

# Impacting Teacher Residencies Through Collaborative Partnerships: A Case Study

**Amy Guillot, Ph.D.**

Texas A&M University-Victoria

**Rachel Martinez, Ed.D.**

Texas A&M University - Victoria

**Jahnette Wilson, Ed.D.**

Texas A&M University - Victoria

## Abstract

*As the teacher shortage impacts school districts across the nation, building and strengthening the teacher pipeline becomes critical. The existence and maintenance of strong partnerships between stakeholders is a key component of the teacher pipeline issue. This self-study research centered around an educator preparation program (EPP) and two local school districts as the EPP transitioned from traditional one-semester student teaching to two-semesters of residency. The transformation provided a springboard to investigate the status of partnerships as well as to develop a tool, Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric, to continue the partnership dialogue. Using five guiding principles from Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran's (2010) as a foundation, the investigators developed the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric. This study describes the development of the APT Rubric tool and the results gathered by the EPP during the transformation of partnerships. Additionally, implications for using the APT in the transformation of other partnerships are discussed.*

Keywords: transformation, partnerships, residency, case study

According to the U.S. Department of Education's report, Raise the Bar Policy Brief (2023), there is a teacher shortage as the recent COVID pandemic caused a surge of teachers to leave the profession. Communities across the United States lost a total of 730,000 public education jobs during the time period from February to May 2020. That said, many states and school districts were already experiencing teacher shortages prior to the pandemic. Most of these lost positions recovered from pandemic shortages, however, "there are still 95,000 fewer public education employees supporting our students compared to pre-pandemic levels, and recovery of these jobs has varied significantly from state to state" (2023). This statistic would indicate that we are getting back to the status quo, but as we look deeper into the quality of teachers who filled these lost positions, the issue becomes murkier. Because teacher shortage is on the rise across the country, many states have loosened certification requirements or developed fast track teacher certification programs in an effort to meet the rising

challenges of understaffed districts and schools. Unfortunately, these individuals are not adequately prepared for the classroom, leading these teachers to leave the classroom at high percentages (Fitz & Yun, 2024). While putting uncertified teachers in the classroom may fix the teacher shortage issue in the short-term, it will impact thousands of children across the U.S. who will not learn from a qualified and prepared teacher. Lee (2018) indicates that students who have highly qualified and effective teachers positively impact students' short-term and long-term educational success. This is not surprising, but it simply validates what we know. Good teachers matter.

Strong partnerships between educator preparation programs (EPPs) and school districts are the key to preparing good teachers and enticing those good teachers to teach in local school districts (Guha, R., Hyler, M.E., & Darling-Hammond, L., 2016). This article describes the transformation of partnerships between one educator preparation program (EPP) and two local school districts as all entities worked together to strengthen teacher pipelines.

Based on a review of the literature and the data collected from the EPP and partnership school districts, a tool was developed to enhance the sustainability of those partnerships, the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric tool. Development of the APT Rubric is explained along with suggestions for use as a data-gathering tool. Its potential uses and implications with other partnerships are discussed.

### Contextual Background of the Study

This case study centers on a small four-year college located in two diverse campus settings about 120 miles apart from each other. The main campus is housed in a mid-sized, rural town in Southeast Texas. The second campus is located in a suburban area of Houston, Texas. The suburban campus draws teacher candidates from both an urban and suburban setting while the main campus draws candidates from mid- to small rural communities. The educator preparation program at this university offers

**Table 1**

#### *Teacher Certification Areas Offered*

Specialization Area	Grade Level Span
Core Subjects	Early Childhood – 6 <sup>th</sup> grade
Core Subjects	4 <sup>th</sup> grade – 8 <sup>th</sup> grade
Content Areas	
Math	7 <sup>th</sup> grade – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Science	7 <sup>th</sup> grade – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
History	7 <sup>th</sup> grade – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
English Language Art & Reading	7 <sup>th</sup> grade – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Special Education	Early Childhood – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Languages Other Than English (LOTE-Spanish)	Early Childhood – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade

The program also provides preparation for supplementary teacher certification in English as a Second Language. The bulk of candidates choose to become certified in EC-6 Core Subjects with a few students each year earning 4-8 Core Subjects and 7-12 Content Area certification. There has also been a rising number of teacher candidates earning Special Education EC-12 certification in recent semesters. The university has long been a teaching institution and has placed hundreds of pre-certification teachers in local school districts for many decades.

Similar to many educator preparation programs (EPPs) around the nation, the program had always operated

teacher candidates an opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree in education along with preparing them for teacher certification at both campuses.

The journey of the educator preparation program at this university speaks to the complexity and persistence needed to nurture and enhance existing partnerships. Not only did the program aim to enhance partnerships that had been around for many years, but it also set out to transform the partnerships into something new and unique to each school district. Strengthening the teacher pipeline was a mutually beneficial goal for both entities; but to do so, big changes needed to occur within the educator preparation (EPP) program and each local school district.

The educator preparation program at this Texas university prepares teacher candidates for certification in the following areas:

independently from local school districts. Over the years, this positioning has caused a “silo effect”. Communication occurred between the EPP and school districts only when one entity needed something from the other, i.e., student teaching placements, professional development for teachers, etc. The communication tended to be sporadic and often directed between just a few select individuals. While all participants in the communication were friendly and willing to assist, the potential benefits to the EPP and the school districts themselves only scratched the surface. Teacher candidates were able to perform state-mandated field experience requirements in real classrooms within

local school districts with oversight from the program. However, long term goals of building and nurturing the teacher pipeline had not been discussed nor acted upon. This long-term goal of building the teacher pipeline could only be accomplished if a meaningful partnership was built and nurtured where the outcomes were mutually beneficial. The educator preparation program (EPP) was positioned to develop strong and mutually beneficial partnerships between the program and local school districts. First, the faculty at this university who are instrumental in sustaining partnerships with school districts were fully on-board with this goal. The faculty in the program were innovative, action-oriented, and open to self-reflection and improvement, all essential qualities in partnership members. Second, in 2021, the educator preparation program at this university received technical support through a grant that focused on the transformation of the EPP. The assistance provided, in the form of technical support, funding, and networking, enabled the hard work of establishing and maintaining partnerships to begin. Finally, the program had already established a working relationship with the two school districts highlighted in this research over the course of 25 years. The rural school district and the EPP had worked together in various capacities over the years due to the geographical location of both entities. The EPP also had a good relationship and history of student teacher placement with both school districts involved in this case study. Thus, these two school districts were logical choices with whom to begin strengthening partnerships. In summary, there were several positive attributes in play which set the stage for mutually beneficial partnerships between the EPP and school districts to flourish.

## Literature Review

### *Good Teachers Matter*

Multiple factors contribute to the teacher shortage across the United States, and the presence of teachers in classrooms without high-quality or formal training can exacerbate workplace turnover and negatively impact student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). It is a revolving door of hiring non-certified and underqualified teachers who leave after one or two years of teaching. The shortage of teachers can have negative implications for the success of future generations. Without qualified teachers, students do not achieve consistent academic growth (Lee, 2018) which in turn impacts their future livelihoods. Researchers Chetty R., Friedman J. N., & Rockoff J. E. (2013b) highlight the importance of teacher quality to the long-term economic

and social benefits of students. Good teachers make a difference in the lives of students, even into adulthood. National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Educators' (NCATE's) Blue Ribbon Report (2010) states, "The education of teachers in the United States needs to be turned upside down. To prepare effective teachers for 21st century classrooms, teacher education must shift away from a norm which emphasizes academic preparation and coursework loosely linked to school-based experiences" (p. ii). The report goes on to explain that transformation of education cannot take place unless teacher preparation programs and school districts present a unified vision. They must be strategic in their partnerships and share the responsibility of teacher preparation. The report says, "Only when preparation programs become deeply engaged with schools will their clinical preparation become truly robust, and will they be able to support the development of candidates' urgently needed skills and learn what schools really need" (p. 3). Educator preparation programs (EPPs) and their district partners must stop operating in silos, remove the barriers, and engage in effective collaboration beyond the traditional teacher preparation protocols (US PREP, n.d.). The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) calls for yearlong apprenticeships that include high quality coaching experiences with a mentor teacher and supervisor. According to NCTR's levers for equitable teacher residencies, EPP leaders must work in collaborative partnerships with stakeholders (NCTR, 2021).

### Teacher Residency Pathways

National studies on teacher retention consistently show that 20–30% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years. Attrition rates are even higher in high-poverty schools and in hard-to-staff subject areas. However, data from teacher residency programs and district partnerships indicate much higher retention among program completers with 80–90% remaining in the same district after three years, and 70–80% still there after five years (Guha et al., 2016). Therefore, teacher residencies can be a solution to the teacher shortage.

Teacher residencies have gained traction within the last two decades (Afacan, 2022; Polly et al., 2019). Teacher residency is defined as a comprehensive model for teacher preparation which includes a yearlong classroom experience and intentional, collaborative partnering with schools to match residents with experienced and qualified mentor teachers. Residents and mentor teachers are supported and coached throughout the residency through additional training. In many residencies, the resident is provided financial support in the form of a stipend or scholarship (NCTR, 2024; US Prep National Center, 2022).

States around the nation are moving toward policy changes to adopt residency pathways as a valid option or requirement for teacher candidates. “As of 2023, twenty-three states and the District of Columbia support or create teacher residency programs through statute or regulation, and 10 states use funding or other policy mechanisms to support teacher residencies financially. In addition, several pathways adjacent to teacher residencies have also gained traction, including Grow Your Own (GYO) programs and registered teacher apprenticeships” (NCTR, 2024, pp. 1). Valente, Tejwani, and Pedroza (2023) explored data to measure the effectiveness of a university residency model with three different rural school districts. The residency model was designed to align with the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) Levers for Equitable Teacher Residencies (2021). Residents in the three rural school districts were placed in a full year co-teaching placement and were paid a stipend. They were partnered with an expert teacher, a Local Education Agency (LEA) mentor, and a highly qualified university supervisor. During the residency year, the residents taught in a supportive environment and received feedback on their practice. They also continued to complete coursework required for a teaching credential. The educator preparation program (EPP) partnered with the districts and used the residency model to meet district needs. Through their efforts, they were able to build a pipeline to attract and retain a diverse teacher workforce to address teacher shortages in their respective districts. Data revealed numerous positive outcomes including the preparedness self-reported by the residents to teach and the retention of completers in the partner districts. Completers had a three-year retention rate of 93% and a five-year retention rate of 86%, both of which were much higher than the national average. This adds to data collected by University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation National Center (USPREP) and Educational Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) (2022) confirming that resident teachers are significantly more likely to remain teaching in the school district, and even the school, where they completed their residency, thereby reducing teacher turnover in the school district.

Teacher residencies have shown positive results in several additional areas. PK-12 student achievement and outcomes improve when students are taught by a teacher who completed a teacher residency, and these teachers continue to show student growth in year two and three of teaching (Gottlieb, J. & Kirksey, J., 2022). Residencies not only encourage resident teachers to remain in the profession, but these teachers are day-one ready to teach when they finish the residency. University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation National Center (USPREP) and Educational Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC)

(2022) distributed and analyzed surveys to teacher educators and found that educators who completed teacher residency pathways engaged in high-quality components of teacher preparation more often than traditional pathways. In a residency pathway, walkthroughs in resident’s classrooms were conducted more often; delivery of professional development to both residents and mentor teachers was more likely to occur; and teacher educators of a residency were more likely to hold governance meetings with K-12 partnership school districts than traditional pathways (US PREP & EPIC, 2022). The implications of this work illustrate the crucial need for universities to step outside their silos and to collaborate with districts to impact meaningful change.

### **Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and School District Partnerships**

Much of the current research regarding school partnerships is built on the work of John Goodlad (1994) who compiled a list of twenty recommendations to build better schools that started with improving university teacher education programs and clinical teaching experiences in K-12 schools. The AACTE Clinical Practice Commission (CPC) Report (AACTE, 2018) includes a Partnership Proclamation that directly speaks to essential components of partnerships and elaborates that they should be “mutually beneficial partnerships that involve innovative and reflective efforts involving teacher candidates and clinical practice” (Polly, D., Reinke, L.T., & Putman, S.M., 2019, p. 4). More recently, University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP) states that an essential component of a residency is “strong district partnerships that include shared decision-making, aligned expectations for candidate preparation, regular sharing of data, coordinated recruitment, placement, and hiring processes that reflect the needs of the district” (pg. 3, 2023). The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) concurs regarding the importance of nurturing a strong partnership between schools, school districts, and educator preparation programs (NCTR, 2024). Educator preparation programs globally agree partnerships are foundational to the work of teacher education, deeming the concept of strong partnerships as important (Adams, 2023). Providing a teacher pipeline for school districts with a supply of highly qualified and experienced teacher applicants is complex. Certainly, there are multiple factors impacting the pipeline such as access to high quality and affordable educator preparation programs (EPPs), teacher salaries, and opportunities for teachers to grow their leadership opportunities and skills. While each of these is important as evidenced by increased funding and grants from the U.S. Department of Education (2023), they do not

happen in a vacuum. Genuine, transformational partnerships between school districts and educator preparation programs (EPPs) enable these initiatives to be truly effective and are the glue that holds each of these worthwhile initiatives together. Research suggests that successful residencies must include strong partnerships between the educator preparation programs (EPPs) and the district (Guha, R., Hyler, M.E., & Darling-Hammond, L., 2016). It is essential for these entities to collaboratively envision, design, implement, and continuously improve the residency program. A foundation for deep engagement must be created and cultivated through shared vision, strong communication, and regular opportunities for engagement.

The creation of partnerships with school districts is a foundational aspect of teacher preparation. Holen and Yunk (2014) posit partnerships should be characterized by mutually beneficial arrangements that include shared decision-making and resources. Research suggests that candidates are likely to find employment in the schools and districts where they complete student teaching (Krieg, Theobald, & Goldhaber, 2016). Thus, the benefit of strong partnerships includes the development of a recruitment and employment pipeline (Cash, Williams, & Hart, 2020). Collaborative models provide a way to end fragmented approaches to teacher education, thereby strengthening university-school relationships (Bartholomew and Sandholtz, 2009).

According to Darling-Hammond (2014), the components of a strong educator preparation program (EPP) include a common vision, well-defined standards, strong core pedagogical curricula, extended curriculum experiences, the use of performance assessment, and strong relationships. Additionally, collaborative leadership, commitment to change, and openness are essential to building strong, transformational relationships and partnerships (Butcher, Bezzina, & Moran, 2010). Thus, when EPPs and school districts join in collaborative, clinical partnerships, there is a tangible commitment that is essential to the development and preparation of highly qualified teacher candidates (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

The research shows there are mutual benefits to quality partnerships and the collective advancement of the teacher preparation field. According to the findings in a study conducted by Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran (2010), five guiding principles for transformational partnerships emerged. First, partners must work out of a shared purpose where understanding and common goals are aligned. Second, stakeholders must lead collaboratively. They need to build capacity to exercise influence with one another. Third, partners must relate on a basis of trust, which means they should build their relationship by emphasizing commonalities so that trust will emerge and be nurtured.

Fourth, partners must ensure appropriate and adequate resources with attention paid to both financial and human assets. Fifth, all partners must remain open and demonstrate a willingness to learn and change. As has been described, Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran (2010) discuss trust as one of the five guiding components for transformational partnership. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) explored the nature of trust, the meaning of trust, and the dynamics of trust including initiating, sustaining, breaking, and repairing trust. These researchers found that trust is critical in terms of improvement towards transformation. Trust is generative (Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran, 2010). The more participants engage in collaboration, sharing resources, and discussing a shared vision, the stronger the trust is. The existence of trust impacts communication, collaboration, climate, organizational citizenship, collective efficacy, achievement, and effectiveness (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). Given the purpose of this case study and using five guiding principles from Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran (2010) as a foundation, the investigators developed and used the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric tool during the transformation of partnerships. This data offers implications for using the APT Rubric in the transformation of other partnerships.

## **Methodology and Results in Two Phases**

### **Phase 1: An Examination of Impactful Practices to Build Transformational Partnerships**

#### ***Participants***

Participants in phase one of the case studies included 23 stakeholders from the educator preparation program (EPP) and the two school districts who were actively involved in the university and school district partnerships. These members included EPP leadership, EPP faculty, state educational service center employees, and educational school leaders and teachers invested in the partnership. EPP leadership involved all individuals acting as leaders within the program: the Dean of the College, the Associate Dean, the Department Chair, faculty acting as instructors, Directors of Field Supervision, and field supervisors. Additional adjunct EPP faculty who taught courses within the program were included. Two members who worked at the state education service center and who facilitated partnerships within the region were included. The school district partners identified as principals, assistant principals, and cooperating/mentor teachers. Members from the district Human Resources offices were also included in this phase of the study.

### ***Research Design and Data Collection***

The research design for this work was a case study approach using action research (Cohen et al. 2000). The research was conducted in two phases. Specifically, researchers for this study used ex post facto research exemplified by the researchers examining data retrospectively to identify causes, relationships, and themes. In Cohen et al (2000), researchers used their own experiences as participants in the partnership to develop themes and examine findings to understand the nature of partnerships. They were able to identify principles critical to the development and sustainability of transformational partnerships. This, in turn, allowed researchers to justify transformational ways in which the partnership between the school districts and educator preparation program (EPP) worked together. The idea of a retrospective historical narrative approach draws on the experiences of the researchers as key players in transformational partnership work. The research questions for Phase One of the study included the following:

- RQ 1: What impactful practices might the university incorporate/build/facilitate that would engage ISD partners in transformational teacher preparation?
- RQ 2: How/Where might those practices be mutually beneficial to both university and ISD partners to improve the teacher pipeline?

The data collection plan for Phase One included focus group interviews and document reviews. Documents reviewed were Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), Strategic Planning Meeting minutes, and scheduled focus group interviews which included written reflections. Focus groups were conducted with district personnel including district administrators and mentor teachers, educator preparation program (EPP) faculty members, and state education service center facilitators. The researchers arranged four focus groups. Two focus groups consisted of personnel such as district administrators and mentor teachers from each school district. A third focus group included the EPP faculty and leadership. The fourth focus group contained state education support center employees who engaged in facilitating partnerships between EPPs and school districts.

### ***Data Analysis***

Each focus group was asked the same questions (see Figure 1). The focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed. The researchers examined the transcripts of the focus groups, as well as participant's written reflections (see Figure 2) collected at the end of each focus group meeting. Program documents and meeting agendas were

also analyzed. Low-inference coding was utilized to identify critical data and themes among and between the data (Saldaña, J., 2009). Emergent findings were determined. The findings from the pilot were used to inform the next steps regarding the intervention to be used in Phase Two of the action research study.

**Figure 1.** *Focus Group Protocol***Questions:**

- Thinking about ISD/University partnership, what are some of the major policy issues and challenges you see around this work at present? What do you perceive as challenges for ISD partners? University partners?
- How would you describe the role you play, and the role of leadership in general, in engaging in the challenges of the partnership?
- How would you describe the role you plan, and the role of leadership in general, in enhancing the opportunities that arise with partnerships.
- How would you define the work “transformative” as it relates to partnerships?
- Where do you think universities and ISDs share a necessity in building transformative partnerships?
- Explain the role of collaboration in relation to building partnerships? Prompt, if needed: What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_ in a collaborative relationship? (Active listening, respect, follow-up)
- Do you think formal opportunities to collaborate are sufficient or are informal pathways to collaborate important also? Explain your response.
- What are the challenges to collaboration in an ISD/EPP partnership?
- Explain the role of trust in relation to building partnerships. Prompt, if needed: What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_ in a relationship of trust? (sincerity, honesty, authenticity)
- What are the challenges to building trust in an ISD/EPP partnership?
- Explain the role of resources, both human and financial, in the sustainability of a transformational partnership?
- Explain the role of openness to change and learning in a transformative partnership. Prompt, if needed: What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_ in a partnership built around change? (desire for open communication/critical feedback, growth mindset)
- What are the challenges to being open to change in an ISD/EPP partnership?
- What have we forgotten to ask you that you think is important for us to understand these issues?
- Is there anything you would like to elaborate on?
- Are there specific documents that we should collect that would help us better understand partnerships? If so, where are they and how can we get copies?
- Do you have any questions for us?

Figure 2. *Written Reflection*

Directions: Rank the following five practices according to your perception of importance in building a transformative partnership.	
Are you employed at a school district (ISD) or an educator preparation program (EPP)?	
What is your role?	
Rank the following five practices according to your perception of importance in building a transformative partnership from 1 to 5:  1 = Most Important 5 = Least Important	<input type="text"/> Shared Purpose <input type="text"/> Lead collaboratively <input type="text"/> Relate on the basis of trust <input type="text"/> Ensure appropriate and adequate resources <input type="text"/> Open to learning and change
Please explain your thoughts behind your #1 ranking and your #5 ranking.	
Think about a transformational partnership you have had. Please describe what made that partnership transformative. What factors and/or practices made that partnership transformative?	

### *Results from Phase One of the Case Study*

Research Question 1 asked, "What impactful practices might the university incorporate/build/facilitate that would engage ISD partners in transformational teacher preparation?" Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran's (2010) five guiding principles for transformational partnerships emerged within the data collected for Phase One of the study revealing an interwoven nature among the principles. In coding these data, researchers found both the themes and the groups to be interconnected as there was triangulation in these data from each of the focus groups. Commonalities were evident as researchers coded the transcripts of the focus groups. This data informed impactful practices, based on the five guiding principles, that the educator preparation program (EPP) could incorporate to engage school district partners in transformational teacher preparation. Additionally, the data appeared to reveal a sixth principle, specifically, mutual benefits.

Researchers found specific resounding themes in the data that coincided with Butcher, Bezzina, & Moran's (2010)

five principles. The emerging theme of mutual benefits was added to the data analysis. A summary of stakeholders' definitions of these themes based on interviews and written reflections follows. The list is self-titled "5+1 Principles of Partnership".

1. *Trust* is critical to the partnership and is both pivotal and foundational. You must do what you say you will do.
2. *Leading collaboratively* is essential on the part of all stakeholders. Silos must be broken down.
3. *Shared purpose and vision* are born out of collaboration and working together in partnership. The shared purpose should be revisited often.
4. *Adequate resources* must be identified, and both human and financial costs should be considered by all parties.
5. *An openness to learning* must be intrinsic, as there can be no impact or transformation without it.
6. All stakeholders should feel there is a *mutual benefit* to be gained through the partnership as it is important to listen and understand.

Some challenges to this work were apparent throughout the interviews and focus groups. Researchers noted perceived

inequities and slights in these data. For example, districts wanted to know why the educator preparation program (EPP) was not contributing to funding, not realizing the cost involved in hiring field supervisors. During one focus group interview, an ISD partner stated, “Better understanding and transparency about the EPP’s funding source could have been stated up front.” Another ISD partner addressed “money” as a challenge for the ISD. The lack of communication about funding sources led to the perception that the partnership was not equally beneficial. Another challenge could be seen in the competing agendas of the EPP and the districts as each appeared to focus on their own needs. One EPP partner reflected that, “It is hard to have set meetings with district administrators as only one or two show up or do not stay for the entire meeting.” Finally, the nature of each entity faced its own set of challenges. The EPP continually dealt with bureaucracy, policy, constraints around state requirements, and a lack of growth mindsets on the part of a few faculty members and/or upper administration. Districts faced challenges around lack of time, experience, and an unwillingness to change.

Research Question 2 asked, “How/Where might those practices be mutually beneficial to both the university and ISD partners to improve the teacher pipeline?” Based on

the findings described, the 5+1 Principles of Partnership have the potential to inform partnership-building practices that might be mutually beneficial to both the educator preparation program and school district partners to improve the teacher pipeline. The researchers used these principles to inform subsequent work with transformational partnerships through governance meetings and other partnership meetings, as appropriate.

### *Conclusions from Phase One*

Based on the data collected during Phase One, the researchers identified specific next steps regarding the partnerships. First, the structure of future partnership meetings needs to be framed around the aforementioned themes. As challenges arise in the partnership, keeping these themes at the forefront of partnership meeting agendas could avert potential issues and provide a space for discussion to occur. The [Assessing Partnership Transformation](#) (APT) Rubric (see Figure 1), was constructed to assess the health of partnerships based on the 5+1 Principles of Partnership. The researchers used the APT Rubric to guide data collection during Phase Two.

**Figure 3. Rubric**

<b>Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric</b> ©2023				
Assess the partnership relationship versus the individual institutions or entities that make up the partnership. You are not assessing the players or participants, but you are assessing the state of the partnership.				
Below is a brief description of each component that makes up a transformational partnership:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared Purpose = common goals</li> <li>• Lead Collaboratively = shared leadership; everyone is active</li> <li>• Relate on a Basis of Trust = honest relationships</li> <li>• Adequate Resources = includes both financial and human assets</li> <li>• Open to Learning and Change = open to growth and development</li> <li>• Mutual Benefits = beneficial to both parties</li> </ul>				
<b>Name of University or School District:</b>				
<b>Circle One:</b> Human Resources    Administrator    Mentor Teacher    Site Coordinator    Other				
<b>Is this your first year in partnership?</b> <b>Circle One:</b> Yes    No				
	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>
<b>Shared Purpose</b>	A shared purpose has not been stated, or only one party is privy to the common goal.	Both parties understand the common goals. The goals are beginning	Both parties can state the common goals. The goals drive the partnership.	Both parties can elaborate on common goals, and the goals clearly

		to drive the partnership.		drive the partnership.
<b>Lead Collaboratively</b>	One or two people do the work and make decisions. There is not a sense of collaboration.	Only specific members of the partnership are active and complete the work.	Most members in the partnership are active and interact as colleagues to complete the stated work.	All individuals in the partnership are active and interact as colleagues to drive the stated work.
<b>Relate on a basis of trust</b>	It is unclear whether members are honest brokers. Challenging conversations are avoided or left unresolved.	Only specific members interact as honest brokers. There is hesitancy about having challenging conversations.	Most participants interact as honest brokers. There is some sense of being able to have challenging conversations without negative consequences.	All participants interact as honest brokers. There is a strong sense of being able to have challenging conversations without negative consequences.
<b>Adequate Resources</b>	Members of the partnership are not willing or able to support each other with the use of human and/or financial assets. There is a perception that the contribution of resources is unequal and unfair.	Members of the partnership are not consistently willing or able to support each other with the use of human and/or financial assets. There may be some perception of unequal or unfair contribution of resources.	Members of the partnership are not willing but not always fully able to support each other with the use of human and/or financial assets. The contribution by both parties is mostly perceived as equitable and fair.	All members of the partnership are willing or able to support each other with the use of human and/or financial assets. Both partners contribute resources that are perceived as equitable and fair.
<b>Open to Learning and Change</b>	One or two members of the partnership perceive growth as opportunity and/or it is not a priority within the partnership.	Specific members of the partnership perceive growth as opportunity, but growth may not be seen as a priority within the partnership.	Most partners perceive growth as opportunity and as a priority within the partnership.	All partners perceive growth as opportunity and approach it with enthusiasm and as a priority within the partnership.
<b>Mutual Benefits</b>	It is perceived by most members of the partnership that one or neither organization is benefitting from the partnership.	Specific members perceive the fruits of the partnership as marginally advantageous to one of the organizations.	Most members perceive the fruits of the partnership as advantageous to the organizations within the partnership.	All members strongly perceive the fruits of the partnership as advantageous to all organizations within the partnership.
<b>Please provide evidence related to a weakness or a strength you indicated above.</b>				

*Adapted from the Guiding Principles of Transformational Partnerships (Butcher, Bezzina, & Moran, 2010)*

## Phase Two: A Deeper Dive Into Transformative Partnership Practices

### *Participants*

There were fewer participants in Phase Two of the case study. Phase Two included twelve stakeholders actively involved in the university and school district partnerships. Education service center employees did not participate in Phase Two due to finishing their specific work with the partnerships during the prior year. The stakeholders in Phase Two included educator preparation program (EPP) leadership, EPP faculty, and school district members invested in the partnership. EPP leadership involved all individuals acting as leaders within the program: the Dean of the College, the Associate Dean, the Department Chair, and Directors of Field Supervision. EPP faculty included instructors of EPP coursework and field supervisors. The school district partners were identified as principals, assistant principals, and cooperating/mentor teachers.

### *Research Design and Data Collection*

Throughout the course of Phase Two, the researchers found that establishing meaningful partnerships with regional districts truly takes effort. Partnership transformation is founded upon relationship building and nurturing that relationship. Phase One had a newness and excitement about it that Phase Two did not. Phase Two focused on steps to sustain the partnerships. The purpose of

### **Table 2.** *Partnership Meeting Descriptions*

Phase Two was to further investigate impactful practices that the educator preparation program (EPP) might incorporate to engage school district partners and facilitate transformational teacher preparation in an effort to improve the teacher pipeline by using the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric. Researchers developed the rubric based on the 5+1 Principles of Partnership found in these data during Phase One of this case study. For Phase Two of the case study, researchers focused on the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How might the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric inform the EPP in building and facilitating ISD partners in transformational teacher preparation?
- RQ 2: What challenges were identified by the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric, and how might the EPP and ISD partners address those challenges?

The APT rubric was incorporated during formal partnership meetings throughout the new academic year to capture the voices of partnership stakeholders and address challenges as they arose. Throughout Academic Year (AY) 2023-2024, four partnership meetings were held that included stakeholders from both the educational preparation program (EPP) and the district partners. Researchers used the implementation plan outlined in the table below to assess the health of the partnerships and gather follow-up data around the 5+1 Principles of Partnership:

Partnership Meeting	Description of Meeting Agenda
1	Researchers share results of these data collected in Phase 1. Then, they will use the APT Rubric to capture stakeholder voices regarding the partnership.
2	Researchers share any challenges captured via the APT Rubric and collaboratively make a plan to address those challenges.
3	Researchers continue to work collaboratively to make a plan to address any challenges as needed.
4	Researchers again use the APT Rubric to capture stakeholder voices regarding the partnership. These data are used to inform the partnerships' plan for the following academic year as well as a temperature check for progress made on any areas of concern within the partnership relationship.

### Data Analysis

Researchers triangulated data collected from the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric, site visits to district campuses, as well as minutes taken during partnership meetings. Site visits involved visits to the school district campus(es) where one or more educator preparation program (EPP) residents were placed. EPP leadership, field supervisors, and school district leadership observed the residents as they assisted and/or taught in their classrooms. Each site visit participant provided a short, informal evaluation of the resident's teaching during the observation. The results were discussed during the following partnership meeting and were used as data to discuss the success of the resident/mentor teacher match as

well as the success of the overall partnership. Once data was collected from all three data points, the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric, partnership meeting minutes, and site visit observations. Low-inference coding was utilized to identify critical data and themes that emerged. The findings were used to inform the next steps in the work regarding partnership transformation.

### Results from Phase Two of the Case Study

Research Question 1 asked, "How might the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric inform the educator preparation program (EPP) in building and facilitating school district partners in transformational teacher preparation?" These data results are delineated in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3.** Ratings on Strength of Partnership Between EPP and Rural ISD

Themes	EPP(N=2)	A	P	D	NI	ISD(N=5)	A	P	D	NI
Shared Purpose		1	1	0	0		2	2	1	0
Lead Collaboratively		1	1	0	0		1	3	1	0
Trust		2	0	0	0		3	2	0	0
Resources		1	1	0	0		0	4	1	0
Open to Change		1	1	0	0		3	1	1	0
Mutual Benefits		2	0	0	0		2	3	1	0

Note. A=Accomplished, P=Proficient, D=Developing, NI=Needs Improvement

Trust and Mutual Benefits are seen as the strongest components according to these data by both the EPP and the rural school district. Qualitative written data was also collected on the APT Rubric and supports these findings. One EPP partner supported the high ratings of Trust and Mutual Benefits by commenting, "I believe the partnership between the district and the program is strong. Both parties are eager to work together to bolster the quality of educators produced so that they are successful in the classroom." While none of the components were rated

poorly by the stakeholders, Leading Collaboratively was not strong. A comment from one ISD partner supports this conclusion with a comment about communication which is needed to build the capacity to influence one another, i.e., Lead Collaboratively. "A weakness is ongoing communication between the two partners." The qualitative and quantitative data collected on the APT Rubric provided validation of results.

**Table 4.** Ratings on Strength of Partnership Between EPP and Suburban ISD

Themes	EPP(N=2)	A	P	D	NI	ISD(N=3)	A	P	D	NI
Shared Purpose		0	2	0	0		1	2	0	0

Lead Collaboratively	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	0
Trust	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Resources	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Open to Change	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Mutual Benefits	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0

*Note.* A=Accomplished, P=Proficient, D=Developing, NI=Needs Improvement

Resources and Open to Change are viewed as the strongest components, according to APT Rubric data collected by both the EPP and the suburban school district. Qualitative written data was also collected on the APT Rubric and supports these findings. One ISD partner addressed the component of Resources. “Everyone benefits. All parties involved have a reward in the end. Growing your own program and hiring well-trained staff = WIN.” Another ISD partner wrote a comment related to the component Open to Change by stating, “The needs of the campus (teacher quality) are frequently discussed. Program is tailoring to fit those needs.” A separate ISD partner supported Open to Change by writing, “The trust that is needed fuels the growth with the students in mind. Authentic feedback is valued by both entities.” The qualitative and quantitative data collected on the APT Rubric provided validation of results.

Research Question 2 asked “What challenges were identified by the Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric, and how might the EPP and school district partners address those challenges?” According to these data, the challenges identified during Phase Two clearly indicated that transformative partnerships require the investment of time and intentionality of practice. Additionally, school districts have differing challenges, so the partnership between each school district and the EPP is unique. To address these unique challenges of each school district, the educator preparation program (EPP) and school district partners should be mindful of the characteristics that are instrumental in facilitating and supporting a transformative partnership yet invest the time and intentional collection of partnership voices to address individual concerns. The educator preparation program (EPP) intends to address this challenge through the continued use of the APT Rubric to formalize the practice and assess the ongoing status of their partnerships.

## Discussion

The findings from this study have significant implications for the educator preparation program examined in this case, as well as broader relevance for educator preparation programs and school district partnerships more generally. The results show that districts and teacher preparation programs that are built on engaged partnerships can have a transformative impact when preparing new classroom teachers. For the regional university conducting this study, the data informed the educator preparation program (EPP) of transformative practices (i.e., 5+1 Principles of Partnership) that could be used to develop and strengthen mutually beneficial partnerships between EPPs and school district partners. Labeling the strands and/or characteristics was an important first step in the process of transforming the partnerships. The 5+1 Principles of Partnership created a common language and sense of actionable steps which then raised awareness of the goal of transforming the partnership. Simply raising awareness created a growth mindset among the partnership members.

The impact of transformational partnerships is further enhanced when all parties are intentional. The Assessing Partnership Transformation (APT) Rubric that was developed during Phase Two of the study provided a tool to allow each voice in the partnership to be heard using the common language and actionable steps of the 5+1 Principles of Partnership. The APT Rubric directly addresses Polly, et al.’s (2019) synthesis of the AACTE Clinical Practice Commission Report (2018), Goodlad’s Postulates (1994), and NAPDS Nine Essentials of Professional Development Schools (2008) which states, “school-university partnerships should be grounded in reflective practice where data, current innovations, and past experiences are considered when evaluating and planning the directions of the partnership” (p. 6, 2019). A benefit of the APT Rubric is that it can be flexibly utilized. It can be used to provide an initial assessment about characteristics of the partnership but can also be used during regular assessment periods as a progress monitoring tool. The

educator preparation program (EPP) in this study will continue to incorporate the APT Rubric into partnership meetings to amplify stakeholder voices. Partners will be able to celebrate growth or address concerns by using this progress monitoring tool.

While the study yielded promising results, it is not without limitations. The restricted scope and relatively small sample size underscore the need for expanded future research involving a broader range of universities and school district partners engaged in collaborative efforts. Future studies should aim to validate and extend the findings by applying the APT Rubric within diverse contexts and across varying models of teacher preparation and district partnerships.

The end goal for all educators is to improve academic outcomes for PK-12 students. The present study contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that when teacher preparation programs and school districts partner in meaningful ways, new teachers can be better prepared for the classroom. The significance of hiring good teachers to reach this end goal cannot be overstated. There are many challenges to sustain a strong teacher pipeline that feeds good, highly qualified teachers into PK-12

classrooms, but nurturing partnerships between EPPs and school districts will enable that pipeline to prosper.

### **Conclusion**

A range of factors that contribute to building a robust teacher pipeline through the collaboration of an educator preparation program (EPP) and rural and suburban independent school districts (ISDs) were examined within this study. The result of this work has potential to contribute to the growing body of literature on educational partnerships, with a specific focus on addressing the critical challenge of transitioning from transactional partnerships to truly transformative collaborations. The findings underscore the significant benefits that transformative partnerships between EPPs and school districts can offer in strengthening teacher pipeline capacity.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of trust, shared accountability, and ongoing and consistent communication. By engaging in consistent dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, EPPs and school districts can better respond to the evolving needs of the teaching profession. This work provides entry into the discourse on how partnerships can be leveraged to address critical issues in teacher preparation and retention.

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