding commitment to serve all students. UTRGV leaders recognize the importance of serving the multicultural and multilingual region where they are situated, given that the vast majority of UTRGV’s teacher graduates are hired to work in the Rio Grande Valley. For example, in certain courses, cocurricular opportunities provide chances for teacher candidates to engage with the linguistic and cultural richness of the region and better understand the experiences of their future students. Through one course, teacher candidates have the opportunity to volunteer at the Humanitarian Respite Center, where they provide translation support for children from immigrant families. One teacher candidate described the power of this experience in helping to build understanding of student needs in the region:

It wasn’t a teaching experience, but it affected my process of developing my teacher persona. ... I was really affected because you get to see the desire for education and the passion to getting to it, no matter the process. A lot of them went through the Darién jungle [a geographic region connecting Colombia to Panama]. A lot of them traveled through very dangerous places to get here. I remember hearing a story of [a child’s mother] who said that they had to come here because the terrorist group had told them that if they didn’t move, they’d die. ... And so being able to see people’s background instead of hearing it in the classroom or never knowing about it, it makes your students human, and it helps you not take things personally in the classroom.

Teacher candidates explained that practices that build from students' strengths were one of the tools in their developing toolboxes. As a candidate pursuing secondary certification stated, "You have to relate ... to what the students might know locally, or even regionally."

All teacher candidates at UTRGV are trained to support multilingual learners. Linguistically sustaining practices are embedded in coursework so that candidates learn to value and support their students' multilingualism. For example, all candidates in early childhood take the course Linguistically Diverse Early Childhood Students to practice applying bilingual literacy strategies.¹³⁶ A faculty member who teaches secondary math and science candidates explained how linguistically sustaining practices are embedded into coursework: "I try [modeling] so they see how many other ways there are to help students—even without knowing one word in the language—to understand what's going on in the classroom." Two faculty members described a simulation in which they use foreign languages not commonly spoken in the region—Afrikaans and Persian—to teach and assess a new concept.¹³⁷ After the simulation, participants in the course reflect on their concept mastery, their methods of meaning-making (recognizing cognates with the English language, for example), and the emotional experience of the lesson. Then the instructor introduces the concept of translanguaging as "the process whereby multilingual speakers utilize their languages as an integrated communication system."¹³⁸

To ensure teacher candidates build their skills for linguistically sustaining practices, the preclinical coursework includes multiple opportunities for candidates to apply and reflect on these practices. The faculty redesigning coursework have mapped associated pedagogical concepts to be covered in specific courses. Further, candidates' ability to implement appropriate linguistically sustaining pedagogical practices is appraised in two of the three key assessments.

UTRGV instructors also use linguistically sustaining practices themselves in coursework. For teacher candidates at UTRGV who themselves are bilingual, course materials in the college are offered in both English and Spanish. One professor provided nuance to a common misconception about educators who are from and plan to work in the region:

The assumption is always [that] everybody speaks Spanish. Well, that's not necessarily true, because we have a lot of students that can speak conversational Spanish—very informal—but don't understand the Spanish academic language. ... So we have classes taught strictly in Spanish. Pedagogy courses.

Since most teacher candidates have backgrounds similar to the backgrounds of the students they will teach, instructors purposefully "affirm the value of their linguistic resources," as one instructor explained. Thus, teacher candidates experience as students in the EPP what they are being prepared to implement with their own PreK–12 students.

Lengthening and Strengthening the Clinical Experience

Members of UTRGV's EPP Advisory Committee—which is composed of representatives from 15 districts across the region—shared feedback about districts' need to improve teacher retention and teacher candidates' need for financial support during their clinical experiences. In response to this feedback, UTRGV now offers two yearlong clinical pathways in addition to the traditional single-semester option. STEP UP builds upon features of the single-semester clinical experience, extending into a second

semester and adding supports for teacher candidates. Likewise, the more recently introduced residency program builds on key features of the STEP UP model. In partnership with area school districts, UTRGV has sought to “reconceptualize the student teaching experience to allow for a more substantive and purposeful clinical experience.”¹³⁹

The STEP UP Clinical Pathway

In 2016, UTRGV launched STEP UP (Student Teacher Educator Preparation: University Partnership), developed in partnership with Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District. As of the 2023–24 school year, UTRGV had expanded STEP UP to three additional districts.¹⁴⁰ STEP UP lengthened the traditional one-semester clinical teaching to a two-semester placement with a mentor teacher. This is a competitive program limited by the number and certification areas of placements offered by partner districts, and candidates are selected based on GPA, an essay, and an interview with faculty. In the 2022–23 school year, 27 teacher candidates completed the STEP UP yearlong program.¹⁴¹ According to its website, the goal of STEP UP is to “bridge the gap between preparation and the first years of teaching.” In the program, candidates attend the first 5 days of the school year, then 1 full day a week in the first semester, and all 5 days a week for 15 weeks in the second semester.¹⁴²

In addition to the full-year placement, STEP UP builds on the single-semester student teaching experience by incorporating two notable features that scaffold and guide candidates through their clinical teaching. One is a progression of candidate responsibilities from co-planning to co-teaching. To develop a common understanding of this progression, mentor teachers and candidates receive professional development on coaching and co-teaching from the district and UTRGV faculty. In their classroom, mentor teachers direct the pace of the candidate’s progress, but in general they provide more engaged support to candidates in the beginning and reduce that scaffolding as the candidate grows in proficiency and is able to take on more complex teaching roles. This support includes modeling, instructional input, and critical examination of instructional practices.

The second feature of STEP UP is a monthly meeting with a cohort of peers, facilitated by a faculty member who serves as a field supervisor. During this meeting, candidates connect their coursework to their clinical experiences—an important form of practice-based learning. Guided by their field supervisor, STEP UP teacher candidates reflect on their co-planning and co-teaching opportunities, in-service training, faculty and other school meetings, and experiences analyzing student data.¹⁴³

Candidates and program graduates reported that the lengthened clinical experience prepared them well to be teachers of record. One graduate described how their STEP UP placement revealed “all of those different things that you don’t learn typically in the [preclinical coursework],” through sustained relationships with their students and mentor teacher. She noted, “One of our students lost their mom. Another one was in foster care. ... You learn those things through experience. How to communicate with case workers. How to file a CPS report.” A teacher candidate in the second semester of their placement echoed this perspective, reporting that “the program helps you see what really goes on as a teacher” and “how much teachers [have] to tackle.”

Candidates and program graduates reported that the lengthened clinical experience prepared them well to be teachers of record.

STEP UP candidates receive sustained guidance from experienced mentor teachers and their field supervisor, who help them navigate challenges. According to one administrator, mentor teachers are selected based on multiple factors, including “their [student] data, their [rating on] T-TESS [Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System, a statewide teacher evaluation tool] ... their student relationships, their parent relationships. We also asked if they wanted to be part of this process.” A candidate described the influence of learning from their mentor teacher during their first semester in STEP UP:

She wants her students to grow. She’s a very helpful person. ... I never really got experience [before] of a classroom with a mixture of students and how she teaches and tries to grab their attention. ... It does amaze me because it gives me hope that I could do the same toward others in the future.

One district administrator reported that STEP UP produced better-prepared first-year teachers who were likely to be hired in their placement district. To facilitate a smooth transition into their first year, candidates are included in onboarding for district policies and have a guaranteed interview for the possibility of early hiring.

Despite its successes, challenges emerged pertaining to candidate supply for the program. A district administrator noted:

There was a year [in which] our numbers [of teacher candidates] were really, really small. And they were even smaller in the spring semester because our teacher candidates hadn’t passed all of the requirements to continue into student teaching [for the second semester].

District administrators and UTRGV faculty found that frequently candidates needed to take on jobs to support their families in addition to taking coursework and juggling clinical teaching. These multiple competing demands on teacher candidates’ time understandably limit the extent to which they can engage in learning opportunities that will help prepare them for the classroom. In 2024–25, only 16 teacher candidates participated. While STEP UP is still providing a high-quality preparation experience, UTRGV created an additional pathway to address this particular challenge.

The Paid Residency Pathway

The college undertook the design of a paid residency pathway with invited district partners in 2021. They began in one district, piloting a yearlong model with a small number of students. As an administrator in this district said:

To elevate the profession of teaching we have to value them from the start. And [an element of that is] to give them a \$12,000 stipend. It’s not a huge amount of money. But for a teacher candidate, that’s going to make all the difference in the world. So, we wanted to make sure that we were going to continue to feed our pipeline, and that’s why we went with the residency.

To implement the new pathway, UTRGV partnered with US PREP, joining US PREP’s sixth cohort of educator preparation programs implementing residencies. Seed funding to introduce the residency pathway was provided in the form of a \$1 million grant jointly issued by three philanthropic foundations.¹⁴⁴ At the district level, funding for paid residencies is largely supported through strategic staffing—where

existing district academic support funds are reallocated to residents, who, in exchange, take on roles such as tutors and paraprofessionals—and may also be supplemented by a 2023–2025 strategic staffing grant for residency programs administered by the Texas Education Agency.¹⁴⁵

During UTRGV’s initial US PREP residency design year in 2021–22, five other districts were invited to consider hosting residents. The dean and the director of field experiences at UTRGV met twice a month with representatives from the districts, including superintendents, human resources directors, and finance officers. In these individual governance meetings, US PREP and UTRGV partnered with districts to assess their needs and used the model of the pilot district to explore how strategic staffing plans could be tailored to meet the budget constraints of each district. Districts adjusted their budget in different ways to provide compensation to residents. For example, one district collapsed vacancies and reallocated substitute and professional development funding to use residents as substitutes in a limited capacity (about 1 day per week). Another district’s strategic staffing plan included release time for mentor teachers to provide coaching and intervention across the campus in place of an instructional coach salary. A third district’s plan braided bilingual, Title I, and state compensatory education funds to pay teacher residents placed in these students’ classrooms.¹⁴⁶

In addition to determining role responsibilities of residents based on strategic staffing, each partnership set data-driven goals for their residency program. For example, one district administrator noted that they are tracking the implications of having a resident in their classroom for their emergent bilingual students. This administrator described the mutual benefit of designing a residency program in shared governance with UTRGV:

One of the things that we did early on in the work is we went to visit schools. We brought professors into our elementary and our secondary schools. ... It was a great opportunity for us to understand perspectives—us of them and them of us. And we learned a lot. ... What is so simple for us with teacher prep is really not as simple because of all the regulations and everything that you’re governed by at the university level. So we realized right away that we didn’t have a quick fix. And from that point on, we said, all right, what is [residency implementation] going to look like?

Finally, UTRGV convened one meeting with all six districts to foster regional alignment. At this meeting, three districts agreed to offer residents equal payment and five committed to hosting between 5 and 10 residents the following fall. The paid residency launched in 2022–23 with a first cohort of 28 residents placed across six school districts; this number increased to 52 residents across seven districts in the 2023–24 school year, and 53 residents in the 2024–25 school year. Additionally, UTRGV began a spring-to-fall cohort in January 2025 with six residents in an eighth district. In 2024–25, most partner districts were able to pay residents \$12,000, and some included benefits like health insurance. The rural pilot district farther away from campus paid residents \$15 per hour, which can add up to as much as \$18,000, depending on the resident’s hours.

The residency pathway differs from STEP UP in four important ways. In the residency pathway: (1) residents are district employees; (2) UTRGV engages in more frequent and collaborative governance with partner districts; (3) mentor teachers are trained by UTRGV with regular frequency; and (4) residents spend more time in their placement, receiving more feedback and support.

Residents as District Employees

As district employees, residents are perceived as a second teacher in the classroom, though they operate under the direction of their mentor teachers. One mentor teacher illustrated this relationship by describing the classroom space as “our classroom” and the students as “our students.” Likewise, administrators expect residents to attend and contribute to team meetings and to work hard for the benefit of the students. One district administrator stated:

I set the expectation for each and every one of them, regardless of whether [they’re] a teacher resident or a mentor teacher. The expectation is that they’re knee deep in that instruction for the benefit of our students, and we owe it to them to give the very best versions of ourselves.

Partner districts develop a resident profile during their design year, review candidate applications in the spring semester, and interview potential residents. The resident profile helps partner districts select candidates who fit their needs and alerts the college to staffing shortages in the region. To facilitate the hiring process, the UTRGV Office of Field Experiences hosts an annual job fair for candidates applying to the residency pathway. At the fair, each district has a table staffed by a representative, usually a hiring administrator or other human resources staff member, where they can interview residents.

Though residents are paid by the district, the university works with the district during the design year to define the parameters of the residency. This collaboration is done to ensure that the residents’ learning is appropriately scaffolded while the district is able to benefit from their contributions. As one faculty member explained:

[New residents] still need a lot of coaching and mentoring, and so the parameters that we established started from the first [week]. How many weeks are they going to just be observing? ... The first [substitute] assignment is going to be after October. It’s going to start within just the mentor teacher’s classroom.

If the resident profile and parameters are not meeting the needs of district partners, district and EPP administrators can work together to refine their design or implementation at a governance meeting.

Ultimately, the goal of the residency is to establish a high-quality hiring pipeline to meet district needs. As one principal explained, residents are ideal candidates because they have a deep understanding of the school community and the expectations of the school administration, as well as knowledge of instructional resources. Additionally, districts can see firsthand how hosting a resident positively affects the children in the classroom where that resident is placed. One administrator noted that “the numbers speak for themselves when it comes to student performance” in the residents’ classrooms. They added:

For me, it’s all about the students and the benefits they reap, because at the end of the day, I get to see the personalized relationship that they [residents] have with kids and then how they’re working with them [at] an instructional level to provide that support. ... I see the progression of the student from the beginning of the year, when they first become introduced to our teacher residents, and the relationship they built at the end of the year, and how comfortable they feel going toward them for academic support. But also the social-emotional learning is just as important. And we’ve seen it even more so through the residency.

Frequent, Collaborative Governance With District Partners

While STEP UP partnership meetings occur once per semester, residency governance meetings occur twice as often, with two in the fall and two in the spring. These meetings begin with sharing data about the progress of the residents the district is hosting. One faculty member explained, “With leadership from the district, principals, and district leaders, we discuss the POP cycles—the preobservation, observation, postobservation. ... And then we discuss what’s going well with the program. That’s when we have those good discussions.”

Frequent meetings between partners enable the program to make refinements at a faster rate, which benefits residents’ growth and the students they teach. One district administrator described their governance meetings as “a good working relationship,” and another emphasized that the “partnership is very strong with STEP UP. I see that tenfold now with our teacher residency.”

In addition to quarterly governance meetings, frequent communication occurs between the campus principal and the site coordinator, a university faculty member who supports a cohort of residents. At UTRGV, site coordinators are assistant professors of practice, and the residency course is one of four methods courses they teach. Site coordinators lead governance meetings and conduct formal and informal observations of residents. They also serve as the primary liaison between the school and UTRGV. One principal explained how crucial they perceive their partnership with the site coordinator to be:

Usually when our site coordinator comes to do observations and they have their POP cycles, she does a check-in with me. ... Whether it’s an email, a text, [or] a phone call, communication is so consistent. I could not do this without that person.

The weekly or more frequent touchpoints on each campus enable a higher level of support for residents, with real-time feedback and opportunities for adjustment. A principal described the benefit of this flow of information, noting that it allows the team to pivot quickly and explaining, “If the teacher residents share something with our site coordinators ... we get on it right away.”

One district also established a line of communication between the site coordinators and the district human resources coordinator. This communication has enabled the college to arrange for resident cohort meetings to be held on a district campus, further embedding the residency program within the district partnership.

Rigorously Trained Mentor Teachers

The residency program has also created more overlap between the district and university through the preparation of mentor teachers. Whereas STEP UP mentors may participate in one optional training at the beginning of the year, resident mentors have two or three required training sessions per year. Training covers topics such as co-teaching and providing feedback, the T-TESS evaluation rubric and its components, and implicit bias. One mentor teacher reflected on learning and applying co-teaching structures, explaining:

So, there was “One teach, one observe.” And that’s how [the resident teacher] started. She would watch me, take notes down, ask questions if she needed. And then there was “One teach, one assist,” where [the resident] help[s] out here and there. Right now, we do a lot of the co-teaching. ... We’ll both go around the classroom and then [work with] small groups.

In addition to the training sessions, site coordinators host check-in meetings throughout the year with all the mentor teachers at once. One mentor teacher provided examples of the questions posed by the site coordinator: “Where are you [in the co-teaching progression]? How are you ensuring that all these models are being implemented? What is working best for you and for the kids?”

Resident Requirements and Supports

Compared to candidates in the STEP UP pathway, residents have increased time in the classroom over the yearlong placement. In the fall semester, residents spend 3 full days per week at their school, in addition to attending August professional development and spending the first 5 days with students. The other 2 days a week they are at UTRGV taking classes. After their university coursework concludes in November, residents may work full-time in their clinical placement, depending on the district. In the spring semester, teacher residents spend 4 days a week in their clinical placement and 1 day per week at UTRGV for their clinical seminar class.

The weekly seminar is integral to resident growth. The cohort’s site coordinator provides feedback, shares aggregated observation data, and offers opportunities for residents to reflect on their clinical experience. One site coordinator explained how they determine the learning objectives for the seminar:

One of the goals of the residency is that we’re always trying to bridge theory to practice. ... We’re transitioning them into building this teacher identity and embedding that into the curriculum that is presented in this seminar, [which is] very fluid. The seminar is based on the walk-through [observations], so depending on observations for me, as well as the principal and mentor teacher, we discuss those areas of refinement.

Increased support for residents by the site coordinator is supplemented by daily feedback from and close collaboration with their mentor teacher. According to one mentor, the support they provide is more targeted because of the site coordinator’s collaboration and evaluation.

Strategic Staffing Technical Assistance Program Manager

To sustain the paid residency program in the region, the EPP was awarded funding for a US PREP-trained program manager in the Office of Field Experiences, whose job is to provide technical assistance for sustaining and scaling paid residency positions. The college subsequently received a budget line from the provost to sustainably fund the position. This program manager trains new site coordinators and facilitates the design and implementation of paid residency slots in partnership with school districts, using strategic staffing models to fund stipends and create a pipeline into high-need subject areas. While districts across the rest of the state receive strategic staffing technical assistance provided by regional Education Service Centers (ESCs), UTRGV’s program manager provides direct technical assistance to partner districts, working alongside district administrators to identify and implement strategic staffing strategies and other sources of funding for residency stipends. (After UTRGV’s strategic staffing technical assistance program manager began their work, the regional ESC in UTRGV’s geographic location also began supporting strategic staffing efforts.) At this time, no other educator preparation program in Texas has a strategic staffing technical assistance provider position housed in and paid for by the university.

Flexible and Varied Teacher Candidate Support Structures

Research indicates that teacher candidates may face a variety of obstacles in completing higher education pathways and, consequently, credentialing programs.¹⁴⁷ Financial burdens are often among the most substantial, including both the cost of tuition and the opportunity cost of completing unpaid clinical experiences while forgoing other employment opportunities.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, candidates may struggle with program completion if they do not have access to resources that guide them through their credentialing pathway.

UTRGV has purposefully implemented strategies to address potential obstacles teacher candidates may face throughout their preparation pathways. As one professor noted:

Compared to previous institutions where I have worked ... our college really spends a lot of attention to try to make supports available to students. I would say that is part of the core values, too. It's a very supportive environment for students.

The college grounds its approach to student supports in recognizing that the “majority of [their] students are first-generation students ... have families, children, [or] are working full-time,” as one faculty member noted. In response, UTRGV offers a range of supports to help candidates complete their credential pathways, including financial supports and access to structured advising, certification exam supports, cohorts, and a facultywide culture of support.

Financial Support

Given the economic context of the region, UTRGV maintains an institutional focus on affordability. Dean Alma Rodriguez noted that the university president is “committed to making sure that students in general at UTRGV graduate with as little debt as possible.” According to the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard, the median total debt for undergraduates at UTRGV is \$12,950 after graduation,¹⁴⁹ much lower than the \$20,500 median debt for the state’s flagship institution, the University of Texas at Austin.¹⁵⁰ To lower student costs, the UTRGV Tuition Advantage grant program was launched in fall 2022 and covers the tuition and mandatory fees for students with a family income of \$125,000 or less, including students from all of UTRGV’s EPP pathways, after federal and state aid or scholarships have been applied.¹⁵¹ UTRGV also offers multiple merit- and need-based scholarships for students, including an emergency fund. Due to the Tuition Advantage program, UTRGV’s affordability, and other financial supports, teacher candidates report that they feel comfortable committing to complete their preparation program. As one candidate said, between low tuition rates, Pell grants, and Tuition Advantage, “Taking out loans isn’t too much of a concern for me because I know it won’t get too high and I feel that I would be able to pay them off very quickly.”

UTRGV’s district partners are also committed to sustaining the paid residency pathway. Districts say they are using a blend of funding sources to do this. One district administrator explained, “This school year, we did go into local funds; not only just our state [compensatory education] funds. ... The commitment is there to keep it and then to continue to find ways to sustain it.” At least one district applied for a 2-year state grant to supplement its available funds.

Still, forgoing outside employment during a clinical experience can be especially challenging for many UTRGV candidates, including nontraditional candidates who are raising children. The development of the paid residency was a key strategy to address this challenge. As a faculty member described, it was an attempt to “find an equitable solution for nontraditional students who cannot afford to quit their jobs” while still maintaining a “clinically rich program.” Currently, all candidates in the residency pathway are in a paid position as district employees.

Despite UTRGV’s tuition assistance offerings and paid residency, faculty maintain that additional funding is still needed to support candidates. Only candidates who are residents and candidates receiving external scholarships receive financial support during their clinical experience. Furthermore, because partner districts fund the paid residency using different staffing models, resident compensation and benefits differ across residency placements. One candidate noted that, under the residency hiring arrangement with her placement district, she receives a salary, benefits, and comp time, but that “other teacher residents don’t get that.”

Candidate Information and Pathway Support

To help candidates navigate their coursework, clinical experience, and certification requirements, UTRGV has established consistent information channels, tailored advising, and candidate monitoring. One faculty member said, “Investing in ... multiple checkpoints in multiple venues [where students] seek advice and mentorship” helps support program completion. A program graduate described their experience:

Once I got in, [program faculty and administrators said], “We’re going to take you with us. Let’s go.” There’s no falling behind. There are deadlines. They’re following up on those deadlines. ... Before [you enter] the College of Education, you’re kind of just treading water on your own. But the [educator preparation] program is so good about [breaking down how to] “follow the days, follow the times, and this is what you’re going to get done.” They give you a clear goal and how to get to that goal.

Coordinated and Program-Specific Advising

UTRGV assigns all new freshmen a general requirement advisor to help map their degree pathway; however, both teacher candidates and faculty in the College of Education note that these advisors play a limited role in helping candidates navigate their teaching pathways. Consequently, one professor in the college explained that the educator preparation program has hired multiple program specialists whose “primary role is to provide individualized, tailored advising to each student” once they enter the College of Education. The program specialists work closely with college faculty to identify and analyze meaningful student data, improve candidate support tools and processes, and ensure consistent messaging. As one faculty member said, the coordination among departments and offices has helped candidates receive consistent information and advising to help them navigate through the preparation program, even as state requirements change.

Communication and Support Through Program Coordinators

UTRGV’s program coordinators are responsible for maintaining consistent contact with students about deadlines, resources, and opportunities for candidates to receive advising support. A faculty member noted that they send information through a variety of modalities to reach as many students as possible,

“not just face-to-face required meetings every semester,” but regular advising and contact through email and texting. A teacher candidate noted that their program coordinator was a strong and consistent presence within the program:

I constantly get emails from her every day, and she sends out [reminders] like, “Make sure you’re preparing for your exam. I’m going to be at this place, at this time. You can come meet me and we can touch base about anything you might have questions on for your exam or for student teaching.” ... I know if I wanted to use her as a resource, I definitely could.

Candidate Monitoring

In addition to proactive communication and advising, UTRGV integrates candidate checkpoints and monitoring to prevent students from taking incorrect courses or falling through the cracks. Program coordinators conduct weekly check-ins, and UTRGV integrates checkpoints into its class registration to make sure candidates are on track with their degree plan. Candidates must submit a request and receive approval before they are able to register in the college. While candidates note that the extra approval step is cumbersome, they recognize that the additional checkpoint is an important safety measure to support students. As a teacher candidate noted, “They make sure we are on the right path.”

Certification Exam Support

In the early implementation of its teacher preparation program, UTRGV identified two persistent problems related to testing: low pass rates and students opting to graduate without completing clinical teaching or certification exams. In response, the college developed multipronged strategies to support candidates through their certification exams, including supports for candidates who have already graduated. One faculty member attested that pass rates have notably increased since this suite of strategies was implemented (see [Table A2](#) in the Appendix).

Embedding Test Preparation Into Coursework

UTRGV data revealed low pass rates on elementary education content exams. In response, faculty decided to integrate test supports into coursework. As one faculty member described, “We’re not requiring them to do one more thing or go to a tutoring lab.” Instead, faculty are responsible for being well versed on test prep materials so that they can integrate information and strategies throughout their courses. They are also responsible for implementing performance gates (e.g., the key assessments described earlier in this section; see [Table 9](#)) to gauge whether students are prepared to take the full certification exams or whether they need additional instruction.

The Certification Exam Support Hub

UTRGV also established the Certification Exam Support Hub, one of the five initiatives housed within the Learning to Teach Lab (see [The Learning to Teach Lab: Scaling and Sustaining Transformation at UTRGV](#)). The Certification Exam Support Hub offers teacher candidates guidance, tutoring, and other forms of assistance as they navigate their certification sequence. The goal, according to faculty, is to lessen candidates’ fear and sense of overwhelm as they approach exams. Consequently, faculty and administrators say that UTRGV has built in “support systems both for the academic and the financial piece” of the process.

The Hub provides exam study plans that outline all competencies covered in an exam. Study plans include matrices for candidates to examine their passing percentage scores by competency. Plans are paired with easy access to study resources, listed on the same web page, that link to flashcards, guides, articles, and videos, organized by domain and competency. The Hub also assigns study priorities and tracks candidates' study activities as well as time spent on these activities.

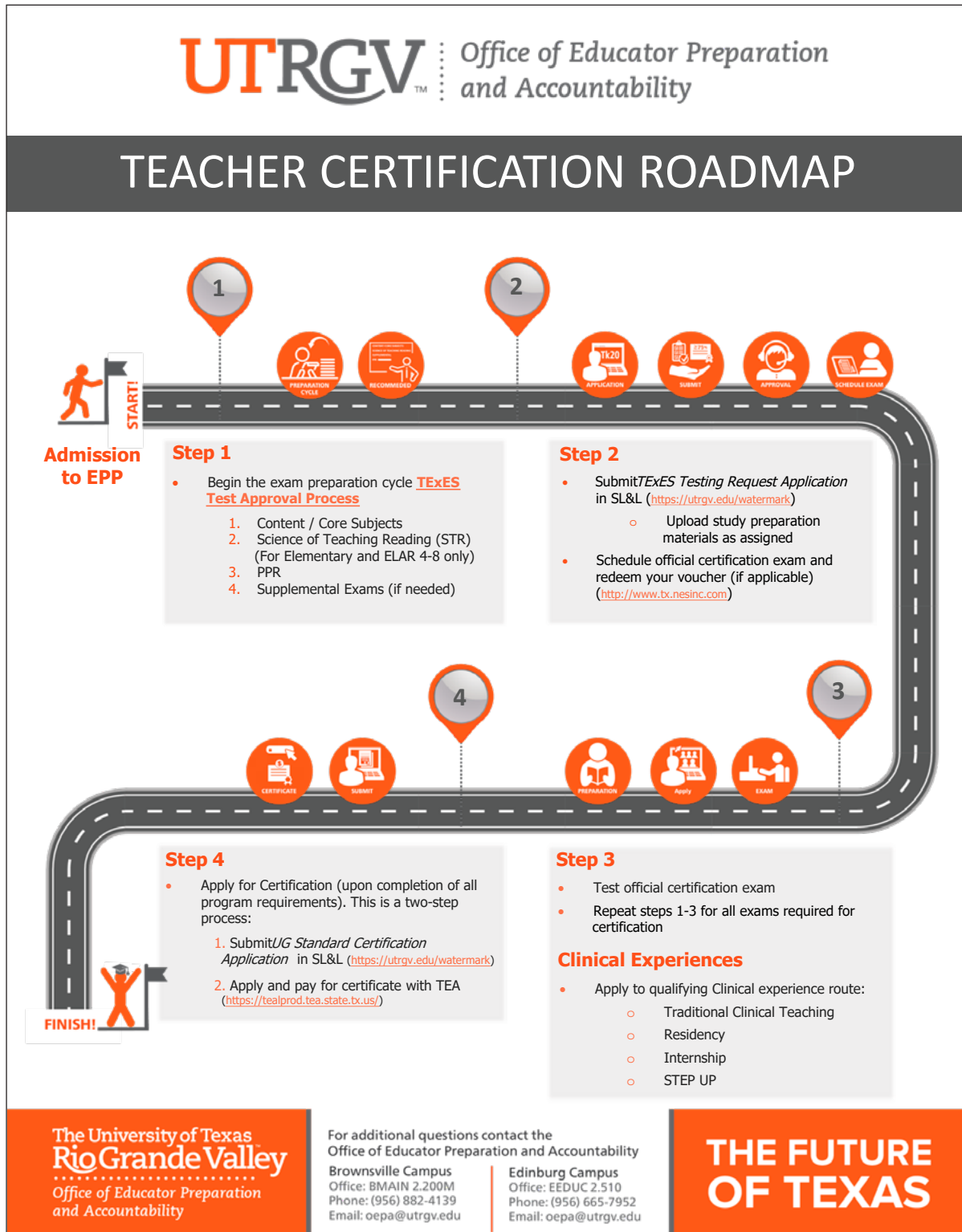
In addition to providing access to study information and plans, the Hub offers advising and other resources to help candidates navigate the testing process. The Hub webpage provides a “roadmap” to teacher certification, providing recommendations on exam preparation order and outlining the actions candidates should take as they navigate from beginning their exams through finalizing their certification (see [Figure 2](#)). Additionally, specific to the exam approval process, the Hub's web page explicitly outlines progress steps, providing links to forms, submission instructions, and access to advising.

The program specialists providing targeted advising are responsible for tracking candidates' test preparation progress and identifying when candidates are prepared to take the certification exams. Program specialists receive data from test preparation modules embedded into coursework to identify areas in which candidates may need additional support or tutoring.

The Certification Exam Support Hub also offers certification exam vouchers that cover payment for candidates' exam costs. Any preparation program candidate who has met requirements for test approval is eligible for two certification exam vouchers, which they may use to cover their first attempts on the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibility, content specialization, or Science of Teaching Reading exams.¹⁵² Prior to the vouchers, many candidates struggled with the high cost of the exams. As one faculty member noted, “Before, some of them were attempting these tests two or three times out of their own pocket. ... They're already at the edge financially. Then we're adding \$500, \$800, \$1,000 of test expenses. They can't do it.”

Finally, as part of the Certification Exam Support Hub, teacher candidates have access to extensive study opportunities and support through tutoring and workshop sessions. The Hub offers a variety of tutoring modalities to make supports more accessible to candidates: individual and group sessions, face-to-face and online, weekdays and weekends. As one faculty member described, “They're offering [all] those options ... to help [candidates] work around their schedules and work and life.” Candidates are notified of specific session dates and competencies covered so they can tailor the tutoring supports to their own study needs and priorities.

**Figure 2. UTRGV Certification Exam Support
Hub's Teacher Certification Roadmap**



Source: University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P–16 Integration. (n.d.). [Teacher certification roadmap](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

Postgraduation Certification Support

Even after candidates graduate from their teacher preparation programs, the college continues to provide supports, whether through exam workshops or the Certification Exam Support Hub, to graduates who have not yet completed and passed their certification exams.

Cohort Support and Collaboration

Both yearlong clinical teaching pathways, the STEP UP program and the paid teacher residency, use a cohort model for the clinical experience. Candidates are grouped together at placement districts and attend clinical teaching seminars with their respective cohorts. This structure allows for shared transportation and information and fosters a sense of community. Program graduates noted the ways that having cohorts of candidates positively influenced both their clinical experience and their current experience as teachers of record. Most importantly, cohort members support each other's learning. For example, one graduate recalled an opportunity to see instruction at different grade levels in action:

We got clearance for me to spend a week in [a cohort member's] classroom in 3rd grade, and then I would spend another week in 4th grade, so that we would be able to learn the different grade levels ... because we knew that when we took the exams, we were going to have to know scenarios from [all levels].

Cohort members also served as cheerleaders for one another throughout the clinical experiences. One graduate cited their cohort members as key to their persistence in the program:

Without them I feel like I would have probably left the program. But since they were here, it was a constant, "OK, we got this. We're almost at the finish line." We held each other accountable. I honestly feel like if I didn't have the cohort, I probably would not have been here.

Support for Candidates' Unique Needs

In addition to structural candidate supports, the college has established a strong culture among its faculty of addressing the whole student and recognizing candidates' unique needs. Faculty emphasize relationship building and accessibility in instruction across all pathways within the EPP. As one faculty member said, UTRGV faculty "go above and beyond to make sure that [candidates] can make it to the finish line" by regularly checking in with students, sending reminders, and promoting a culture of support, rather than punishment or high-stakes consequences. They continued, "It really takes me one email to say, 'I can support you. Why don't you come to class?'"

A faculty member recalled a student who had failed a key assessment and sought support. The faculty member and department head decided to offer a second chance while still keeping expectations high, explaining, "We need to be fair in what we do, and we also need to keep them accountable for the things that they have to do." This culture of high expectations coupled with high support promotes candidates' mastery of knowledge and competencies. Candidates are given multiple chances to practice, reflect on, and improve their assignments, with the knowledge that instructors are supporting their learning. One faculty member said:

Sometimes I have students submit the same project seven times because it's about proficiency. ... As long as they follow my feedback, they can earn the complete grade. This is something that I do always for them, and [I] follow up with them to make sure they are incorporating it into the assignments.

Further, UTRGV faculty and staff play a key role in connecting students with resources and accommodations, such as connecting students with local nonprofits and knitting together support systems inside and outside of classes for students with differing needs. One faculty member said:

We're all here to help each other out. I mean, I've even worked with students who are visually impaired. ... I made sure that they had [a] strong support system in the class and outside the class. Did that mean extra work on my end that I had to be communicating back and forth with special services outside the class? Absolutely. Did that mean that I had to set up a location and make sure that student was getting help with their peers? Absolutely. Did that mean having those students sit in class with groups that were specifically working together as a team? Yes.

Data-Driven Continuous Improvement

To effectively address the needs of its teacher candidates and partnering districts, UTRGV relies on data-driven continuous improvement to innovate at a rapid rate. According to Dean Alma Rodriguez, the focus extends past “remaining compliant” and “maintain[ing] the status quo.” Instead, the educator preparation program “aims for the highest quality that [they] can provide for [their] teacher candidates.” District staff cite an internal focus on improvement as a strength of the university, noting that as the largest preparation program in the region, it would be “easy for them to just sit back,” yet they are “always willing to take on new initiatives.”

Faculty and leaders throughout the EPP reinforce a strong commitment to ensuring that all quality improvement or programmatic changes are data-informed. Faculty note that when leaders provide data, it becomes easier to garner support for programmatic decisions or changes. Describing the intentionality behind this modeling, one faculty leader said, “One of [our main priorities] was to really develop a culture of inquiry in the college, and we took it seriously. ... I think now faculty are very accustomed to starting most meetings with data.”

With commitment from leadership, much of UTRGV's EPP's improvement and innovation stems from its participation in a variety of initiatives and learning opportunities outside of the college itself. Faculty members regularly take part in external trainings and continuous improvement initiatives and share what they learn with others in the college, resulting in myriad strategies and structures contributing to continuous program refinement.

A Culture of Continuous Improvement for Curriculum Redesign

The culture of continuous improvement is promoted by UTRGV's faculty and reinforced by its leadership. Instructors feel empowered to suggest ideas and make changes. Those that are successful are then shared across the faculty. A faculty member recalled making a change in his syllabus that he believes resulted in teacher candidates passing their content certification exams on the first try. The director of teacher education asked this faculty member to share his success with other faculty:

When you start to get people asking to see what you've done and for you to share back, it could go both ways, right? It could create some kind of animosity between other colleagues ... or it could be like, “Hey, let's all work together here.” [It's] the culture-based aspect of things. The understanding, the respect, the ... feeling that it's OK that you have an idea and you want to try it. Let's move forward. And once it's working, it's a success, but it's a success for everybody.

This shared culture of continuous improvement results in faculty who one leader described as “very engaged in really critical discussion[s],” acknowledging areas of strength and growth. One faculty member described how colleagues are frequently making incremental changes to curriculum and instruction:

We really promote ... an approach where we test small changes that we’re going to make programmatically. We pilot things more, collect data, make some decisions as to whether we’re going to standardize things, but based on real data, authentic data. ... It’s just part of what we do regularly.

According to faculty, despite the program’s nascency, the “energy” and “momentum” for continuous improvement have resulted in tangible advancements in the EPP’s offerings and the resulting preparedness of teacher candidates. As one faculty member reflected, “You can really see the trajectory. A lot of things have been put in place that weren’t there before. ... There’s some fruit to the work.”

Structures That Promote Data-Driven Continuous Improvement

UTRGV’s commitment to continuous improvement is more than a mindset: It is a series of intentional structures, interwoven across committees, departments, district partners, and other colleges in the university, that regularly engage faculty and leadership to reflect, examine, and adapt their preparation program.

Standing Leadership Team Meetings

Semiweekly leadership team meetings across the College of Education include the dean, associate deans, department chairs, the director of teacher preparation, and the director of field experiences. These meetings are a space for leaders to examine data, monitor trends, and make responsive changes to the program. The EPP dean shared an example of how the leadership team monitors student progress on certification exams:

Every other Monday we meet as a leadership team, and we [look at] the certification exam pass rates. We’ve been identifying different areas where we see some trends in content knowledge; for instance, in the secondary level. Our department chair then communicates with the department leaders of the other colleges where the students are receiving the content instruction to make them fully aware of how they’re doing.

The dean emphasized that they “don’t wait until the official pass rate is out,” after the year has finished. Instead, they “monitor ... as students are testing” so immediate changes can be communicated and made with different instructors and departments.

Teacher Preparation Standing Committee

The UTRGV Teacher Preparation Standing Committee was launched in 2020–21 to serve as an improvement team for its preparation programs. This standing committee is less structured than formal committees that center on decision-making and voting. Instead, it serves as a precursor to formal decision-making settings and focuses on learning and discussion—the “kind of learning that would be helpful in designing different experiences for students,” as one faculty member said.

The Teacher Preparation Standing Committee consists of department chairs, program coordinators, and key faculty members who together tackle persistent problems of practice. The committee's approach is grounded in improvement science, stemming from its work with the Raising Texas Teachers program. In addition to receiving a grant for \$22,909 from the Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation in 2021 to collaborate with nine other university-based preparation programs,¹⁵³ the faculty member in charge of facilitation was also trained by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in principles of improvement science.¹⁵⁴ A committee member noted that, in the few years the committee has existed, it has been a “game changer” in being able to make programmatic shifts through multiple iterations, resulting in “major improvements” to the program.

Improving Test Supports Grounded in Candidate Experiences

UTRGV identified the persistent problem of students opting to graduate uncertified. When the Teacher Preparation Standing Committee examined this issue, they discovered that the process of obtaining a waiver of clinical teaching to graduate uncertified was “very automatic” and that the department would “just sign it off.” Consequently, many students were exiting the program, and program faculty were uncertain as to why.

To rectify the situation, the committee sought to better understand candidates' reasons for exiting before clinical experience and to offer candidates a better understanding of the implications of waiving their clinical teaching and exams. UTRGV faculty conducted empathy interviews with candidates, discovering that many were confused by the college's testing protocol. As one described, “Some students said they were very confused about certain terms. And we noticed that ... the languaging was not consistent on the website and then on the actual paperwork.” The faculty member added that consistent language is particularly important for UTRGV's multilingual students.

In response, UTRGV developed a subcommittee to work on streamlining the testing protocol, embedding review sessions, study plans, and more supports so candidates felt more prepared for the process and content of certification exams. Faculty also explained the changes to the testing protocol to candidates in class.

Faculty noted that the process of streamlining the testing protocol was slow, taking over a year and a half, but that the effort and time commitment paid off. According to one faculty member, “We're seeing that more people are going through this and taking this option, and they're passing. They're passing the first time. So that was big. That was huge.”

Source: From interviews with University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley personnel. (2024).

The Dean's Faculty Champions

Rodriguez set a goal of identifying “faculty champions” to lead the way in addressing needs that arise across different programmatic areas. Selection of key areas was data-driven, focusing on elements of the EPP's programming that needed more “intentional curriculum building, planning, [or] professional development,” as one faculty member explained. Specific focus areas of the faculty champions have included research, practice-based teacher education, digital pedagogies, and teacher educator development.

Faculty champions receive a stipend to lead workgroups or professional learning communities of colleagues and set yearly goals for improvement in their focus area, using data-driven planning and implementation meetings throughout the year.¹⁵⁵ The faculty champions' work was initially grant-funded; for focus areas that require continued leadership, the dean has sustained funding for faculty champion stipends from the institutional budget.

Robust Data Dashboards

In line with its commitment to data-driven programmatic design and decision-making, UTRGV invested time and resources into the development of comprehensive data dashboards to inform its teacher preparation pathways. Funded by the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, UTRGV was an early adopter of the Ed-Fi Teacher Preparation Data Model, which connects multiple data systems to visualize teacher preparation data such as enrollment, candidate performance, program information, post-completion, and university–school partnerships.¹⁵⁶ These dashboards, as detailed in [Table 10](#), provide faculty with easy access to various metrics. According to the dean, the data dashboards have positioned UTRGV “at the forefront of data use,” supporting its major programmatic goals of quality, a culture of inquiry, and positionality.¹⁵⁷

Data dashboards are referenced frequently at the biweekly leadership team meetings, offering deans, department chairs, and directors regular data touchpoints to inform their discussions and priorities. The dashboards, according to Rodriguez, “make sure nothing falls below [the EPP’s] expectation[s]” and help identify areas program leaders and faculty “need to [pay] more close attention to.”

To include data on graduates hired as teachers of record, UTRGV established data-sharing agreements with partnering districts. Consequently, the data dashboards have been a “vehicle to strengthen [EPP–district] partnerships,” which are further reinforced through UTRGV’s annual Data Summit, held at the beginning of each academic year.¹⁵⁸ UTRGV invites different interest holders, including district staff, faculty from other colleges in the university, and faculty from various departments in the college to “present, share, and analyze data” relevant to teacher candidates’ experiences and outcomes. During the daylong program, participants review data relevant to a central institutional goal and engage in continuous improvement discussions. One faculty leader said:

From the very beginning of our institution ... everybody was asking for data, data, data. Now we have so much data, and it’s at our fingertips. ... So the Data Summits really set the tone every academic year for helping us to think about all of us being data users.

Table 10. Key Metrics Included in UTRGV Data Dashboards

Categories	Metrics
Enrollment	• Teacher candidate progression • Enrollment summary, college and EPP
Candidate performance	• Program gateways and performance assessments (e.g., the key assessments described earlier in this section) • Refinement and reinforcement • Student perception survey filled out by students in candidates' classrooms • Coursework • Dispositions • Mentor evaluations • Fieldwork placements • Key assessments
Program information	• Survey data on candidates' program satisfaction during program • Survey data on candidates' program satisfaction post-program
Post-completion	• Program completers • Certification • PreK–12 student performance • Employment
University–school partnership	• Completer employment • Completer 1- and 5-year retention • District profile • PreK–12 student info • Survey and interview data on mentor teachers' assessment of the program • Partnership surveys • PreK–12 student performance

Sources: University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P–16 Integration. (2019). [Fall 2019 Data Summit](#); University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education and P–16 Integration. (2022). [Fall 2022 Data Summit](#).

Educator Preparation Program Advisory Committee

Another partnership structure is the EPP Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from 15 districts across the region and facilitated by a professor. This meeting has been held once per semester since 2015, with established feedback loops and a history of actions taken by the college based on committee recommendations. The typical agenda is centered on a specific topic, presented alongside aggregate data. As the dean described:

We do a little bit of updating and those kinds of things, but then we devote a good hour, or hour and a half, for real conversations, table discussions, or large group discussions in which we present them with [questions]. And we just let them talk and record, on chart paper, all of their feedback for us.

The advisory committee functions to guide the direction of the college's strategic planning, helping the college prepare educators in alignment with regional needs.

District Governance Meetings

UTRGV holds regular governance meetings with administrators from each of the seven local districts hosting residents, adding another formalized space for discussing data-driven continuous improvement specific to the teacher residency. For example, during the first year of the paid residency pathway, district administrators noted during governance meetings that they wanted to hire their teacher residents, but they were not certified in time to be hired for the upcoming year. In response, UTRGV revisited its testing expectations and support for teacher candidates, outlining the exams candidates would need to take, offering study support sessions, and monitoring whether candidates are taking their exams on time. UTRGV faculty now have regular touchpoints with candidates on testing progress, as well as data on candidates' progress to communicate to districts during governance meetings.

Continuous Monitoring of Statewide Initiatives

UTRGV's continuous improvement practices are also guided by involvement in and monitoring of statewide initiatives. As one faculty member described, "One of the things that makes us successful ... is always having looked to the future, [at] what's going to happen." For example, Texas changed its science standards for the 2024–25 school year to align with Next Generation Science Standards, which focus on phenomenon-based learning not previously covered in UTRGV program coursework. In preparation for the changes, faculty integrated the new concepts into its coursework in 2023–24 and offered free workshops on the new standards and phenomenon-based learning. The college wanted current candidates to understand the content so they would be prepared for the change to occur when they were the teachers of record. Similarly, in preparation for the state's potential adoption of a teacher portfolio assessment, UTRGV piloted the optional edTPA performance assessment in 2021–22, developing local performance assessments, aligned rubrics, and a submission platform for candidates and their coaches.¹⁵⁹

Student Feedback Opportunities

Students, too, play a role in offering insight and feedback to faculty that may impact programmatic changes. Teacher candidates note that they feel comfortable reaching out to professors, directors, and even the dean about challenges or areas for improvement. One teacher candidate said:

The dean of education really tries to connect with her students. I think that's amazing because she can actually hear us. ... That helps a lot, that we are able to talk to her [at] events that she made for education students to give feedback to her. And she actually helped us. Like if we have a problem, [we can say], "Hey, this is happening and we are not feeling like this is helping us," and she actually [will] work it out.

Faculty instructors also engage with student feedback regularly. In addition to standard course evaluations, faculty members described organizing student focus groups to understand exam challenges and developing user experience surveys for online learning modules. Throughout, a pattern of varied feedback opportunities followed by adjustment in coursework was evident. One faculty member remarked, "I need to value the voices of my students."

Summary of UTRGV's STEP UP and Teacher Residency Programs

The UTRGV educator preparation program, with its two yearlong clinical pathways, provides an example of high-quality EPP implementation. This is the result of a relatively new and still ongoing redesign effort that has strengthened preclinical coursework, leveraged district partnerships, and enhanced program effectiveness in serving Texas and the Rio Grande Valley region.

This case study highlighted four key program features of the STEP UP and residency pathways at UTRGV. (1) UTRGV's EPP has redesigned preclinical coursework and integrated practice-based learning experiences that prepare teacher candidates for clinical teaching in local districts. (2) A lengthened and strengthened clinical teaching experience thoroughly prepares candidates for their first year as a teacher of record. (3) Flexible and varied candidate support structures—including program-specific advising, tailored exam preparation options, and candidate monitoring—sustain teacher candidates to and through certification. (4) Intentional, ongoing collaborative structures promote data-driven continuous improvement and innovation to meet candidate and district needs. In addition to these key program features, notable practices that help support UTRGV's strong program design and implementation include UTRGV's incorporation of pedagogies designed to serve all students; the Learning to Teach Lab, which offers resources and opportunities for candidates to regularly engage in practice-based learning experiences; and UTRGV's responsiveness to regional educational needs when making programmatic decisions.

Common Features and Considerations for Promising Preparation Programs

The three case studies highlighted in this report provide examples of high-quality educator preparation programs with reputations for preparing educators to be “day-one ready” when they become teachers of record. Indeed, findings across case studies illustrate the influence that these programs have on candidate preparation and quality. This section begins with descriptions and examples of program completer preparedness and quality across the three featured educator preparation programs (EPPs), followed by an analysis of common program features that foster this level of quality. The section concludes with a set of considerations for practice and policy.

Program Completer Preparedness and Quality

Alumni from all three EPPs reported feeling very well prepared for the day-to-day realities of teaching, which they attributed to the wealth of experience and practice they gained during their yearlong clinical experiences and the opportunities they had to build sustained relationships in their placement classrooms and schools. One resident summarized:

Now I know how to teach the student. I know how to assess the student. I know how to [identify] a student weakness and improve it. I know how to improve my instruction. I know how to set the classroom management. I know how to build a relationship with the student.

Recent graduates from all three programs consistently characterized their teacher preparation experiences as rigorous and challenging but explained that this investment was highly worthwhile in increasing preparedness and reducing stress when it came time to take on a teacher of record role.

District administrators, school leaders, and mentor teachers recognized the value that these EPP candidates brought to their schools. Mentor teachers reported learning new ideas, concepts, and pedagogical strategies from program candidates during their preclinical field experiences and clinical placements. As one mentor teacher explained, candidates “come with things to offer,” including new ideas for introducing material, small-group reteaching, or enrichment, layered on top of a strong pedagogical foundation. School leaders attested that graduates from the featured pathways at the University of Houston (UH), the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), and the University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) entered their classrooms with advanced knowledge and experience. “You wouldn’t think they’re a first-year teacher” was a common refrain. As one principal explained, residents are ideal candidates because they have a deep understanding of the school community, the expectations of the school administration, and the instructional resources. District staff also acknowledged the positive impact residency alumni have on their students. Echoing school and district staff working with all three EPPs, a principal who had recently hired residents explained:

I have these two [teachers] that just came out of the residency program, and they’re at a totally different level than brand-new teachers. ... They’re so prepared. I have never met teachers [who are] brand new [who are] this prepared for the classroom. ... And right now they’re two of my best teachers.

School and district administrators also reported seeing differences between residency alumni and teachers trained through other pathways, particularly in teacher evaluation scores and student classroom performance. A principal specifically described residents' preparedness for the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS, the statewide evaluation rubric) as a proxy for their preparedness:

They already know the expectations. They know what is expected out of the rubrics. They know all the domains, so they're already ready and know what to expect. So I love that they just come in and they're ready to teach.

In Socorro Independent School District—one of UTEP's longest-standing district residency partnerships—administrators have begun to systematically compare T-TESS data for residency alumni with other teachers with the same number of years as a teacher of record. Administrators reported that UTEP residency alumni outperform their peers on all areas of the state's teacher evaluation instrument in both the first and second years in their own classroom. While systematic student outcomes analyses have not yet been conducted, administrators frequently cited promising student performance in the classrooms of both residents and residency alumni compared to their peers prepared in other programs. As one administrator noted, "The numbers speak for themselves when it comes to student performance" in the residents' classrooms.

Another cited outcome of the residency programs was the trust fostered through the EPP–district relationship in the residency program and its importance for ensuring residency-trained teachers understand the local context. One principal noted:

I just feel that they were trained by quality teachers. They were trained in a quality school. And they know our demographics, they know our community, they know how we operate. You know, if I was to hire somebody tomorrow, if I was to get a vacancy, and [if] I would hire somebody that wasn't part of [this] program, I would think that they would have a very different experience.

Indeed, because each EPP is a key supplier of teachers who go on to teach in the surrounding districts, the EPPs are able to make the case that moving the needle on high-quality teacher preparation pays communitywide dividends down the line. In fact, a 2024 study found that students of Texas teachers who were prepared through a residency program gained between 2.5 and 3 more months of learning in math and reading, respectively, than students of the average new teacher in the state.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, the candidates that the EPPs prepare today become tomorrow's mentor teachers and administrators across the region, strengthening local career ladders for educators.

Each of the three case study EPPs is also making significant headway in diversifying its local teaching workforce. The large majority of newly certified teachers out of each EPP identify as people of color: In 2022–23, 74.5% of newly certified teachers from UH, 90.3% of newly certified teachers from UTEP, and 91.8% of newly certified teachers from UTRGV identified as Hispanic/Latino, Black, or another non-White race/ethnicity.¹⁶¹ All three case study sites, thus, are preparing teachers of color in proportions that far exceed the share of teachers of color statewide in Texas (45% in 2022–23) and that reflect PreK–12 student demographics in the surrounding districts.¹⁶²

Additionally, high proportions of students at the case study universities are from low-income backgrounds and/or are first-generation college students. In recent years, the Pell grant recipient rate—a proxy for low family income—was approximately 40% at UH, 48% at UTRGV, and 70% at UTEP; recent first-generation college-going rates among undergraduates were 44% at UH, 50% at UTEP, and 71% at UTRGV.¹⁶³ These rates underscore the importance of providing high-quality, stipended preparation pathways for candidates who would otherwise not be able to afford them.

While there are meaningful differences across the programs in terms of their size, history, contexts, and other factors, more notable are the programmatic similarities the featured programs share that enable them to produce such well-prepared candidates who are greatly valued and desired by school leaders. These similarities provide insights for the redesign and strengthening of other EPP offerings in Texas and across the United States. While each of the highlighted programs features residencies as a model for candidates' clinical experiences, many of the insights gleaned from the three programs are applicable to other preparation models as well.

Common Educator Preparation Program Features That Foster High Program Quality

All three programs are the result of comprehensive redesign efforts that have strengthened candidate learning opportunities and enhanced EPP–district partnerships. With deliberate attention to the educational priorities and needs of their local district and community contexts, and a commitment to preparing day-one ready teachers, each program has focused on a practice-based program design; relevant coursework; aligned and expanded clinical experiences; supportive partnership governance structures; and the creation of specific roles to coordinate, manage, and monitor program implementation and effectiveness.

Specifically, the programs:

- **Provide high-quality learning opportunities**, including practice-based, well-sequenced coursework tied to a yearlong, well-supported clinical practicum that uses co-teaching structures.
- **Establish the infrastructure to deliver and maintain high-quality preparation**, including appropriate staffing and partnerships.
- **Support candidates to successfully complete the programs and attain certification** through paid residencies and assistance with planning, coursework, and testing.

While these individual components are important to each program's success, so is the strategic and thoughtful way each program weaves them together. The three programs take an intentional approach to ensure that each of these components is part of a coherent system, developed in partnership with Texas-based US PREP (which provides technical assistance to help EPPs put teacher residency programs into practice) and local PreK–12 districts and underscored by a culture of continuous improvement. We turn next to a discussion of these common features, which provide lessons about how educator preparation programs in Texas and other states can strengthen educator preparation and cultivate a high-quality, diverse, and stable teacher workforce.

High-Quality Learning Opportunities

UH, UTEP, and UTRGV each underwent a program transformation to strengthen their teacher preparation pathways, revamping and more tightly coupling coursework and clinical experiences.

Practice-Based, Well-Scaffolded Coursework

Coursework redesign has played a key role in program transformation at each featured EPP; namely, the incorporation of a practice-based approach across preclinical and clinical coursework. For UH and UTEP, the shift toward a full-year residency model prompted reexamination of how the content and assignments embedded in preclinical coursework could better prepare candidates for co-teaching during their clinical experience. For UTRGV, the shift to a practice-based model stemmed from a broader program transformation effort that included practice-based coursework as one of four key transformation strands.

All three EPPs conceptualize a practice-based approach as providing opportunities throughout the preparation program for candidates to apply their knowledge in preparation for the realities of the classroom. UH and UTRGV faculty describe certain practice-based learning opportunities as “no-harm opportunities,” where candidates initially practice their skills on peers or with instructors, rather than on children; the mixed-reality simulations in UTRGV’s Learning to Teach Lab exemplify this idea. “Practice-based” also refers to opportunities for candidates to practice their skills in classroom settings with children, but with scaffolding and support from an experienced teacher or clinical instructor. Each of the three EPPs invested considerable time and effort into their shift to a practice-based approach to teacher education, as demonstrated by their intentional approaches to integrating practice-based opportunities across candidates’ preparation pathways and by extensive faculty training and engagement.

Integrating a practice-based approach led the EPPs to modify coursework content and assignments, assessments, and field-based experiences. Content-wise, the practice-based approach shifted courses from a focus on theory to teaching theory *connected* to core teaching practices. Through this shift, candidates, upon learning content, have immediate opportunities to practice pedagogical skills through course assignments. Assignments, which formerly assessed what candidates *know*, now assess what candidates can *do*. For example, at UTRGV, practice-based opportunities coalesce across course content, assignments, and field experiences in their three “key assessments,” which are completed by every teacher candidate regardless of certification area. During the key assessments, candidates apply skills learned in their coursework during their preclinical field experiences, such as understanding school and community contexts, designing lesson plans, and analyzing student data.

Candidates, upon learning content, have immediate opportunities to practice pedagogical skills through course assignments. Assignments, which formerly assessed what candidates *know*, now assess what candidates can *do*.

During the coursework redesign process, each EPP also intentionally sequenced and scaffolded its coursework during both the preclinical and clinical years. At UTRGV, instructors now introduce concepts and skills progressively throughout the preclinical year, providing practice-based opportunities designed to build on prior concepts and increase in rigor over time. One candidate noted that “each one of the classes

connects with another,” where each course adds another layer of complexity to a skill, whether through applying the skill across different contexts or with different student groups. At UTEP, clinical coursework is directly sequenced and tied to residents’ clinical experience: Coursework at the beginning of the clinical year focuses on classroom culture and management, and as the year progresses, the coursework-related curricula increase in rigor alongside the increase in candidates’ instructional responsibilities, prompting more higher-order thinking and self-reflection for candidates.

Intensive and Supported Yearlong Clinical Experiences

UH, UTEP, and UTRGV have all implemented yearlong clinical experiences under the oversight and guidance of mentor teachers who are selected for their expertise and receive training specific to the mentor teacher role. At UH, all candidates participate in a yearlong teacher residency. UTEP requires all candidates whose majors are within the College of Education to participate in its Miner Teacher Residency. And UTRGV offers both its recently established teacher residency and its longer-standing STEP UP program, in which candidates spend 1 full day a week co-teaching during the first semester and then 5 days a week in their second semester.

In all three EPPs, the decision to offer a yearlong clinical experience was prompted by a desire to provide rigorous, high-quality learning opportunities that would prepare their candidates for the realities of the classroom as a teacher of record. With the expansion of traditional one-semester student teaching into a full year of clinical experience, teacher candidates participate in the full scope of a school year, from the first day of school through the last. In addition to their time in the classroom, candidates participate in teacher planning days, faculty meetings, parent conferences, and other aspects often excluded from one-semester student teaching placements. Recent graduates from the UH residency noted that, because of their intensive clinical experience, “There’s no fear when stepping into the classroom for the first time” and that the residency is “worth every single minute,” while a Houston district administrator stated that UH graduates are “well prepared to take on the challenges of being in the real world of a classroom.”

Throughout the yearlong clinical experience, teacher candidates from all three EPPs gain crucial opportunities to practice their craft alongside experienced mentor teachers. Candidates are considered co-teachers who are expected to take on responsibilities from day one of their clinical placement. EPPs provide structures for learning, delineating general timelines for candidates’ progression of responsibilities and co-teaching practices throughout the school year. Guided by their work with US PREP, all three EPPs have shaped candidates’ progression in their residencies to be both structured and flexible. Site coordinators provide residents and mentor teachers general expectations for planning, teaching, co-teaching, observation, and feedback focus areas, but mentor teachers have discretion in adjusting candidate responsibilities based on candidate and student needs. Over the course of the first semester, residents gradually assume classroom management and instructional responsibilities, building up to their second semester, where they typically engage in all teaching responsibilities alongside their mentor teacher. For UTRGV’s STEP UP pathway, candidates progress from co-planning during their first semester to co-teaching 5 days a week during their second semester.

Throughout the yearlong clinical experience, mentor teachers play a series of key roles. They are highly involved in co-teaching, monitoring candidates’ progression of responsibilities in the classroom, and providing feedback and coaching. Mentor teachers work in partnership with site coordinators, sharing

the responsibility of supporting candidate learning and needs throughout the clinical year. To help mentor teachers manage all of these responsibilities, EPP site coordinators provide them with direct training on co-planning and co-teaching strategies, using assessment rubrics for candidate observation and feedback, reviewing candidate data, and facilitating a gradual release of responsibility. Additionally, mentor teachers participate in professional learning communities through regular meetings with site coordinators and other mentor teachers. In addition to EPP-directed training, some districts provide additional training for their mentor teachers.

Essential Infrastructure

All three programs have developed administrative roles; strengthened PreK–12 district and broader community partnerships; and formalized reflective practices to successfully plan, implement, and improve their preparation programs.

Key Clinical and Administrative Faculty

With the adoption of the US PREP residency model, UH, UTEP, and UTRGV introduced a key clinical and administrative role in their residencies: the site coordinator. For residents, site coordinators fulfill the clinical instruction responsibilities of traditional university field supervisors, including supervising, coaching, and conducting observations for residents during their clinical experience. However, the site coordinator responsibilities expand beyond these typical roles. Site coordinators also teach resident practicum seminars and courses on teaching methods; regularly collaborate with EPP directors and faculty; train and collaborate with mentor teachers; and facilitate quarterly governance meetings at each partner district, jointly attended by EPP and district staff. In addition, site coordinators, teacher candidates, and program alumni note that site coordinators play a crucial role in supporting residents mentally and emotionally during their challenging clinical experience year.

While all three EPPs have site coordinators, the structure and funding for this role varies across the institutions. UTEP considers site coordinators as full-time faculty, with some funded directly from the university's budget, whereas UH site coordinators may be in full-time or part-time positions funded by the braiding of a variety of sources. At UTRGV, site coordinators are assistant professors of practice (a non-tenure-track position) and, in addition to their site coordinator responsibilities, also teach other methods courses. Program directors note that, regardless of job structure or funding mechanism, site coordinators play a crucial role in implementing quality residency pathways.

By distributing responsibilities across various aspects of residents' clinical experiences—whether through teaching a course, providing observation and feedback, building relationships with district and campus staff, or training mentor teachers—site coordinators create alignment and coherence across resident learning opportunities. With information on residents' progression from principals, mentor teachers, EPP faculty, their own observations, and candidates themselves, site coordinators have leeway to adjust their student teaching seminar courses, mentor teacher training topics, feedback focus, and governance meeting agendas to address residents' unique needs throughout the clinical experience.

PreK–12 Partnerships and Shared Governance

All programs engage in robust district partnerships, supported by formalized shared governance structures, to promote collective decision-making and responsibility for teacher preparation.

The development of residency pathways under the US PREP model required each program to establish formalized, frequent governance meetings that typically include preparation program directors, site coordinators, district administrators, and principals at PreK–12 campuses that are hosting residents. Each EPP–district residency partnership holds at least two shared governance meetings per semester, facilitated by site coordinators.

Governance meetings serve multiple purposes. They support alignment across institutions regarding the structures and goals of the partnership. They also provide a space for cross-institutional data sharing. Meeting participants share and discuss data from candidate performance metrics, classroom visits, and, in UTEP’s case, resident input panels, to coordinate additional supports or instruction needed for candidates and mentor teachers. Site coordinators, as the established EPP–district liaisons, can then coordinate with EPP faculty to adjust coursework or program administration as needed. According to EPP faculty and district administrators, the shared governance meetings help bridge the typical boundaries across universities and PreK–12 institutions, resulting in a proactive and highly responsive partnership model that continuously strives to meet both EPP and district needs.

The shared governance model also redefines the EPP–district relationship apparent in a traditional EPP model, redistributing ownership and responsibility. Collaborative structures and the strong communication lines they create enable both EPPs and partner districts to de-silo the traditional boundaries between higher education and PreK–12 education. By increasing district involvement in sharing data and decision-making, partner districts are better able to see what they stand to gain from the residency model, increasing their buy-in to the residency.

Community Embeddedness

Each EPP is thoroughly embedded in its local community and tailors its efforts to the needs of its region’s teacher labor market. This locally contextualized engagement creates a shared sense that the work the EPP is doing is important for communitywide success and is embedded in community values.

Each EPP has also gone beyond the core EPP–district partnership structure to create additional partnerships that build support and infrastructure for its program. For example, UTEP formed and co-led the El Paso Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice, grounding the EPP within the local community. The community of practice has created a shared understanding of the realities of the local teacher labor market and the self-sustaining, closed-loop nature of the Paso del Norte region. Similarly, UTRGV frequently incorporates feedback from its EPP Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from districts across the region, into its program design. UTRGV also holds an annual Data Summit with local district staff and faculty from other colleges in the university to share and analyze data on teacher candidate experiences and outcomes and incorporate feedback into programmatic decisions. UH also holds large regional convenings with district partners, in its case twice per year, to discuss the local teacher labor market, analyze data, and align district and EPP needs and practices.

Reflective and Regular Improvement Practices

In all three EPPs, program improvement is considered a continuous process, with faculty consistently engaging in reflective and collaborative processes to improve the integration of practice-based opportunities across programs and to strengthen the clinical experience. Redesign processes have

included extensive cross-departmental faculty collaboration through faculty focus groups and dedicated faculty committees to map out practice-based learning objectives, calibrate courses, and sequence course progression.

Even after the official redesign and incorporation of a practice-based approach, program faculty continue to invest time in shared reflection on and iteration of coursework, revisiting course content and assignments to improve learning opportunities for candidates. At UTEP, for example, instructional faculty collaborate with EPP leadership, district staff, and teacher candidates to engage in data sharing and performance review to identify opportunities for course improvement.

Candidate Supports

All three programs serve diverse candidate populations representing a range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other backgrounds. Many candidates, too, are the first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution. To help all candidates successfully complete their degrees and attain certification, the programs invest in paid residencies and provide other supports.

Paid Residencies

For all programs, the expansion from traditional, one-semester student teaching to a yearlong clinical experience elevated the need to address long-standing financial barriers that teacher candidates face. While a yearlong clinical experience offers substantial benefits for candidates' learning opportunities and readiness to enter the classroom as teachers of record, unpaid clinical experiences create significant financial and logistical challenges for those candidates balancing clinical coursework, full-time teaching, responsibilities in their home, and, in many cases, additional employment.

Consequently, UH, UTEP, and UTRGV all leveraged district partnerships to offer paid residencies, with funding streams varying across partnerships. These efforts to fund residencies relied on the strong foundation of partnership and trust built through shared EPP–district governance structures. With a shared vision and understanding of the importance of high-quality teacher preparation, EPPs have been able to garner district buy-in and financial investments into residency pathways, coupled in some cases with limited-term state funding.

With a shared vision and understanding of the importance of high-quality teacher preparation, EPPs have been able to garner district buy-in and financial investments into residency pathways, coupled in some cases with limited-term state funding.

UTRGV and UTEP, which established their residencies with the goal of improving access and affordability, developed funding streams for resident stipends at the same time they established their residency pathways. In establishing its residency program, UTRGV built on its existing district partnerships through STEP UP—its unpaid, yearlong clinical experience—to implement strategic staffing models. In these models, residents work part of each week as official district employees, such as substitutes or paraprofessionals, while completing their clinical experience. This approach frees up district resources to provide resident stipends between \$12,000 and \$18,000, depending on the district; in some

districts residents also receive benefits as full-time employees. UTEP used a variety of funding sources over the course of its paid residencies, beginning with local philanthropic funds that provided stipends of \$11,000 to \$14,000 during its residency pilot year. UTEP then leaned on strategic staffing models with its partnering districts to increase the yearly stipends. During Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) implementation from 2021 to 2024, UTEP's partner districts were able to add those grant monies to the mix, raising yearly stipends to \$20,000. UH, too, was able to draw on TCLAS Decision 5 residency grants, enabling the EPP to shift from an unpaid residency to one that provided stipends of up to \$20,000 per year.

According to EPP staff and faculty, district and school staff, and candidates and program alumni, these paid residencies are a critical support. However, while a promising start, there is still much room for improvement. Even with the promise of up to \$20,000, program costs and other family financial obligations can pose economic barriers for candidates. Further, the sunset of TCLAS residency stipends places the onus directly back on districts to free up residency funds through strategic staffing, other forms of budget reallocation, or grant writing.

Supports for Teacher Candidate Success

In addition to providing financial support through resident stipends, all three programs invested in supports to help candidates persist through their preparation pathway. UTEP and UTRGV provide extensive support for candidates preparing to take the content and pedagogy exams required to become certified as a teacher in Texas. For example, UTEP works with faculty to integrate test preparation into course assignments and hosts monthly boot camps focused on context exam preparation. UTRGV also provides financial support in the form of vouchers for first-time test takers. All three EPPs provide tailored academic advising and support related to helping teacher candidates navigate course sequencing and master course content. At UH and UTEP, where residents must meet certain performance thresholds on classroom observations to move forward in the residency, any resident at risk of not clearing these “performance gates” is identified early and supported thoroughly by their site coordinator and mentor teacher. Similarly, UTRGV's key assessments function as performance gates in teacher candidates' preclinical coursework, with structured support provided to candidates as needed.

Additionally, the featured programs focus on the teacher candidate as a whole person coming from a unique context and with unique needs. While this focus is ultimately intended to support the PreK–12 students whose learning teacher candidates will eventually be responsible for, interviewees described how this focus extends to teacher candidates themselves, helping to foster a sense of belonging.

Considerations for Practice and Policy

The three EPPs highlighted in this report represent different regional contexts, student populations, and program redesign timelines, all of which have shaped their educator preparation pathways. Despite their differences, our study found core commonalities in the EPPs' approaches to teacher preparation that reveal considerations for EPPs, school districts, and state policymakers within and beyond Texas.

The final sections of this report outline key actions that practitioners and policymakers can take related to establishing, improving or transforming, and sustaining educator preparation programs, and enacting policies that can support clinically intensive teacher preparation. We first offer considerations for EPPs and districts related to integrating high-quality candidate learning opportunities, building EPP–district partnership and governance infrastructure, and providing candidate supports. We then provide considerations for states to support the establishment, improvement, and sustainability of these features at scale.

Importantly, at the state level, Texas has already taken notable steps toward codifying and incentivizing features of high-quality teacher preparation pathways, outlined in an earlier section of this report (see [A Complex and Evolving State Policy Context](#)). The state’s Effective Preparation Framework offers guidance to educator preparation programs on key levers that support high-quality program design and implementation, including integrating practice-based learning opportunities, candidate co-teaching progression, regular coaching and feedback structures, extended clinical teaching, and collaborative governance structures between EPPs and districts.¹⁶⁴ Many of these features have been codified into recent changes to state EPP regulations, such as practice-based opportunities in preclinical coursework, co-teaching practices, and the establishment of an Enhanced Standard Certificate for residency completers.¹⁶⁵ Further, following the sunset of TCLAS residency funds, the Texas Education Agency has offered residency continuation grants to sustain paid residencies in select school districts.¹⁶⁶

Considerations for EPP and District Administrators

Findings from the three case studies illuminate key actions that EPPs and districts can take to improve candidate learning opportunities, ensure robust EPP–district governance and partnerships, and support candidates to and through certification. Although the studied EPPs are situated in Texas and are responsive to the state’s unique policy context, the following considerations remain broadly applicable to EPP and district efforts to improve teacher preparation, regardless of location or specific preparation program pathways.

Support the transformation of learning opportunities.

- Create the time, financial and technical assistance resources, and incentives for EPP faculty to engage in course redesign and alignment that integrates practice-based learning experiences.
- Develop a structured framework for progression of candidate responsibilities, paired with field supervisor and mentor teacher training on coaching and feedback, to create a scaffolded and tailored clinical experience.
- Engage with technical assistance providers who are experienced in practice-based course redesign to support coursework transformation.
- Offer additional compensation and adjust job responsibilities for mentor teachers, thereby setting them up for success in the mentor teacher role while creating career ladders for experienced and effective teachers.

Support the development of infrastructure and partnerships.

- Delineate and fund roles for site coordinators or similar personnel who have both coaching and instructional expertise.
- Identify opportunities and sources to recruit site coordinators or similar personnel, such as educators nearing retirement, senior teachers, and instructional leaders.
- Ensure sufficient staffing to maintain a low ratio of teacher candidates to site coordinators, enabling site coordinators to provide frequent, meaningful feedback to each teacher candidate they oversee.
- Establish regular shared governance meetings that address program implementation, program quality, and the needs of candidates.
- Regularly share data and make EPP–district decisions jointly to meet the needs of candidates and the regional education system.

Support the teacher candidate experience.

- Adopt “strategic staffing” models, which redirect district funds to subsidize residency stipends by having residents take on part-time instructional support responsibilities. In implementing strategic staffing, maintain the rigor of the clinical experience by providing residents with scaffolded support in their strategic staffing roles and ensuring residents spend the large majority of their time working alongside their mentor teacher.
- Secure federal, state, and philanthropic dollars to fund paid residencies.
- Assign individual faculty advisors or site coordinators to monitor candidate progress and provide early interventions.
- Provide tutoring and testing preparation, either integrated into coursework or separately.
- Cover the costs of certification exams.

Considerations for State Policymakers

Building on the policy considerations offered for EPPs and districts, findings from this report also highlight key actions that states can take to support the establishment, continuous improvement, and sustainability of high-quality teacher preparation programs at scale. In Texas, these considerations offer actions for the state to continue building upon its investments into high-quality educator preparation. The following considerations are also broadly applicable to other states interested in supporting or scaling high-quality teacher preparation.

Support the transformation of learning opportunities.

- Provide guidance on and examples of integrating practice-based approaches into coursework, as Texas has started to do through its Effective Preparation Framework.
- Require or incentivize candidates to complete a full year of stipended clinical experience to earn a teaching credential.

- Fund EPPs and their district partners to develop and help sustain yearlong clinical experiences, including funding for mentor teacher compensation.
- Provide technical assistance or fund technical assistance providers to support EPPs in transforming learning opportunities.

Support the development of infrastructure and partnerships.

- Provide guidance and examples of high-functioning shared governance structures.
- Require robust partnerships between EPPs and PreK–12 districts as part of program approval processes.
- Provide technical assistance or fund technical assistance providers to support EPPs in developing partnerships with PreK–12 partners that include frequent data sharing and joint decision-making.

Support the teacher candidate experience.

- Provide guidance on blending and braiding available funds to support paid residencies.
- Provide state funding for paid residencies, especially those that incentivize teaching in high-need areas and certification fields experiencing teacher shortages.
- Reduce or eliminate testing fees.

Conclusion

High-quality educator preparation programs with clinically intensive teacher training pathways have the potential to alleviate teacher shortages and improve educational outcomes for students. The EPPs in this report offer valuable lessons for programs, districts, and states about creating and sustaining programs that prepare day-one ready teachers. The programs share important similarities in terms of learning opportunities, infrastructure and partnerships, and candidate supports, but they are not identical. Instead, they are tailored to their particular student bodies and the needs of their local regions. These local adaptations enable both EPPs and their PreK–12 partners to engage more deeply with teacher preparation and to address local priorities. As a result, the programs are preparing effective teachers who help meet the local teacher labor market demands in their regions and deeply understand the needs of the families and students in the communities they serve.

Appendix: Figures and Tables

Figure A1. University of Houston Progression of Student Teaching Responsibilities

Progression of Student Teaching Responsibilities

University of Houston has adopted a co-teaching model for field experiences. Teacher Candidates are required to be actively engaged in as many of the elements of the classroom as is possible from the very beginning. Teacher Candidates should assume greater responsibilities throughout their student teaching.

Before the beginning of classes in the school year, Site Coordinators will meet with Mentor Teachers to review the University of Houston program, expectations for the Mentor Teachers, procedures for contacting the Site Coordinator, role of the Site Coordinator, and expectations for Teacher Candidates regarding assignments and co-teaching.

Student Teaching 1

	Resident Responsibilities*	Mentor Teacher Responsibilities**	Feedback Focus Areas from MT or SC
Weeks 1-3	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident Minimum Teaching Expectations: - Assume partial responsibility for leading classroom routines (e.g., attendance, bell work, dismissal) - Teach the first few minutes of class once a week - threshold, do now, opening/ framing the lesson. - Co-plan and lead small group activities Co-Teaching Expectation: - One teach one observe - One teach one assist - Alternative teaching Observation Expectation: Observe school transitions. Daily observation of MT with a focus on large and small group instruction, positive classroom culture (set, reinforce, clear directions, positive narration, awareness, responding consistently, strong voice) Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.	- Complete MT Orientation - Complete MT Orientation and Questionnaire Forms in Tk20 - Host introductory meeting with Resident - Weekly check-ins with R - Schedule daily observations of yourself and other teachers for the resident - Observe and provide feedback [continues every month]	Support R in working on: - Setting and Reinforce expectations - Clear directions - Scan and awareness - Respond consistently - Strong voice - Lesson preparation and facilitation - Framing the learning: sharing objective(s) Agenda - Do now or opening activity - Coaching Techniques: - Whisper Coaching - Side by Side Coaching - Model Coaching
Weeks 4-6	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar; Script out targeted parts of lesson plans. Minimum Teaching Expectations:	- Attend MT Training , if applicable - Complete MT Progress Report Form In Tk20 - Schedule teaching opportunities for Resident	Support R in working on: - Classroom management and culture - Clear procedures - Lesson preparation and facilitation:

	- Assume partial responsibility for leading classroom routines (e.g., attendance, bell work, dismissal) - Co-plan and lead small group activities - Start to Co-plan and lead in one subject area or class period - Teach the opening of a lesson 2-3 times a week. - End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity 2-3 times a week. - Co-plan and lead small group activities	- Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities - Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) - Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	- standards and objective(s) - Teaching lesson - Leading small groups
	Co-Teaching Expectation: - One teach one observe - One teach one assist - Alternative teaching		
	Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT in the first few minutes of class to identify how they set the tone in terms of academics and classroom culture. Continue to observe MT for positive classroom culture. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.		
Weeks 7-10	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Script out targeted parts of lesson plans. Minimum Teaching Expectations: - Co-plan and lead in one subject areas or class periods - Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; - Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. - End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. - Co-plan and lead small group activities - Continue responsibility for previous month(s).	- Attend MT Training , if applicable - Complete MT Progress Report Form In Tk20 - Review Reinforcement and Refinement areas from POP, WT, MT Progress Reports, and CV. - Schedule teaching opportunities for Resident - Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities - Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) - Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	Support R in working on: - Framing the learning: Objectives, CFS, Agenda - Hooks - Engagement Techniques: IE: Cooperative learning; Wait time, cold call, turn and talk, everybody writes, call and response - Lesson preparation and facilitation. - Teaching lesson - Differentiation - Exemplar creation and criteria for success
	Co-Teaching Expectation: - Above as well as - Station teaching - Parallel teaching - Team teaching		
	Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.		

Weeks 10-13	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Teaching Expectations: • Begin to co-plan and lead in two subject areas ◦ Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; ◦ Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. ◦ End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. • Co-plan and lead small group activities • Provide opportunities to engage students and support monitoring during independent practice, continue to help lead transitions and practice strong classroom culture. • Continue responsibility for previous month(s). Co-Teaching Expectation • Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.	• Attend MT Training , if applicable • Complete MT Progress Report Form In Tk20 • Review Reinforcement and Refinement areas from POP, WT, MT Progress Reports, and CV. • Work with Resident to identify misconceptions in upcoming lessons • Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities • Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) • Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	Support R in working on: • Framing the learning: Objectives, CFS, Agenda • Introduction to New Material: appropriate instructional delivery methods, clarity, key points, anticipating misconceptions • Alignment of instruction
Weeks 14-15	Planning Expectations: Continued from previous month. Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Teaching Expectations: • Co-plan and lead in two subject areas or class periods ◦ Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; ◦ Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. ◦ End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. • Co-plan and lead small group activities • Continue gradual on-ramp responsibility for previous month(s). Co-Teaching Expectation • Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.	• Complete TK20 Final Verification Form • Review Reinforcement and Refinement areas from POP, WT, MT Progress Reports, and CV; Set goals for the ST 2. • Work with Resident to identify misconceptions in upcoming lessons • Co-plan or co-review an introduction to new material to support instructional planning. • Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) • Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	Support the Resident in: • Introduction of New Material: using a variety of explanatory devices, clarity, key points, anticipating confusion • Instructional delivery alignment • Use organizational system to manage workflow

Student Teaching 2

	Resident Responsibilities*	Resident Advisor Responsibilities**	Feedback Focus Areas
Weeks 1-3	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Teaching Expectations: - Co-plan and lead in two subject areas or class periods; Begin to co-plan and lead in three subject areas. - Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; - Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. - End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. - Co-plan and lead small group activities Co-Teaching Expectation - Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.	- Complete MT Orientation - Complete MT Orientation and Questionnaire Forms in Tk20 - Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities - Review ST 2 goals from ST 1 - Look at student work together from daily assessments to determine level of mastery and next steps - Involve resident in data-driven instruction analysis of assessment data - Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) - Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	Support the Resident in: - Implementation of CFUs : Ask, ask, ask, gestures/polling and whiteboards; HOT questioning - Adjusting instruction real-time based off of CFUs- re-teach do overs, pinpoint, or check-in - Monitoring and adjustment during student practice
Weeks 4-6	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Teaching Expectations: - Co-plan and lead in three subject areas or class periods - Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week;	- Attend MT Training , if applicable - Complete MT Progress Report Form In Tk20 - Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities - Look at student work together from daily assessments to determine	Support the Resident in: - Implementation of CFUs : Ask, ask, ask, gestures/polling and whiteboards; HOT questioning - Adjusting instruction real-time based off of CFUs- re-teach do overs, pinpoint, or check-in

	○ Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. ○ End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. ● Co-plan and lead small group activities Co-Teaching Expectation ● Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.	level of mastery and next steps ● Involve resident in data-driven instruction analysis of assessment data ● Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) ● Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	● Monitoring and adjustment during student practice
Weeks 7-10	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Teaching Expectations: ● Co-plan and lead in three subject areas or class periods ○ Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; ○ Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. ○ End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. ● Co-plan and lead small group activities Co-Teaching Expectation ● Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.	● Attend MT Training , if applicable ● Complete MT Progress Report Form In Tk20 ● Review Reinforcement and Refinement areas from POP, WT, MT Progress Reports, and CV; ● Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities ● Look at student work together from daily assessments to determine level of mastery and next steps ● Involve resident in data-driven instruction analysis of assessment data ● Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) ● Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	Support the Resident in: ● Implementation of CFUs : Ask, ask, ask, gestures/polling and whiteboards; HOT questioning ● Adjusting instruction real-time based off of CFUs- re-teach do overs, pinpoint, or check-in ● Monitoring and adjustment during student practice
Weeks 11-13	Planning Expectations: Review, plan, and prepare from lesson plans provided to Resident; review and revise objectives and standards for lesson plans; plan and prepare lessons. lesson assessment and exemplar. Teaching Expectations: ● Co-plan and lead all subject areas or class periods ○ Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; ○ Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week.	● Attend MT Training , if applicable ● Complete MT Progress Report Form In Tk20 ● Allow for increase in teaching/ co-teaching responsibilities ● Look at student work together from daily assessments to determine level of mastery and next steps ● Involve resident in data-driven instruction	● Focus areas based on Residents' strengths/areas of growth especially in content and rigor

	○ End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. ● Co-plan and lead small group activities	● Observe and provide feedback to Resident (continues every month) ● Weekly check-ins (continues every month)	
	Co-Teaching Expectation ● Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting		
	Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.		
Weeks 14-15	Planning Expectations: Adjust and internalize all plans, reflect on student progress towards end of year goals Teaching Expectations: ● Co-plan and lead all subject areas or class periods ○ Teach the opening of a lesson at least 2-3 times a week; ○ Facilitate the lesson at least 2-3 times per week. ○ End the lesson and transition the class to the next activity at least 2-3 times a week. ● Co-plan and lead small group activities	● Complete TK20 Final Verification Form ● Work with Resident to identify misconceptions in upcoming lessons ● Co-plan or co-review an introduction to new material to support instructional planning. ● Observe and provide feedback to Resident ● Weekly check-ins	● Focus areas based on Residents' strengths/areas of growth
	Co-Teaching Expectation ● Any co-teaching strategy appropriate for the subject area or classroom setting		
	Observation Expectations: Daily observation of MT. Continue to observe the MT as he/she interacts with the class. Attend and observe department and grade level planning meetings.		

Source: University of Houston. (2023). *Progression of student teaching responsibilities* [Internal document].

Table A1. University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley: Roadmap to Graduation for EC-6 Bilingual Certification

Semester	Coursework	Field-based experience	Key assessment
All pathways			
Before entering EPP	6 hours of preadmission education introductory courses	–	–
Semester 1 in EPP	15 hours of major coursework	–	Community Case Study
Semester 2	15 hours of major coursework	24 hours of structured field-based experience (6–8 weeks)	Mini Unit and Lesson Plan
STEP UP option			
Semester 3	12 hours of major coursework	First 5 days + 1 day a week in clinical placement (120 hours)	Data Literacy and Reflection
Semester 4	6 hours of major coursework (clinical only)	5 days a week in clinical placement (15 weeks)	–
Residency option			
Semester 3	12 hours of major coursework (3 are clinical)	3 days a week in clinical placement (18 weeks)	Data Literacy and Reflection
Semester 4	6 hours of major coursework (3 are clinical)	4 days a week in clinical placement (18 weeks)	–

Notes: This table provides an example of the recommended coursework, including field-based hours and timing of key assessments, for one certification area at UTRGV: Early childhood through 6th-grade bilingual education. The coursework listed in the table is in addition to university core requirements.

Sources: University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley. (2023). [Degree plan: Bachelor of Science \(BS\) in education–Bilingual education EC-6th certification](#). (accessed 08/30/2024); University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education. (n.d.). [Field-based experiences: Requirements](#). (accessed 08/30/2024); University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley College of Education. (n.d.). [Three key assessments](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

**Table A2. University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley
Candidate Exam Pass Rates Over Time**

Exam Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities	89%	88%	88%	85%	94%	88%
All Content Pedagogy Exams	76%	84%	90%	88%	89%	90%
Core Subjects EC–6	59%	73%	83%	62%	87%	84%
Science of Teaching Reading	n/a	n/a	n/a	100%	100%	98%
Bilingual Education Supplemental	100%	97%	98%	95%	94%	98%
English as a Second Language Supplemental	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Notes: Rates represent passing rates among all attempts; each program finisher can attempt each exam up to five times. Pass rates for “All Content Pedagogy Exams” cover all subject areas, including the Core Subjects EC–6, Science of Teaching Reading, and Bilingual Education Supplemental exams listed below it. Graduate-level certification (e.g., principal, superintendent, reading specialist, diagnostician) exams were excluded from this data summary. The Science of Teaching Reading exam did not become a requirement for early childhood through 8th-grade teachers of reading until 2021.

Sources: Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). [Certification examination pass rates for content pedagogy tests](#). (accessed 08/30/2024); Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). [Certification examination pass rates for pedagogy tests](#). (accessed 08/30/2024).

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