

From the Shuffle to the Soar: Creating a Clearer Pathway to Teacher Residency

Amanda Rutter

University of Texas Permian Basin

Lorraine Spickermann

University of Texas Permian Basin

Sharon Vasser Darling

University of Texas Permian Basin

Abstract

Navigating an undergraduate degree plan is challenging, even more so for first-generation and non-traditional college students. Having clear pathways to teacher certification empowers candidates to create agency and fosters a transformative education experience that is particularly important as Texas faces critical teacher shortages. Advancing a teacher residency program focused on creating a competent teacher workforce with wrap-around support services and curricular alignment to help bridge academic and clinical experiences is key. Equally important is promoting high-quality-instructional materials and giving candidates access to multiple funding opportunities. Consequently, a greater student-work-life balance is created so candidates can be successful in every role.

Keywords: *Curriculum alignment, high-quality instructional materials, candidate-first initiatives*

Teacher preparation programs across the country are confronting unprecedented challenges as they strive to respond to increasing teacher shortages, changing student demographics, and the demands of contemporary classrooms. These challenges remain even greater for institutions serving first-generation, non-traditional, and historically underrepresented students. The development of a contemporary, responsive, and equitable path for educator preparation involves not only curricular re-design, but also an expansion of support structures, novel approaches to clinical experiences, and purposeful partnerships with schools and communities.

The authors of this paper examine one institution's effort to reimagine teacher preparation and the teacher candidate experience. Work begins with *Creating Clear Pathways*, describing how a shared vision emerged in response to statewide teacher shortages and the need for more coherent and accessible routes to certification. Building on this foundation, *Expanding the Vision* highlights candidate-first initiatives—such as First 5, the FirstGen Forward Network, Student-Made, and income-based scholarships that address financial, academic, and social-emotional barriers to student success.

The authors then explore the academic transformation that occurred across programs. *Curriculum Alignment* describes how faculty collaboration and integration of the

TeachingWorks and US PREP frameworks enhanced course coherence and practice-based pedagogies. *High-Quality Instructional Materials* discusses how evidence-based materials and structured learning cycles shaped both instructional planning and classroom implementation. Complementing these components are *Curriculum Design and Alignment*, which explains the comprehensive institution-wide training and redesign of assessment along with commitment to equity as drivers in the design of a more robust and student-centered model.

Course Alignment also describes the development of degree maps and a robust program matrix, providing the candidates with a sense of progression that reinforces essential competencies and supports on-time graduation. Lastly, the section on *Funding Opportunities* shows strategic grants and resource investments that have expanded technological access, elevated culturally responsive teaching, and strengthened wrap-around services essential in supporting diverse educator candidates. These linked efforts form a coherent teacher preparation agenda: one that centers candidates' lived experiences, promotes integration between academic and clinical work, and furthers equity through design. By illustrating the vision, while simultaneously sharing steps taken to actualize it, the manuscript provides a model that can be replicated by other institutions

Creating Clearer Pathways

Everything begins with a conceptualized vision of what might be. When the state's teacher attrition rate is a record 13.4% (Texas Education Agency, 2024), reimagining pathways to teacher certification becomes an essential mission. In recent years, the state of Texas has experienced a critical shortage of certified teachers for classrooms teaching English Language Arts and reading, computer science, bilingual/English as a second language, and special education. This has led to a staggering 40% rise in the hiring of uncertified and unpracticed teachers who have not met the requirements of a traditional Educator Preparation Program (EPP). It has also yielded significant learning gaps for students being taught by uncertified teachers who historically experience a three-to-four-month loss of learning (The Texas Tribune, 2024). A recent Texas Tech University survey revealed that 45% of the state's teacher workforce is now represented by uncertified teachers. Data further disclosed that rural districts are far more likely to hire uncertified teachers particularly for early childhood, elementary education, and special education classrooms (Texas Tech University, 2024).

For our higher education institution serving an 86,000 square mile region that represents approximately 7000 enrolled college students, 51% of whom are Hispanic and 42% first-generation college students, we had additional challenges to consider to ensure our College of Education (COE) candidates seeking teacher certification would earn their degrees, on time, and successfully enter the workforce. Following the onboarding of a new and visionary dean in 2019, the COE leadership sought to implement transformative programs for candidates that would not only help them achieve their goals of graduation but to also provide sufficient financial relief so that college was a possibility. The leadership further sought to promote more practice-based pedagogy for our education candidates along with enhanced district and community partnerships that would bridge the gap between the academic and clinical experiences thereby allowing community partners to become strategic stakeholders. We envisioned new trails leading to better site school placements for our historically underrepresented candidates, more effective recruitment efforts, and more successful retention strategies aimed at guiding candidates across the finish line. Through

intentional planning and yearlong wrap-around services, we designed an innovative program for creating a well-prepared, competent teacher workforce.

Expanding the Vision

Candidate-first initiatives were a significant part of this visionary change to advance our COE candidates closer to their graduation goals. The initiatives included our First 5, FirstGen Forward Network, the Student-Made Program, and a 100% tuition-free Scholarship program, and a substantial Department of Education grant. The multitude of programs helps our candidates to become more vested and provide much-needed financial relief.

The First 5, a family-friendly program offering free or low-cost childcare, family literacy, and food assistance, serves our students and local communities in many ways. A student-made initiative, this partnership aligns with our united goal of promoting high-quality curriculum for learners and also provides assistance to families for overall health needs through evidence-based options. The program includes the Parents as Teachers (PAT) team, a nationally-recognized group offering home visits, child assessments, and access to various community resources (citation withheld for blind copy).

The FirstGen Forward Network designed a national model for holistic first-generation student success with a goal of helping close the graduation gap for FirstGen students, who now represent more than half of all undergraduates in the U.S. (FirstGen Forward, 2025). Trends show that First-gen students are applying to college at twice the rate of continuing generation students, and yet only 27% of first-gen college students successfully graduate within four years. This not only presents a substantial gap between first-gen students and their peers, it also has a significant economic impact. Studies show that closing the achievement gap will result in approximately 4 million more first-gen students graduating and will subsequently add \$700 billion to the U.S. economy (FirstGen Forward, 2025).

The FirstGen Forward Network seeks to provide more inclusive institutional structures, improve student retention, and help first-generation students set and measure

progressive goals. The holistic learning advanced by FirstGen Forward Network is core to our educational programs to ensure our candidates experience the interconnectedness of overall growth, including improved academic achievement, social-emotional development, and the development of life skills. Supporting social-emotional growth for our candidates is critical to supporting their well-being, academic success, and career readiness (Wallace Foundation, 2025). Research shows FirstGen college graduates are 88% more likely to be employed following graduation along with earning higher wages.

A program made by students for students also made its way to our campus. The Student-Made program helps students to become entrepreneurs while earning their degrees. It provides a platform for student creators to feature their innovative projects and engage in other financially-lucrative endeavors. Partnership with other colleges and universities, Student-made entrepreneurs can create and sell to an online marketplace that is 100% student operated. Participants learn how to monetize their skill sets. This program is particularly beneficial to students needing to supplement their income, especially those not eligible for paid teacher residency.

The 100% tuition-free income-based scholarship program, a more recent offering, is a visionary disruptor for many of our low-income Hispanic students who considered themselves ineligible to attend college (citation withheld for blind copy). In addition to offering qualifying candidates throughout the region a full tuition ride, the program additionally covers the costs of mandatory fees. Eligible candidates include transfer, on campus-based, and online candidates. Candidates with a family-adjusted gross income that does not exceed \$100,000 qualify for all eight semesters of learning. As the median household income for our region was estimated to be \$79,668 in 2024, the application of this scholarship is far-reaching.

Curriculum Alignment

To support the new and expanded vision for teacher education, major collaboration took place across the COE faculty to build more cohesive learning programs. We launched a deep dive into examining our instructional materials with the understanding that our candidates gain

their primary information not only from competent teachers but the quality of content taught. When only 17% of students nationwide were meeting grade level standards (TNTP, 2024), a change of direction became a necessity. This included restructuring coursework to include more meaningful content with real-life applications. It necessitated a visible shift both in what we are teaching and how we are teaching.

Teamwork for our curriculum alignment included monthly COE faculty meetings to create a collaborative chart grounded in the concepts of TeachingWorks at The University of Michigan (TeachingWorks, 2024) and modified by the University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation, known as US PREP (US PREP, n.d.). TeachingWorks assisted the teacher workforce by designing practice-based approaches to building classroom structures based on justice through the content taught, through teacher-student interactions, and as a result of the classroom culture. This approach was in line with the vision of US PREP leaders whose mission is to support best practices by reimagining the boundaries of possibilities in teacher preparation. Like our institute, US PREP seeks to serve historically underserved candidates with a strong focus on mentoring, coaching, and integration of coursework and clinical experiences.

High-Quality Instructional Materials

The research-based design for TeachingWorks gave novice teachers strategic guidance through high-leverage practices (TeachingWorks, 2024). This practice-based program further supported equitability within the classroom by including the use of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) aligned with academic standards. HQIM not only supports the state standards but offers the added benefits of engaging content, accessibility, and improved student outcomes. The TeachingWorks program is successful in part due to its four-step model that focuses on introducing, modeling, practicing, and assessing the curriculum:

- *Introduce*: The mentor teachers help novice teachers see and analyze parts of teaching.
- *Model*: The mentor teachers give novice teachers opportunities to simulate elements of teaching.

- *Practice*: The mentor teachers support novice teachers in practicing elements of teaching.
- *Assess*: The mentor teacher evaluates the progress of the novice teacher, provides feedback, and the novices have opportunities to analyze their own teaching practices.

Table 1.0: Teacher Residency and Clinical Teaching Semester Planning

Teacher Residency and Clinical Teaching						
<i>(I) Introduce (M) Model (P) Practice (A) Assess</i>						
	Semester 3	Semester 4	Semester 5	Semester 6	Semester 7	Semester 8
1.1 Standards and Alignment - The teacher designs clear, well-organized, sequential lessons that reflect best practice, align with standards and are appropriate for diverse learners.						
1.2 Data and Assessment - The teacher uses formal and informal methods to measure student progress, then manages and analyzes student data to inform instruction.						
1.3 Knowledge of Students - Through knowledge of students and proven practices, the teacher ensures high levels of learning, social-emotional development and achievement for all students.						
	Introduce student interest survey, lesson plans connecting to prior knowledge, students talking about interest and background, high-level of student engagement, pair/share. self-assessment	Introduce/Model student interest survey, lesson plans connecting to prior knowledge, students talking about interest and background, high-level of student engagement, pair/share. self-assessment	Practice student interest survey, lesson plans connecting to prior knowledge, students talking about interest and background, high-level of student engagement, pair/share. self-assessment	Practice/Assess student interest survey, lesson plans connecting to prior knowledge, students talking about interest and background, high-level of student engagement, pair/share. self-assessment	Practice/Assess student interest survey, lesson plans connecting to prior knowledge, students talking about interest and background, high-level of student engagement, pair/share. self-assessment	Practice/Assess student interest survey, lesson plans connecting to prior knowledge, students talking about interest and background, high-level of student engagement, pair/share. self-assessment
1.4 Activities - The teacher plans engaging, flexible lessons that encourage higher order thinking, persistence and achievement.						
	Introduce levels of questions, thoughtful questions, open-ended questions	Introduce/Model student-led questions, thoughtful, open-ended questions	Practice student-led questions, thoughtful, open-ended questions	Practice student-led questions, thoughtful, open-ended questions	Practice/Assess student-led questions, thoughtful, open-ended questions	Practice/Assess student-led questions, thoughtful, open-ended questions

applied their new knowledge to a field placement lesson plan provided by their mentor teachers. The mentor teacher’s lesson plan was modified, as needed, to meet the requirements of an HQIM lesson. The professor graded the lesson plan for key elements before the candidates implemented the lesson plans in their field placements. Our candidates taught at least one of their lesson plans and received feedback (both reinforcements and refinements from the mentor teachers). In semester 6 (Junior semester 2) candidates, in our Social Studies & Language Arts course, collaboratively examined curriculum regarding maps from multiple sources using the HQIM framework. In semesters 7 and 8 (senior semesters 1 and 2) candidates were invited to bring their data from student achievement charts, student perception surveys, and formal observations to seminar for analysis and discussion. The collaborative seminar discussions included a focus on learning environments that support a more student-centered approach with higher levels of engagement with the materials, ongoing collaborative feedback, and increased critical thinking. We further modeled the four-steps in the seminar via co-teaching with a minimum of two teachers leading each district-based group.

The TeachingWorks HQIM framework also adhered to a successful four-part model focusing on candidates, teachers, instructional elements, and the core curriculum (TeachingWorks, 2024):

- *Candidates*: Helps to assess needs and close learning gaps
- *Teachers*: Includes collaboration and professional development
- *Instruction*: Explicit instruction and systematic pedagogical practices
- *Curriculum*: Aligned, high-quality curriculum that includes tiered support

Our COE faculty were likewise able to embed this model into our EPP through our transformative yearlong teacher residency that provided candidates with an income, benefits, mentoring, coaching, co-modeling, instructional materials, AVID strategies, and professional development opportunities for both the candidates and mentor teachers. This reconceptualized approach to clinical teaching aligned

For maximum output, our COE team implemented this model both in our coursework and in our biweekly seminar for teacher candidates. Instructors applied HQIM assessment strategies to learning programs throughout our COE curriculum alignment. For example, in our EC - 6th grade certification program the HQIM framework is used in successive assignments. In semester 5 (Junior semester 1), candidates, in our literacy course, collaboratively worked through a comparative study of similar local curriculum, “Teacher Pay Teachers” curriculum and self-made (TEKS aligned) curriculum. From this work, candidates then

with our national and community partnerships and fully took into consideration our candidates demographics.

Effectively implementing HQIM gave candidates materials that not only align meaningfully with the state standards but also increased learning opportunities as well as improved student outcomes (Texas State Board of Education, 2025). Helping our candidates learn to analyze and use data to drive instruction remains a cornerstone of our current EPP. Modeling and co-teaching are also critical components as is giving candidates yearlong pedagogical practice and timely evaluative feedback. Research shows that pre-service teachers for whom co-teaching is modeled take on the role of lead teacher more readily than candidates for whom this model is not available (Kamens, 2007). Moreover, novice teachers with co-teaching models experienced increased self-efficacy enhanced through the sharing of ideas, distinctive teaching styles, and the supportive relationship with the mentor teacher. Parity in teaching further helped pre-service teachers to be more participatory and communicative in the planning process along with being better able to structure their teaching to be inclusive of diverse learners within their classrooms, leading to improved student outcomes (Friend, 2014). Co-teaching as a service delivery option proves to be a win-win for novice teachers and the students they teach.

Curriculum Design and Alignment

A strong curriculum executed with fidelity will result in substantial increases in learning (Institute for Education Policy, 2025). The Learning Cycle program model, along with the support for HQIM, aligned well with our established goals and yielded opportunities to advance student outcomes in all areas. After learning about the TeachingWorks model via our partnership with US PREP, our COE dean enrolled faculty members representing every major discipline in the 15-month US PREP Curriculum Design Assessment training that began in November 2021. The site-based training offered ongoing coaching in the development of HQIM assessments to measure teacher candidate's proficiencies via whole group and content team sessions, independent assignments, and structured focus groups. This training supported TeachingWorks vision not only for HQIM but to advance equity and diversity in teaching. The goal in learning how to apply the Learning

Cycle model was to evaluate course objectives, assignments, and activities to improve student agency. After returning to our university, our COE team was given the added challenge of applying the curricular changes to one of our courses to increase equitable student outcomes. This important advancement broadened the vision to include additional professional development that would continue to improve our programs and create better alignment with state standards.

In 2023-2024, our COE continued this visionary process by earmarking faculty workshop days to align course syllabi and objectives to the state T-TESS rubric. Specific attention was given to the four domains and 16 dimensions for Planning, Instruction, Learning Environment, and Professional Practices and Responsibilities (Texas Education Agency, 2025). This served to help bridge the gap for our candidates in aligning both their course and clinical work with T-TESS domains. Alignment with T-TESS would further help the candidates efforts with goal setting, evaluation, and student growth measurement. It would also work hand-in-hand with embedding complex AVID strategies designed to help students become educated, responsible participants as leaders in a global society (AVID Center 2025). Introducing the higher-order thinking skills of AVID strategies further served to close the opportunity gaps via rigorous academic preparedness, increased knowledge, and greater student agency. Candidates were encouraged to become more self-directed with a progression timeline that led to them taking full lead as solo teachers by the end of the fall semester during their year of residency.

Course Alignment

Our comprehensive COE degree map is another innovative tool we used to help guide candidates enrolling in our programs throughout their eight semesters of learning as well as to assist transfer candidates mid-way through their programs. Research-based, academic degree maps provide students with a clear roadmap that leads to more on-time graduations and notable student success (Complete College America, 2025). Candidates are able to track their progress to become more proactive in planning and better equipped to make informed decisions. As a continuing part of the resourceful faculty work, our COE degree maps were

revised to provide greater fluidity in the sequencing of coursework so that education candidates were better prepared for their TExES exams as well as clinical placements. The degree maps guide candidates from their freshman to senior years with course scheduling, prerequisites, academic advising, enriching experiences, and lifelong success. Candidates graduate with empirical and quantitative skills, planning and organization, research, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking.

Table 2.0: Falcon BA in EC-6 Education Degree Map

UT Permian Basin: Bachelor's of Arts Education: EC-6 Core Subjects Degree Map 2024-2025 Teacher Residency Option				
	<i>Your Class Schedule</i>	<i>Academic Advising</i>	<i>Enriching Experiences</i>	<i>Lifelong Success</i>
Freshman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enroll in Education section of UNIV 1101 Freshman Seminar. Complete at least 33 hours during your freshman year. Earn a C or better in all courses. Maintain a GPA of 2.75 or better. Participate in New Student Orientation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in New Student Orientation. Meet with your Academic Advising Center Freshman Advisor before fall and spring registration. Talk with the Advisor about the recommended course sequencing for your degree plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join the Education Club or other student group. Participate in intramural sports or engage in other physical activity. Go to an event organized by Student Life. Meet with your instructors during their office hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a study group with some of your classmates. Attend SI or tutoring sessions on a weekly basis. Read books for enjoyment.
Sophomore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete at least 31 hours during your sophomore year. Complete all remaining general education core courses. Earn a C or better in all courses. Maintain a GPA of 2.75 or better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with your Academic Advising Center Advisor before fall registration. Meet with an Education Academic Advisor before spring registration. Verify course sequencing with the advisors. Register for classes as soon as you are able. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join the Kappa Delta Pi Education Honor Society (KDP). Participate in club and KDP activities. Volunteer to mentor or tutor students at a local school or community organization. Go to an Art Show opening or concert on campus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the requirements for admission to the Teacher Certification Program. Apply during the spring semester for admission to the Teacher Certification Program.

Junior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete at least 30 hours during your junior year. Take first block of field-based courses. Earn a C or better in all courses. Maintain a GPA of 2.75 or better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with the Education Academic Advisor and your Education Faculty Advisor each term. Register for classes as soon as you are able. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take on a leadership position in Education Club and/or Kappa Delta Pi: Run for office, volunteer to head a committee, organize an event, etc. Meet with your Education professors during their office hours. Ask about their research and their experiences as teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin preparing for the Core Subjects, STR, and PPR TEXES exams. Take practice TEXES exams, and use the results to guide your test preparation. Attend a Teacher Residency info session in the spring. Apply for Residency.
Senior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete remaining hours for the degree during your senior year. Take second block of field-based courses. Complete teacher residency. Earn a C or better in all courses. Maintain a GPA of 2.75 or better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with the Education Academic Advisor before registration. Select courses for on-time graduation. Meet with your Education Faculty Advisor early in the fall to apply for clinical teaching. Apply for graduation early in the spring semester. Ask the Education Academic Advisor to complete your undergraduate degree check. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue regular participation and leadership roles in club and Kappa Delta Pi activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass the Core Subjects, STR, and PPR TEXES exams before the end of the fall semester. Complete Teacher Residency during the fall and spring terms. Apply for certification at the end of the spring semester.
UTPB Students will graduate with these skills:			Career Opportunities:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empirical and quantitative skills Research Adaptability Communication Planning and Organization Teamwork Critical Thinking 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early childhood or Elementary teacher Preschool teacher Educator for non-profit or private organization 	
College of Education Mesa Building, Room 3215 432-552-2120 epp@utpb.edu				

After completing meetings for the T-TESS rubric alignment, the COE faculty were reconvened for multiple brainstorming sessions to work on programmatic mapping of their graduate and undergraduate courses. Groupings included early childhood, elementary education, special education, and secondary education. These groupings provided a targeted response to concerns regarding teacher shortages and uncertified staffing. To create the Course Alignment Matrix, individual faculty were assigned a selection of courses for review. Examined were the course objectives, assignment descriptors, indicators, standards, and exam competencies. They were evaluated in alignment with the LearningWorks model for Introduce, Model, Practice, and Assess and the Texas Education Association. In part, our COE team sought to address strengths and gaps in the background knowledge, life experiences, and skill sets of our candidates. The multi-course matrix provided faculty with clear pictures of the reinforcements and areas

of refinement for not only individual courses but also for the program overall such as course materials, activities, and methods of inquiry. Once faculty were able to identify appropriate refinements, this led to a revision in the course offering schedule to improve clarity, consistency, and student agency to successfully lead candidates to their TExES certification exams. Programmatic cohesiveness via the Course Alignment Matrix further helped COE faculty as a whole to evaluate educator competencies to facilitate greater learning outcomes.

Funding Opportunities

A substantial Title V DoE grant awarded to our COE helped to bolster teacher resident success and further create career pathways. Conferred in October 2022, the \$3 million dollar grant helped to support research-based practices for the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations with an intentional outreach to Hispanic, rural, male, first-generation, and low-income candidates. The Outreach Coordinator helps low-income prospective candidates complete their Federal Application for Financial Assistance and make them aware of financial aid, including our tuition-free scholarship. The Case Manager provides comprehensive, ongoing advising and counseling services during the candidate's entire EPP experience, such as a yearlong paid teacher residency and expanding access to cutting-edge instructional technology resources.

In the process of writing and submitting the grant proposal, our COE faculty was confronted with the reality that our EPP did not have the necessary technology and equipment to prepare teachers for the 21st-Century classroom. The Texas Education Agency, in its recent accreditation report, found that “the EPP lacks the resources to teach students about digital literacy” (Texas Education Agency, 2024). Grant funding also served to build an equitable classroom culture and promote identity-safe campuses. By the end of the Title V grant, five university classrooms will be fully equipped with similar technology to the surrounding independent school districts (ISDs.) The candidates will use the technology as part of their university coursework.

Wraparound services focused on assets-based pedagogy, pre-service mentoring, culturally relevant and inclusive classroom services, and degree attainment with

certification. By embedding research-based options like mentoring, co-teaching, and school-district partnerships into the program, we were better able to offer more individualized support and address the specific needs of each candidate. In addition to receiving individualized degree maps, candidates had access to one-on-one academic advising, career guidance, and access to career services. This manifold approach further aligned with our holistic approach to education to support the mental health, social-emotional well-being, and community involvement of our candidates.

The grant additionally helped to fund extensive training for instructors to include ESCALA Educational Services, an organization that seeks to dismantle systemic racism in higher education for Latinx students. This is accomplished in part by fostering environmental and pedagogical change for how Hispanic Serving Institutions instruct and evaluate candidates. Instructors completed multiple ESCALA courses, ranging from a few weeks to a few months in duration, including Certificates in College Teaching & Learning in Hispanic Serving Institutions (CTL) and STEM training. The *STEM-X* summer course provided faculty with “practical Culturally Relevant Teaching exercises using their teaching materials to facilitate the transfer of materials back into the classroom and promote changes in their curriculum” (ESCALA, 2025) Our university faculty had productive conversations about best practices for our candidates and the candidates future students attitudes and beliefs about STEM content. The course allowed STEM faculty to have open and frank discussions with the College of Education faculty supporting teacher candidates.

The seven-month CTL course completed by several members of our COE faculty included strategic workshop time with other HSI institutions, individual and group coaching, and the real time implementation of culturally responsive changes in our coursework. Participation focused on equity exercises, interventions, project planning, and course selection. It culminated with a research-based capstone designed to investigate the impact of specific culturally relevant instructional shifts on Latinx students. At least one descriptive study revealed our Latinx and First-Gen students faced several barriers in their educational pursuits that sometimes resulted in failure to

complete coursework and graduate on time. The top three factors were:

- Balancing schoolwork with life responsibilities
- Financial challenges
- Difficult learning material

Survey responses revealed that 50% of our candidates were employed full-time and 38% had children and families. As part of this ongoing project, we discussed ways to diminish or remove barriers, including offering flexible due dates, adjusting assignment requirements, and offering students the gift of time. We also focused on addressing financial challenges via our Scholarship Program and paid teacher residency. To counteract difficulties with the learning materials, we added 240 Tutoring and instructor-led work sessions.

Conclusion

Reimagining the boundaries of possibilities in teacher preparation, re-envisioning pathways to graduation, and offering candidate-first initiatives are among the pillars of our transformative approach to learning. Aligning core curriculum, embedding high-quality instructional materials, and creating matrices for course alignment are also fundamental building blocks. Increasing the efficacy of wrap-around support services and bridging the academic

and clinical worlds for a more cohesive and unified experience were also indispensable elements of change. Taking it one step further to afford our candidates a better student-work-family life balance served to enrich their experiences even more.

With the many combined services offered to our candidates, especially those who are first-generation and non-traditional students, we have forged new routes for them to attend college, graduate, and pursue the careers they once only dreamed of having. Moreover, we have innovatively redefined our learning programs, adopted new core models, aligned curriculum, re-coordinated coursework, improved degree mapping, and secured strategic funding to ensure our candidates can successfully complete their programs with certification and find viable options for becoming competent and prepared members of the teacher workforce.

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