

## Improving Educator Preparation Working Group Meeting Notes

Task Force Members Present: Vania Amado, Brandon Enos, Linda Galvan, Roland Hernandez, Valerie Haywood, Chane Rascoe, Gregory Rodriguez, Rick Rodriguez, Jean Streepey, Josue Tamarez Torres, and Faye Urich

Staff Members Present: Emily Carrizalez, Marilyn Cook, Zoraida Martinez, and Pam Wetherington

Invited Panelists: Stacey Edmondson, Becky Hampton, Anthony Hernandez, Elda Martinez, Rene Ruiz, and Fernando Valle

### Welcome, Introductions, and Identifying the Purpose and Goals

Marilyn Cook, Director of Educator Certification, welcomed the Improving Teacher Preparation Teacher Vacancy Task Force (TVTF) members, and the working group's lead facilitators introduced themselves:

- Emily Carrizalez, Education Specialist, Texas Education Agency (TEA)
- Marilyn Cook, Director of Educator Certification, TEA
- Chane Rascoe, Superintendent, Lampasas ISD
- Jean Streepey, Teacher, Business Design and Leadership at Highland Park High School
- Pam Wetherington, Director of Educator Preparation and Testing

Following the lead facilitators' introductions, TVTF members attending working group session, Improving Teacher Preparation, introduced themselves.

After introductions among the group had concluded, Ms. Cook identified the working group's purpose and goals.

### Debrief June's Teacher Vacancy Task Force (TVTF) Meeting

Dr. Chane Rascoe provided an overview of the five areas the working group had noted at their June working group meeting as areas to discuss further and draft recommendations. The areas were:

- Strengthening Educator Preparation Program (EPP)/Local Education Agency (LEA) partnerships
- Providing consistent support for new teachers
- Increasing the quality of teacher preparation to support teacher readiness and retention
- Improving alternative certification pathways, particularly for candidates in the teacher of record roles
- Implement incentives and reduce barriers for EPPs, teacher candidates, and potential candidates

### Discuss Pre-Work: Articles Aligned to Topics Coming out of June's TVTF Meeting

Ms. Jean Streepey reviewed the prework discussion questions to guide the conversation:

- What recommendations, strategies, practices, and/or policies noted in one or more of the pre-work materials caught your attention?
- How would you prioritize these?

- What systems of change would it take to implement and scale these across all teacher preparation programs?

One TVTF member identified areas in which new teachers, specifically alternatively certified teachers need more support (e.g., classroom management, relationship building, lesson cycle, data-driven instruction, evidence-based pedagogical practices) from their EPPs and how this support could help retain teachers.

A TVTF member asked, “Are there any good experiences the participants have had in the EPPs that could be scaled or expanded on?” One TVTF member answered by explaining how Texas’ residency model has yielded positive results in pre-service teachers’ practices as it provides them with the time, experience, and support to learn what they need so they are effective Day 1.

Ms. Streepey pushed the group to consider if there should be a list of non-negotiables (e.g., lesson cycle, relationship building) that EPPs must provide.

A TVTF member shared how all EPPs (both traditional and alternative certification programs) need to improve and that although they may have the content knowledge, oftentimes they do not have the foundational skills to be fully successful in today’s classrooms. The TVTF member went on further to note how their district has begun collaborating with EPPs to partner on new teachers’ onboarding processes. By doing so, the partners have realized their new teachers need extensive, differentiated, and sustainable mentorship throughout the year.

To add to the conversation, another TVTF member shared how it would be helpful if there were a consistent approach (i.e., common bar) to what pre-service teachers need to know before entering the classroom. They went on further to note that there is so much variety in new teachers’ skill levels (i.e., inconsistency).

In response to creating a consistent approach, a TVTF member warned other TVTF members that each pre-service teacher comes with a different set of skills. He further cautioned the idea of moving toward a one-size-fits-all, but instead, EPPs need to focus on how to differentiate their program design to meet the individual needs of pre-service teachers in partnership with their LEAs. The TVTF member further noted that EPPs must provide pre-service teachers with the foundational knowledge and skills and encourage the informed-autonomy to pivot to meet their students’ needs.

Another TVTF member agreed that it could not be a one-size-fits-all, but there is room to provide consistent training and mentorship to all new teachers. An example of this would be: Each month the new teachers have breakfast with the administrator to build and sustain their relationship.

One TVTF member stated that when new teachers are hired, they are assigned non-teacher tasks (e.g., coaching softball) and challenged the group to consider allowing new teachers to only focus on teaching and not overload them with non-teaching tasks. Another TVTF member affirmed this by stating how they have observed new teachers feeling overwhelmed because of the demands of a new teacher and additional tasks being assigned.

The conversation shifted to the importance of mentorship for new teachers. One TVTF member stated that candidates are often assigned to a mentor or cooperating teacher who is not a strong mentor and noted how Texas, either at the local or state level, should identify a set of specific criteria for what mentoring pre-service teachers should look and sound like in Texas so that all new teachers are supported equally across the state.

## Review Oversight for Developing Recommendations

Dr. Pam Wetherington brought everyone's attention back to the five areas that were to be discussed during the working group session so that working group members could begin to draft recommendations, which would continue to be refined in the following months, leading to the target goal of final recommendations in February of 2023.

Ms. Cook then went on to outline the four different pillars of oversight for potential recommendations. They were: (1) Statutory (Legislation), (2) Regulatory (State Board for Educator Certification), (3) Practices at the state level (e.g., Commissioner, The Higher Education Coordinator Board (THECB), and TEA staff), and (4) Practices or policies at the EPP and/or district level. Ms. Cook went on to note how the four pillars were essential to identify the right path for recommending improvements to teacher preparation.

Ms. Cook asked Dr. Stacey Edmondson to provide an example of how her EPP has worked to strengthen EPP/LEA partnerships that have yielded improvements. First, her EPP began to collaborate with LEAs to fortify their alliance. By doing so, the partnership decided to modify their traditional clinical teaching model and implement a teacher residency model, which provides pre-service teachers with extensive preparation and support for an entire year. In their EPP, all clinical teachers participate in the yearlong residency (i.e., 2 full semesters in the classroom with a cooperating teacher), and the activities within the residency include: (1) Simulating the role of a teacher-of-record while working under the guidance of a cooperating teacher and a university supervisor; and (2) Being a part of the school's teaching and non-teaching tasks (i.e., integrated into the entire school culture). During the yearlong residency the EPP meets with the school's administration team to engage in relevant, authentic conversations such as: (1) how the pre-service teachers are progressing; (2) what the data is telling them in terms of pre-service teachers' performances and student growth. By engaging in these conversations, the EPP and LEA partner(s) can identify the needs of the schools, which inevitably affects the pre-service teachers' professional growth.

## Round 1: Breakout Session

Each of the breakout sessions in Round 1 had one area of focus, and the areas of focus were based on the areas identified from June's TVTF meeting. The areas were:

- Strengthening Educator Preparation Program(EPP)/Local Education Agency (LEA) partnerships
- Providing consistent support for new teachers
- Increasing the quality of teacher preparation to support teacher readiness and retention
- Improving alternative certification pathways, particularly for candidates in the teacher of record roles
- Implement incentives and reduce barriers for EPPs, teacher candidates, and potential candidates

Listed below is a summary of the discussion outcomes that occurred in each of the breakout rooms for Round 1.

### ***Outcomes from Session #1: Strengthen EPP/LEA Partnerships***

The small group discussed residency models and if implementing statewide would be a feasible task. The group also discussed the challenges in higher education and how they could incentivize systemic changes at an equitable pace to keep up with the needs of PK-12 partners. The group posed a question: What would state funding (e.g., compensation for clinical teachers) for residency models look like, and what would necessary legislation look like? One TVTF member noted that funding could come from grants, state funding, and/or employing pre-service teachers as educational aides. One TVTF member discussed how the group should be cognizant of the difference between smaller and larger districts and noted that the Education Service Centers could be a valuable resource for small districts.

### ***Outcomes from Session #2: Provide Consistent Supports for New Teachers***

The small group discussed the following supports that could be implemented statewide:

- Individualized, structured, scaffolded support for all new teachers that align with new teacher responsibilities
- Establish a statewide mentor training (e.g., aligned to the TTESS model so that field supervisors and mentors used a common language and expectation when evaluating pre-service teachers)
- Identify and implement relevant, evidence-based teaching strategies that meet the needs of school communities at a systemic level, so new teachers have some shared experience

The small group further discussed the importance of the mentor teacher and why there was a need for a common statewide training. A TVTF member explained the complexity of matching candidates with mentors and noted the SBEC rule to assign mentors but acknowledged EPPs are at the mercy of who is willing to serve in this role. This TVTF member further explained that feedback provided by mentors and field supervisors oftentimes were not aligned; hence, the need to have a common language and expectation of what pre-service teachers should be demonstrating.

### ***Outcomes from Session #3:***

#### ***Increase Quality of Teacher Preparation to Support Teacher Readiness and Retention***

The small group discussed the need for pre-service teachers to spend more time in schools before being a teacher of record. The group also discussed the need for more effective, consistent mentoring of early-career teachers. Additionally, with many candidates working full-time during preparation, the group discussed the need to fund teacher education and novice teacher apprenticeships so more candidates can afford high-quality pathways. The group indicated a need for research on how funding can be allocated to candidates pursuing teacher preparation through high-quality programs rather than just the quickest, fastest path to a teacher of record salary. A TVTF member used the medical model as an example for how pre-service teachers can be paid for clinical teaching and noted, "If we follow this model, we need to recognize the need to provide commensurate pay."

### ***Outcomes from Session #4:***

#### ***Improve Alternative Certification Pathway, Particularly for Candidates in Teacher-of-Record Roles***

The small group discussed the critical importance of the field supervisor, mentor, and school leaders providing high-leverage, timely, consistent feedback. This group's recommendations included: (1) Identify and use enhanced data-driven instructional practices in preparation; (2) Provide funding to address the cost of living for pre-service teachers during their preparation; (3) Select quality mentors and provide sufficient compensation for them so pre-service teachers receive high-quality mentorship, feedback, supervision, and support during their experience.

One TVTF member asked for more information about pay for mentor teachers. Another member shared that it was difficult for EPPs to assign mentors and identified the need to provide high-quality training to the mentor and provide them with a stipend for their participation; by doing so, this could help identify, assign, and retain high-quality mentors. A TVTF member affirmed this sentiment and noted how education is both a skill and knowledge-based profession and should be compensated accordingly.

### ***Outcomes from Session #5: Implement Incentives and Reduce Barriers for EPPs, Teacher Candidates, and Potential Candidates***

The small group discussed financing residency, specifically financing residency in critical need areas (e.g., bilingual, special education, math, science). For example, one TVTF member shared the need for bilingual teachers across the state and how funding (e.g., pay for bilingual teachers' exams) would help recruit and retain pre-service teachers in the preparation program so they pursue standard certification. The group also discussed the different pathways to certification, stating that the opportunity for choice in a preparation pathway also incentivizes the profession and raises the bar for EPPs seeking to prepare pre-service teachers for certification. A TVTF member offered a recommendation around funding for examinations and noted how the funding options should be a partnership model between the EPP and candidate and structured in a manner that supports the continuation of talent being added to the teacher pipeline.

This group also discussed the importance of strong mentors and the need to compensate accordingly. This was one area in which the group would like to investigate further and address the question: Who is using the mentor allotment that TEA offers?

### **Round 2: Breakout Session**

Listed below is a summary of the discussions that occurred in each of the breakout rooms for Round 2.

#### ***Outcomes from Session #1: Strengthen EPP/LEA Partnerships***

After convening for round 2 of the breakout session, a TVTF member stressed the importance of remembering that teachers are the experts in the classroom and that we bring honor to the profession by respecting the teacher voice and including teachers in the conversations about the profession. The group concurred that there is a need for strong, ongoing professional development around what students need; what communities need; and how data can be used to reflect, revise, retain, and improve. Task Force members agreed that there is a common desire among EPPs and LEAs to collaborate on supporting students and the teachers who serve them. Task Force members commented on the need for strategic mentorship and an investment in time to

support the true pairing of teachers and mentors. There were several comments on the need for paid clinical experiences and the option to build on a year-long apprenticeship model. Task Force members also commented that having time to experience teaching in a variety of settings would be invaluable and would support retention. Several Task Force members emphasized the need to explore funding options to help scale partnerships and residencies across the state. Task Force members asked, “How do we articulate in meaningful ways that resonate with EPPs and LEAs and allow us to translate and transition from paper to practice?” Task Force members suggested we explore all possible options for funding high-quality preparation and increased flexibility in use of funds already allocated to EPPs and LEAs who are implementing best practices related to pre-service practice.

### ***Outcomes from Session #2: Provide Consistent Supports for New Teachers***

Several TVTF members had a chance to share their thoughts and ideas. They discussed reimagining mentorship for new teachers and teachers in new content areas. A TVTF member posed the following for the group to consider and investigate further:

- Everyone needs mentorship, so can we reimagine what successful mentorship should be?
- Could new teacher induction be redesigned and normed to have a standard agreement about what’s universal and specific to the LEA?
- Could mentorship be side-by-side and not just a check-in?
- What are we doing to differentiate mentorship?

Another TVTF member also mentioned that mentorship takes time. He followed with these questions:

- How can we carve out the necessary time to provide high-quality mentorship?
- Could we capitalize on experienced educators, while leaning in on the retired educator community?

TVTF members shared sentiments of what others in the group shared, noting how there is room for more shared responsibility (e.g., joint planning and professional development) between EPPs and LEAs to prepare and support pre-service teachers. An example of this is induction for new teachers, which could be an opportunity to provide consistent training and support.

Lastly, the group addressed the teacher apprenticeship as an option for receiving funding.

### ***Outcomes from Session #3: Increase Quality of Teacher Preparation to Support Teacher Readiness and Retention***

During the second round of breakout sessions, the small group began to identify recommendations to increase the quality of teacher preparation. One TVTF member recommended that specific coursework (e.g., special education, ESL) be required of all teacher candidates to ensure they are prepared to meet the needs of all students across Texas. Another member recommended that EPPs have common expectations for pre-service teachers before being admitted to the program and throughout the program before recommending pre-service teachers for their standard certificate. Some examples of these expectations were: (1) mindset; (2) mission alignment; (3) previous experience; and (4) coachable. Another TVTF member noted the importance of collecting data (e.g., percentage of teachers who are remaining in the profession beyond their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of

teaching if participating in a residency program). By having a complete data set, this could help convince the legislature to fund yearlong residency programs across the state.

#### ***Outcomes from Session #4: Improve Alternative Certification Pathway, Particularly for Candidates in Teacher-of-Record Roles***

The residency model was a consistent topic for all groups, and this group continued to discuss this within their breakout session. They shared how the residency model intentionally pairs pre-service teachers with mentors through interviews and a vetting process. Further, the model supports the notion that pre-service teachers have mentors with a proven record of accomplishment.

#### ***Outcomes from Session #5: Implement Incentives and Reduce Barriers for EPPs, Teacher Candidates, and Potential Candidates***

Several task force members commented on the idea of state support for certification pathways and opportunities to lift restrictions in time commitments, processes, requirements, and other challenges that result in some certification candidates walking away from the profession. TVTF members spoke of short-term and long-term processes for teacher preparation and emphasized the importance of having classroom and contextual knowledge to effectively plan lessons for increased knowledge and student growth. There was consensus around the importance of partnership and continuing to find ways to expand and maintain those critical EPP/LEA connections.

#### **Closing: Synthesis of Breakout Room Discussions and Draft Initial Recommendations**

After two rounds of breakout room discussions that were focused on the five key areas, TVTF members had an opportunity to share their initial recommendations. It should be noted that the TVTF working group, Improve Teacher Preparation, is committed to prioritizing and further discussing the recommendations at their October TVTF meeting. The initial recommendations identified were: (1) Increase practice-based experiences (e.g., more opportunities to practice and receive feedback in authentic settings before clinical teaching and internship; require yearlong residencies for all pre-service teachers; require intensive practice for pre-service teachers before being recommended for an intern certificate); (2) Increase the pipeline (e.g., incentivize difficult-to-staff positions such as bilingual, special education, math, science by providing targeted support to enter and remain in the program and covering the cost of exam fees; Utilize Grow Your Own (GYO) provisions to recruit and retain local talent and industry-based certification (IBC) options to attract more high school students into the education profession; maintain choice in teacher preparation pathways – honor the diversity of teacher preparation and ensure that it matters and impacts positively; identify “families of educators” and tap them for promotional segments on the value-add of becoming a teacher and the positive impact around longevity in the profession); (3) Norm on expectations between LEAs and EPPs for preparedness and readiness for aspiring educators (e.g., clarify roles and responsibilities of LEA and EPP contributors as relates to recruitment, preparation, instruction, and support; establish a common language for LEA/EPP/educator/and aspiring educators; develop a statewide, high-quality mentorship program; develop a statewide New Teacher Academy); (4) Increase the quality and consistency of teacher preparation (e.g., formalize statewide use of the

Effective Preparation Framework; adopt an improved pedagogical exam/performance-based assessment for state licensure (e.g., edTPA); revise the intern certificate pathway so that interns have more support and practice-based experiences).

In closing, TVTF members agreed that there is a need to incentivize the profession and improve teacher preparation but also stated there must be clarity around the root cause of the problem related to teacher vacancies.