

# Digital High Five: Virtual Co-Teaching Strategies within Teacher Residency Programs

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## ABSTRACT

As an increasing number of teacher education programs are adopting teacher residency models in preparing future teacher candidates to meet the needs of local partnering school districts, coursework in teacher preparation is likely to include co-taught models of instruction where representatives from both local school districts and university-based teacher preparation programs will be conducted within shared virtual instructional settings. In addition, due to the physical distance that may stem from institutes of higher education (IHE) in comparison to localized school districts, virtual instructional settings are increasing necessary. It is the purpose of this practitioner-based article to provide teacher educators with a step-by-step guide to co-teaching within synchronous (live) classroom settings.

## KEYWORDS

**Co-teaching, teacher education, teacher residency programs, virtual or synchronous instruction**

**Q***in and Juana represent a local teacher residency program, an established partnership between a local school district and teacher preparation program in the field of special education. As a result, Qin and Juana collaborate together and co-teach a fully online (live, synchronous) course preparing current future teacher candidates (i.e., resident candidates) to teach in a high needs area within the partnering local school district. As co-instructors of record, it is their continued goal to incorporate current co-teaching practices into their co-taught courses and to effectively model co-teaching strategies to best prepare the future resident candidates for inclusive, high needs classroom settings. As an increasing number of teacher education programs are adopting teacher residency models (Guha et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2022), it is the purpose of this article to provide practitioners with a step-by-step guide to co-teaching within synchronous classroom settings based on current best-practices in co-teaching applied within virtual teacher education settings.*

## What is a Teacher Residency Program?

A teacher residency program is a partnership between a university-based teacher education program and a local school district in both the recruitment and preparation of future teacher candidates, i.e., “resident” candidates. Residency programs in the field of education are based on the medical model of apprenticeship where the resident works directly with an expert teacher for the duration of an entire school year. Resident candidates are often provided a stipend for living expenses and tuition reimbursement, and in turn, the resident candidate agrees to train and work in a high needs classroom within the local school district for a set amount of time after completing their residency program (Guha et al., 2017). Residency programs are a unique model of teacher education, where a teacher preparation

program (i.e., a school or college for the training of teachers) and a local school district partner to prepare future resident candidates to support teacher retention within the school district. In addition, because institutes of higher education (IHE), in comparison to localized school districts, are often physically located far from one another, virtual instructional settings are increasingly necessary. In a teacher residency model, professional development opportunities are provided by the local school district, and representatives from both the district and institution of higher education are often assigned to co-teach teacher preparation coursework (Guha et al., 2017).

### **Co-Teaching: Cooperation vs. Collaboration**

Co-teaching is a unique form of instruction where two or more instructors (e.g., university-based instructors, representatives from local school districts, additional professionals in the field of education, etc.) work together to teach a course or class to prepare future teacher candidates (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012; Rabin 2020). The concept of co-teaching is commonly associated as a model of inclusion in the field of special education, where a general education teacher with knowledge in specific areas of content, works together with a special education teacher providing support and special education services within a general education classroom setting (Cook & Friend, 1995). However, models of co-teaching are also common outside of special education and have also been applied to various instructional settings within higher education coursework as well (Bacharach et al., 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Salifu 2021).

Co-teaching can be defined as joint delivery of instruction to a diverse group of students within a shared classroom space (Cook & Friend, 1995; Pratt et al., 2017; Rabin 2020). Each teacher has

their individual experiences and possess their own toolbox of strategies that they are able to share with students. As a result, the inclusion of two teachers better diversifies and reinforces the content being presented (Nguyen & Ng, 2020; Strieker et al., 2020). By incorporating co-teaching opportunities within a teacher residency program, teacher educators can specifically prepare teacher residents for working alongside both their assigned mentor teachers during their residency, as well as future colleagues in inclusive classroom settings.

In order to facilitate an effective co-teaching model, a collaborative relationship is imperative to ensure productive, efficient, and meaningful instruction when co-teaching can have a significant effect on the overall level of instruction provided within the academic setting (Brown et al., 2013; Cannady et al., 2021). Collaborative partnerships are marked by shared values and goals for the course. Instructors who are collaborative also expect open and honest communication regarding the strengths and weaknesses of each individual with regard to their shared impact on instruction (Rabin, 2020).

### **Step 1: Introductions and Setting Up the University-Based Course**

To maintain a collaborative relationship in co-teaching, both instructors need to share their teaching philosophies and beliefs regarding instructor roles and student accountability (Cannady et al., 2021; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Salifu, 2021). In addition, in an online (i.e., virtual) classroom setting, instructors need to first understand one another's classroom routines during online instruction such as how they structure and organize their classes as well as student behaviors they consider to be acceptable or unacceptable in classes provided synchronously online (Rooks et al., 2022). A university-based course includes any required class (i.e., required by accredit-

ed standards) including coursework and practicum (i.e., student teaching placements).

Prior to the first day of instruction, both instructors should plan to meet virtually to review the course syllabus and plan out the sequence of the course. With the addition of a shared document online, both instructors have the ability to view a working document while making collaborative changes to documents such as slide presentations, course syllabi, and assignment rubrics. Reviewing prior examples of the syllabus and teacher preparation standards serves as a guide in determining the sequence of the course and an overview of class assignments.

When creating the course sequence, first determine who is comfortable taking the lead during each class session based on instructor experience and topic preference. In addition, create and complete a survey of instructional preferences to determine strengths and areas of need within the various virtual instructional settings (see Table 1). Review the syllabus and decide who will be responsible for the components listed in each section. This initial planning session serves as a blueprint so that both instructors have a better understanding of the course map and sequence of the class as well as supporting individual instructors in managing personal preparation time.

### ***Tip: Create/Organize a Virtual Shared Drive***

- Create an online shared drive so both instructors have access to all lecture presentations and materials (e.g., tests, slides, supplemental readings, etc.).

- Set up a folder for each class module and organize each folder so that both instructors can easily access and add to class materials for each session.

- Share information with the co-teacher regarding comfort level of topics and presentation styles. For example, one instructor may be more comfortable utilizing direct classwide instruction strat-

**TABLE 1:** Co-Teaching Survey to Establish a Collaborative Co-Teaching Relationship

Questions	
What is your level of comfort with technology?	Not comfortable at all    1   2   3   4   5    Very comfortable
In your opinion, how should the responsibilities of grading student work be divided?	Answer: _____
What is your preferred instruction style? (choose all that apply)	<input type="radio"/> Lecture <input type="radio"/> Lecture with Discussion <input type="radio"/> Lecture with Student Led Breakout Rooms
What is your preferred co-teaching style? (circle all that apply)	Team Teaching    Parallel Teaching Station teaching (small group)                      One-Teach/One-Observe One-Teach/One-Assist    Alternative Teaching
What are your biggest concerns with co-teaching?	Answer: _____
What is your preferred time to plan/collaborate regarding this course?	<input type="radio"/> AM <input type="radio"/> PM
What is your preferred day to plan/collaborate regarding this course?	Monday                      Tuesday                      Wednesday                      Thursday                      Friday <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
What is your preferred communication style?	<input type="radio"/> Email <input type="radio"/> Text Message <input type="radio"/> Phone Call <input type="radio"/> Video Call
Select the course topics that that you are interested in class discussions and activities (choose all that apply)	Topic 1                      Topic 2                      Topic 3                      Topic 4                      Topic 5 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>

egies, while a second instructor prefers facilitating small group activities. One of the strengths of co-teaching is the ability for the resident/candidates to see more than one teaching style modeled (Cook & Friend, 1995; Matsko et. al., 2020).

**Step 2. Planning Out Each Lesson/Course Session**

After beginning/establishing a collaborative co-teaching relationship, plan a time to meet together to prepare for each upcoming session. During each session

determine who will take the lead on planned lectures, during in-class discussions, and in the development of presentation slides (Pratt et al., 2017; Cannady et al., 2021; Salifu, 2021). During the planning session, determine who will serve as the session facilitator (i.e., host). Review the syllabus for the upcoming session and determine the components that should be included within planned class discussions. If creating a new presentation, discuss the components that should be included and determine who

will create individual presentation slides. Discuss any possible in-class activities and decide who will facilitate activity assignments during the planned lesson. To support the engagement and various learning modalities of students, there are several evidence-based instructional strategies that can be easily incorporated into virtual lessons and modeled for use in resident placements. Several resources have been developed to help teachers and instructors at all levels to identify and implement these practices including,

**TABLE 2:** Examples of Evidence-Based Practices to incorporate within Co-Taught Virtual Settings

NAME OF STRATEGY	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Antecedent-Based Instruction	A modification of the environment to increase academic engagement	Provide (show) a slide describing what will be covered during the session and at what time.  Let students know when breaks will be provided.  Notify students when they will be asked to turn on cameras during the session.
Interest Inventory	Assessment/test to determine an individual's preferences and learning style	Access the learning strengths, weaknesses, and concerns in the classroom.  Assign inventories for students to take to guide instruction and response styles used during synchronous sessions.
Prompting	Oral and visual cues to increase student engagement	Provide oral and visual prompts to students.  Ensure students are able to interact with the prompts given and allow wait time for responses.
Prompting / Opportunities to respond	Verbal or sent text in the chat to increase/support student responses	While one instructor is leading a class discussion, the other prompts students in a chat section.  Instructors give opportunities for students to respond to a poll.
Opportunities for Choice making	Instructors provide students with choices either verbally or through the use of virtual polling	In-class activities: Provide multiple opportunities for students to express/demonstrate understanding (video, text response, etc.)
Reinforcement	Instructors (and peers) provide positive encouragement for student answers and engagement	Provide reactions (clapping, thumbs up, etc.)  Instructors take turns reading questions in a chat section and providing positive feedback.
Visual Supports	Visual cues to aid in communication/instruction	Instructors upload visual schedules, graphic organizers, assignment rubrics onto course page/site.

but not limited to: the Evidence-Based Intervention Network (<https://ebi.mis-souri.edu/>), the IRIS Center (<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>), and the What Works Clearinghouse (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>). See Table 2 for examples of EBPs that can be applied to synchronous online lessons.

*Before a particular session on the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process, Juana and Qin review their calendars and set up a time during the week to meet virtually and plan for the upcoming course session. Because Qin, representing the partnering school district, has more extensive knowledge of the IEP process that pertains specifically to the district, she volunteers to take the lead on this particular class session and in the navigation and organization of materials*

*they will present to the resident candidates. During this planning session, both instructors determine the topics to be discussed in class and divide responsibilities in creating slides on a shared presentation document. In their shared drive, Qin and Juana create a file for each class session. Within each file, the instructors include the lecture presentation and supplemental course materials. In this particular class session, Qin includes a graphic organizer to help guide students through the IEP process and plans for students to submit a copy of the completed graphic organizer at the end of the class session.*

**Tip: Planning for Instruction**

- Label the assigned materials in the online shared online drive that each instructor will be responsible for to

ensure smooth transitions from section to section.

- Be open about topics of which you are passionate. This enthusiasm will be evident in the instruction that is delivered.
- Determine comfort level with technology being used and prepare ahead of time for technical supports that may be needed for each instructor.
- Mutually create success criteria for each learning session to be reviewed at the end of the session.

**Step 3. Co-Teaching the Class Session (Synchronous Online Instructional Delivery)**

There are various instructional styles that can be incorporated when co-teaching a course online. For example, in a self-paced (i.e., asynchronous instruction-

al model), students log on to an enrolled course at their own preferred time, independent of the instructor. Instructors may decide to upload a lecture and provide directions in completing a session (i.e., module). Working at their own pace, students complete the module on their own or in a small group. In contrast, in-person modules (i.e., synchronous instruction) is more like a traditional course in that all students and instructors are present at the same time via a video communication platform. Using a synchronous model of instruction allows instructors to project or “share” a presentation on the student’s screen devices and, depending on the selected video communication platform, video and audio options allow for student interactions with instructors and peers. In addition, additional user functions such as a chat box, a class poll, or signals indicating a “raised hand” or “question” allow for additional opportunities for students to engage or respond. Often, students have very specific questions regarding individual situations they have encountered and how it may apply to aspects of their assignments. A synchronous, co-taught session, also allows for the reinforcement of instructional content and for more student questions to be addressed throughout the class session.

### **Co-Teaching Models Applied in the Virtual Classroom Platform**

Building on previously established models of co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995), the following instructional teaching models can also be adapted and applied within virtual, synchronous settings (see Table 3). There are several models of co-teaching that can be used to support student learning in the shared online classroom space. For a more in-depth description of these modules in their original form, the authors recommend the work of Friend et al., (1993), Cook and Friend (1995) and Friend and

Bursuck (2018). During the lesson, plan specifically to utilize the various co-teaching models and determine the specific roles and responsibilities that each instructor will be responsible for.

#### ***Team Teaching***

In a team-teaching approach, both instructors present material together (Chizhick & Brandon, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995, Simons et. al., 2020). During the virtual class session, both instructors introduce session concepts at the same time and facilitate class discussions within a whole group. One instructor may choose to take on the role of host or both instructors may decide to take turns sharing materials throughout the lesson (Chizhick & Brandon, 2020).

#### ***Parallel Teaching***

A parallel teaching model (Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Simons et. al., 2020) allows two or more instructors to split the shared virtual classroom into two smaller (e.g., breakout groups). Individual students are invited to join a smaller (i.e., private) class group and instructors provide direct instruction within the smaller group setting. Instructors may choose to provide similar lessons within each group or cover different topics altogether. One benefit to utilizing individual instructors to teach small groups is lower student-to-teacher ratios and increased student opportunities to respond to material (Simons et. al., 2020).

#### ***Station Teaching/Small Groups***

One particular benefit to the virtual classroom platform is the availability to separate the class into small groups. Similar to cooperative learning groups (Agonafir, 2023; Herrera-Pavo, 2021; Kamps et al., 1995), instructors can create small groups within the virtual class to allow students to complete activities and assignments together. Instructors in

this model can choose to work directly with individual groups or roam from one group to the next in order to check in and provide feedback (Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995).

#### ***Alternative Teaching***

Using the virtual classroom platform, an alternative teaching model allows for one instructor to provide instruction while another instructor meets with individual students or small groups of students in small groups (e.g., “break-out rooms”; Beninghof, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Simons et. al., 2020).

#### ***One-Teach/One-Assist***

Similar to the one-teach/one-observe model, the one-teach/one-assist approach also designates one instructor as the lead while another instructor prompts student responses in the chat or discussion, reinforces presented concepts introduced by the lead instructor, and provides additional opportunities for students to respond to presented materials (Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995).


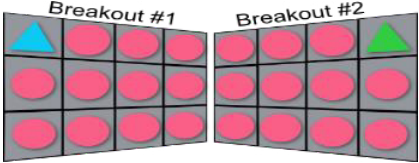
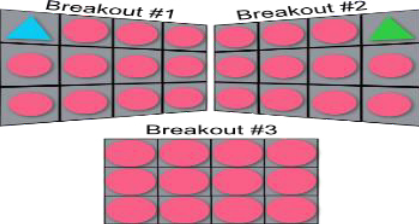
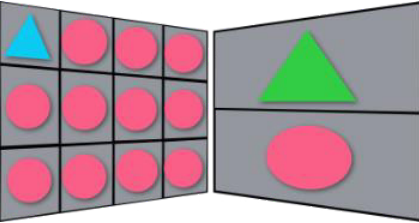
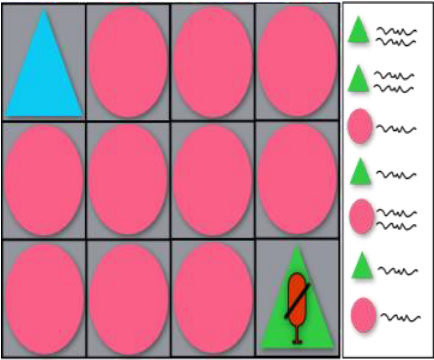
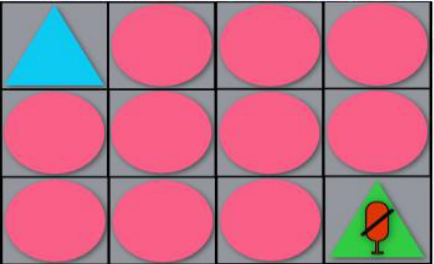
#### ***One-Teach/One-Observe***

In the large group virtual classroom space, both instructors are present. Utilizing the One-Teach/One-Observe Model of co-teaching (Beninghof, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Brown et al., 2013) within the virtual classroom space involves one instructor taking the lead during whole class instruction while another instructor monitors student engagement.

#### ***Tip: Co-teaching Strategies in Synchronous Online Formats***

- During synchronous class lectures and discussions, utilize closed captioning options within the virtual platform for accessibility and various student

**TABLE 3:** Teaching Strategies Applied to Virtual (Synchronous) Classroom Settings

Co-teaching Strategy	Definition/Description	Examples/Visual pictures
1. Team teaching	Both instructors teach simultaneously. Instructors take turns lecturing and adding to class discussions.	
2. Parallel Teaching	Using the group function in the selected communication platform, the class is divided into two groups. Each instructor joins a group and provides individual instruction.	
3. Station Teaching/Small Group Settings	Using the group function in the selected communication platform, the class is divided into several (e.g., 4-6 groups or “stations”). Instructors rotate or “join” each station to instruct, check for understanding and provide feedback.	
4. Alternative Teaching	Using a predetermined schedule, each instructor will teach at a designated time while the other instructor gathers data, completes course paperwork, or follows-up with individual student needs based on work samples in a different location.	
5. One Teach / One Assist	One instructor takes the lead in lecturing or facilitating a class discussion. The second instructor checks in with students via chat and gathers data regarding the previously agreed upon success criteria for the lesson. The second instructor also creates and facilitates creation of breakout rooms and ensures multi-media platforms are cued for seamless transitions between topics and activities.	
6. One Teach / One Observe	One teacher will designate (formally or informally) themselves as the lead instructor during the class session. The other instructor may participate in the class learning and view the content from the perspective of the students. During breakout rooms, join the room without moderating the discussion.	

Note. Adapted from: Cook & Friend (1995) and Friend & Bursuck (2018).

**TABLE 4:** Debriefing Fidelity Checklist

QUESTION	EXAMPLES/CONSIDERATIONS	YES/NO	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Were students engaged?	<i>Were video screens off? Did we check for understanding? Did we use exit strategies?</i>	Yes/No	
Did the students meet the success criteria for the day?	<i>Did students receive credit for the lesson? Were students able to demonstrate learning?</i>	Yes/No	
Were students given opportunities to respond throughout the lesson?	<i>Were students active in class discussions? Did students participate via chat or by classwide discussion?</i>	Yes/No	
Did students demonstrate a grasp of the objectives presented in class?	<i>Were students able to discuss presented concepts with the class or in small groups? Were students able to practice the concepts presented independently or in small groups? Were students assessed during the class for understanding of material?</i>	Yes/No	
Did I (we) embed enough time for students to complete tasks?	<i>Were students given enough time? Was more time needed for students to practice and complete tasks?</i>	Yes/No	
Did I (we) provide enough breaks and at the right time?	<i>Did students request a break during class? Did I (we) check-in to see if students were in need of a break?</i>	Yes/No	

learning modalities.

- Determine if lessons should be recorded for student viewing at a later time.
- Plan for co-teaching strategies of instruction (e.g., one-teach/one-assist and observe, station teaching, etc.).

*During planning sessions, Qin and Juana divide upcoming lessons into three distinct sections and incorporate three different co-teaching models: one-teach/one assist and observe, parallel teaching, and team teaching. Because Qin is more comfortable with the instructional material and local school district policies, she volunteers to begin (i.e., host) the lesson and takes the lead in providing direct instruction. As the lead instructor during this lesson, she shares her screen and projects the co-created presentation and additional materials within the digital video platform. While Qin is providing direct instruction to the class, Juana utilizes the discussion board to answer student questions, prompt individual students, and provide additional opportunities for*

*students to respond. After Qin provides direct instruction to the class, both instructors utilize the small group function to split the class into two smaller groups with each instructor joining a different group (i.e., parallel teaching). During this part of the lesson, the instructors guide the smaller group through an activity they designed to practice engaging in the material from earlier in the large class. After students complete the in-class activity, instructors bring the class back together and utilize team teaching model to facilitate a follow-up, in-class discussion and to take turns reinforcing the resident candidate's learning by responding to questions and checking for understanding of the presented lesson concepts.*

#### **Step 4. Debrief, Review, and Provide Feedback: What Went Well, What Could Be Better, What to Do Next Time**

At the end of each session, either immediately or at a set time before the next session, plan to meet to discuss the

lesson including what went well, and identify areas for improvement. Examples of questions to ask may include: Were the students engaged in the discussion? Did students engage with the provided materials? How much of the information needs to be revisited? How do instructors know that the information presented was retained? (See Table 4). During the debriefing meeting, reflect on the strategies that were successful and reinforcing student success as well as brainstorm additional strategies to support the class and individual learners in future class sessions. Be honest and open about the session to make informed decisions about future lessons. For example, were some individual students engaging more than others? Did you notice individual students/groups rushing through materials? Together brainstorm strategies that may support the success of the upcoming lesson and troubleshoot any potential dilemmas to best ensure instructional success as

co-teachers (see Table 5).

At the end of the day's session, Qin and Juana remain on the video platform for 15 minutes to debrief the lesson. Overall, both Qin and Juana feel pleased with the level of discussion and commented responses from the resident candidates in the online chat function. They feel that the pacing of the lesson was strong and, in particular, Qin's use of redirection strategies to keep the class discussion relevant and on topic. However, Qin also noticed that some students seemed disengaged during the group activity when assigned to small group break-out rooms within the video platform. During their debrief, Qin and Juana discuss the possibility of assigning individual roles within each breakout group. Juana suggests that a list of roles be created for individual group members moving forward. During this time, the instructors also review the group submitted in-class activity. The instructors divide the assigned group submissions to better provide feedback together. Qin and Juana then review the syllabus and discuss the next session on IEP goals and benchmarks. The instructors decide that Juana will take the lead on introducing the material and Qin volunteers to set up the activity. In reviewing the syllabus and assigned readings before class, both Qin and Juana determine the topics to include in the upcoming lesson. Juana sets up a shared presentation in the drive, and the instructors determine which slides they will cover and create individually before the next class session.

**CONCLUSION**

Given the need for co-taught instruction in teacher preparation within teacher residency models, there are many options for online instructional formats. In a synchronous virtual classroom space, co-teaching allows for two or more perspectives to introduce concepts and rein-

**TABLE 5: Troubleshooting Guide for Instructors**

DILEMMA	STRATEGIES
1. You and your co-teacher don't feel like you have enough time to meet and plan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule meetings well in advance</li> <li>Share access to work calendars</li> </ul>
2. The flow of the presentation does not feel cohesive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mark each of the slides with the name of the presenter</li> <li>Determine which co-teaching strategy would work for each presentation slide</li> </ul>
3. The perspectives of each member are different?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find research to validate different perspectives when each are presented</li> <li>Embrace differences of perspective and discuss different views in class discussions</li> </ul>
4. Personalities do not mesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take time to re-define roles and responsibilities by taking the co-teaching survey (see Table 1.)</li> </ul>

force learning through diverse perspectives. Incorporating the various models of co-teaching within virtual classroom spaces provide a unique form of structure that supports the development of teacher education in unique structures and settings. Co-teaching in residency programs provides a unique model of teacher education where institutions of higher education partner with local school districts to prepare future teacher candidates (i.e., residents) for working in high needs classrooms within local school districts. By partnering together, institutions of higher education and local school districts can further support developing needs in teacher education.

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