



**SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY**

# **CASE STUDY:**

**TRANSFORMING EDUCATOR PREPARATION  
THROUGH CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION**



Renewing Educator Preparation

A grayscale background image showing a group of young children in a classroom setting. They are looking towards the camera with neutral expressions. The image is slightly out of focus, emphasizing the text overlay.

## WHAT IS A TEACHER RESIDENCY?

National organizations like the [Pathways Alliance](#)<sup>1</sup> and [US PREP](#)<sup>2</sup> have codified definitions of residency. Taken together, the essential elements of residency include:

- A yearlong clinical teaching experience that allows teacher candidates for 3-5 days per week to experience a complete school year before becoming a teacher of record, including strong supervision, regular feedback from highly effective trained mentor teachers, coaching, and professional development;
- Highly effective mentor teachers that support candidates via co-teaching models, gradual release of instructional responsibilities, and regular observation and coaching; and
- Strong [district partnerships](#)<sup>3</sup> 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

Residents typically receive financial support during their residency in exchange for a commitment to teach in the sponsoring district upon completion. Research has found that graduates of residency programs are better prepared, more diverse, and stay in the teaching profession longer than those who were prepared through other pathways.

1. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TvzvpgoKozwn3D-f09AHafDrQ4aSnGm7/view>

2. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/11CLYL08vZRCREA5\\_DTDKkj1ATTYnZkgdK7ss3xrTjco/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11CLYL08vZRCREA5_DTDKkj1ATTYnZkgdK7ss3xrTjco/edit)

3. [https://youtu.be/LVjWlfpttQU?si=QpekLMdd\\_kqT107x](https://youtu.be/LVjWlfpttQU?si=QpekLMdd_kqT107x)



# T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

## BACKGROUND

03

## REDESIGNING THE SUPERVISOR ROLE

04

## CROSS- DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

06

## DEEPENING DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

07

## STRATEGIC STAFFING

08

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

09

# WORKING WITH US PREP

San Diego State University is a part of a growing number of universities partnered with University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP)<sup>4</sup>, a national coalition of teacher preparation institutions<sup>5</sup>, to implement scaled and sustainable yearlong teacher residencies. The transformation of these preparation programs to a yearlong residency includes reallocating, reducing, and reinvesting existing college resources, capacity, and budgets to scale and sustain the residency approach to preparation across all programs and pathways. This transformation builds from the foundational definition of residencies to include even more robust elements such as:

- Site Coordinators<sup>6</sup> who help bridge the university (faculty/instructor coursework) and the district (selecting/coaching highly effective mentor teachers, selecting clinical placement sites, completing more regular and impactful observation and coaching cycles with candidates, leading governance, etc.);
- Practice-based coursework aligned to the program's instructional framework (e.g. T-TESS) and clinical fieldwork that supports candidates in effectively using high-quality instructional materials<sup>7</sup> to best develop Pk-12 students;
- Consistent use of teacher candidate evaluation instruments to measure teacher candidates' competencies and implementation of standards-aligned instruction; and
- Collecting, analyzing, and using data for continuous improvement<sup>8</sup> via routine data use structures and protocols

***US PREP's mission is to attract, train and retain high-quality, racially diverse teachers for underserved communities across the country and ensure they are ready to teach effectively on day one.***



# BACKGROUND

California has struggled for years with acute teacher shortages. This trend was exacerbated by the pandemic, resulting in higher teacher turnover and fewer new entrants. The state saw a 16% decline in the number of newly credentialed teachers last year (2022-23), leaving districts across the state struggling to fill vacancies. The demand for teachers has led to a sizable increase in the number of emergency permits and substandard credentials that don't require sufficient training. Nearly 5,800 interns and 6,100 teachers on emergency permits were teaching without preliminary credentials in 2020-21, the most recent school year data is available. And, by 2025, another [15,000 credentialed teachers are expected to be needed](#)<sup>9</sup> as transitional kindergarten is expanded across the state. To address these shortages, the state is investing heavily in programs to recruit, prepare and retain teachers for California schools, including [\\$350 million grant funds to launch and expand teacher residency programs](#)<sup>10</sup>, and [subsidies to offset tuition and living expenses](#)<sup>11</sup> for teacher candidates. Residency grants have led to a significant increase in the number of candidates prepared through the residency model, and an increasingly diverse teacher workforce, according to a [report by the Learning Policy Institute](#).<sup>12</sup>

San Diego State University (SDSU), one of 23 institutions in the California State University (CSU) system, has a long history of preparing new teachers to meet the diverse learning needs of students in local schools. With over 400 teacher candidates in 12 different credential areas, and 200 graduates each year, they are the largest provider of newly certified teachers in the San Diego area. Most of their candidates are enrolled at the post-baccalaureate level, as California has historically not permitted undergraduate credentialing pathways (a trend that is beginning to shift).

Their preparation and credential programs span three separate departments - the School of Teacher Education (which prepares general education candidates at the elementary and secondary levels), the Department of Special Education, and the Dual Language Department (DLD). These programs have historically operated largely independently of one another. In recent

years, however, there has been growing interest in creating a shared vision and approach to teacher preparation across the College of Education. When leadership learned about US PREP and the transformation work they were doing with teacher preparation programs around the country, it struck a chord. After attending a US PREP learning tour, Laura Hall, Special Education Department Chair, was excited by what she heard. ["We were eager to strengthen connections between our different departments at SDSU, and to strengthen our district and school partnerships. We also knew we wanted to do more to support our university supervisors and our mentor teachers. We knew that having a strong mentor teacher was a huge plus."](#)

In the Spring of 2019, [SDSU's College of Education](#)<sup>13</sup> began a three-year partnership with US PREP to transform their teacher preparation program, with a focus on fostering deeper collaboration across credential pathways. They created a cross-departmental team that included the Department Chairs from Special Education, the School of Teacher Education and Dual Language Education. The early work centered around building trust and a shared understanding of each department's values and motivations. ["We had lots of conversations around coming from different backgrounds. We met and talked about issues of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\). We looked at district data and we could see the disparities in student outcomes. It gave a whole new purpose for why we need to prepare all candidates,"](#) said Hall. This group started meeting quarterly, and also met with faculty from other universities to understand what effective clinical practice looks like.

4. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/>
5. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/our-coalition-members>
6. <https://irp.cdn-website.com/30f69313/files/uploaded/USPREP-Scaling-the-SC-Role-Case-Studies-2022.pdf>
7. <https://irp.cdn-website.com/30f69313/files/uploaded/USPREP-Article-Curriculum%20Literacy%202022.pdf>
8. <https://data-toolkit.usprepnationalcenter/>
9. <https://edsources.org/2022/california-to-create-teaching-credential-covering-pre-k-through-3rd-grade-that-requires-literacy-training/674316>
10. <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/grant-funded-programs/teacher-residency-grant-program>
11. <https://gstg.csac.ca.gov/>
12. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-teachers-in-california-residencies-factsheet>
13. <https://education.sdsu.edu/>



## REDESIGNING THE SUPERVISOR ROLE

Redesigning the role of the site coordinator was the first - and most transformational - step. Site Coordinators are responsible for conducting informal observations and "POP" (pre-conference, observation, and post conference) cycles, providing frequent and actionable feedback aligned to the California TPEs (Teaching Performance Expectations) to mentor teachers and residents. They also engage in training and calibration, and facilitate mentor teacher trainings and shared governance meetings where SDSU and district/school leaders engage in data rich discussions and shared decision-making. SDSU leadership

and faculty had long understood the importance of strong district partnerships and tight alignment between coursework and clinical practice, but lacked a roadmap - or the needed capacity - to make this a reality. In the past, University Supervisors were assigned to school sites to observe candidates in their student teaching placements, but they had little, if any, interaction with Principals, and school site visits were infrequent. Mentor teachers weren't trained, and data sharing with schools was non-existent. With support from US PREP, SDSU leadership and faculty set out to change this.

***"Now, when I step onto the Feaster campus, staff know me, students know me, candidates know me. In the past, there were times I never saw the principal. I didn't know a whole lot about what was going on. Now, as a Site Coordinator, I feel like I'm part of the staff, and I see how much the principals are invested in what we're doing and I'm even more invested in the school."***

**Griselda Palma**

SDSU Site Coordinator, Mae L. Feaster charter school





## WHAT IS A SITE COORDINATOR?

The traditional student teacher supervisor roles are replaced with highly specialized “Site Coordinators” who are full-time faculty. The Site Coordinator is the linchpin of the transformed teacher preparation model. He or she is:

- A member of the university faculty who evaluates residents and teaches courses (student teaching seminars & methods)
- Conducts walkthrough observations, formal observations, and coaching of residents
- Trained and calibrated on the resident evaluation tool
- Have demonstrated proficient coaching practices
- Facilitates observation tool norming
- Embedded within the district (with relationships with administration and mentor teachers)
- Plans/facilitates data-driven, quarterly mentor trainings and ongoing mentor meetings and support
- Plans/facilitates data-driven, quarterly governance meetings
- Attends university meetings and programs, including faculty meetings and professional development, as appropriate

The SDSU chairs collaboratively designed full-time Site Coordinator roles that have been piloted and are currently in place across 5 partnership for elementary (general education & bilingual / multiple subject) and secondary (single subject) with the goal of ensuring that all district partners have access to a highly trained and skilled Site Coordinator. This work has transformed the relationship between the university and schools. Griselda Palma, a Site Coordinator at Mae L. Feaster charter school (a TK-8 dual immersion school in Chula Vista) and veteran University Supervisor, says her experience has changed dramatically: “Now, when I step onto the Feaster campus, staff know me, students know me, candidates know me. In the past, there were times I never saw the principal. I didn’t know a whole lot about what was going on. Now, as a Site Coordinator, I feel like I’m part of the staff, and I see how much the principals are invested in what we’re doing and I’m even more invested in the school.”

# CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

The US PREP partnership has also fostered much greater collaboration across departments. Special Education, Dual Language and General Education (housed within the School of Teacher Education) have historically operated in silos. Since joining the US PREP coalition, department chairs and Site Coordinators come together regularly to share resources and tools, to participate in joint governance meetings, and to discuss candidate data together.

Site Coordinators across the three departments are creating a shared language and tools to evaluate candidates on the Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs). For the first time, they developed a shared student teacher evaluation tool which all 3 departments have piloted. The School of Teacher Education has fully implemented the tool for all of their multiple subject and single subject candidates. Department chairs say it is much more objective and data driven than what they were using previously to evaluate candidates. They also created a shared candidate performance evaluation calendar. [“This was a significant challenge, but they knew they needed to be on the same page to ensure data collection was happening,”](#) explained Nicole Aveni, US PREP’s Regional Transformation Specialist leading the partnership with San Diego State. They are now using that data in their own supervisor trainings.

Other collaborative efforts have included creating a reference guide for mentor teachers and a universal supervisor handbook for all supervisors. Departments are also coming together to share and reflect on candidate data. Griselda Palma says this is a significant departure from the past. [“Six years ago, cross departmental collaboration never happened at all. We used to work in silos. I didn’t even know a lot of the people in other departments.”](#) Now, partnership (or governance) meetings happen quarterly. At these meetings, Site Coordinators

share classroom observation data, look at teacher candidate growth on the Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs), and share walk-through data. The approach to how data is used has also fundamentally changed. [“We’re using data in really purposeful and meaningful ways to engage in continuous improvement,”](#) said Sarah Garrity, Interim Senior Associate Dean of the College of Education.

Departments are also working much more closely together to support candidates and mentor teachers. They recently ran a joint professional development session with Site Coordinators across all three departments focused on how to develop improvement plans for teacher candidates who are struggling. US PREP also recently facilitated a workshop for all 3 department Site Coordinators and Supervisors on calibrating their pre-conference coaching practices to ensure all SDSU candidates are experiencing a high-quality pre-conference. They watched a colleague’s pre-conference video, analyzed it for effective practices and discussed alternative coaching moves that would have strengthened the coaching experience.

Department chairs have also begun working more closely together on integrated coursework for undergraduates interested in teaching. Liz Buffington, a single subject site coordinator in the School of Teacher Education, brought all three department chairs together to create an accelerated path towards a teaching credential by adding required courses for Special Education, Dual Language and General Education into the [Cultural Proficiency Minor](#)<sup>14</sup>, housed within the School of Education. Now, undergraduates who want to earn a teaching credential at SDSU can fulfill prerequisites towards any of the credential programs. [“Having collaboration across departments made this work so much easier,”](#) said Buffington.



# DEEPENING DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

The nature of SDSU's relationships with district partners has shifted dramatically as a result of their work with US PREP. "Our partnerships were more in name only than authentic partnerships," said Laura Craig, the multiple subject site coordinator for Cajon Valley School District. "When we joined US PREP, we decided to revitalize the partnership with Cajon Valley using the US PREP governance and site coordinator model." They started a new residency cohort in which candidates take all of their classes together and have the same site coordinator. "We train our mentor teachers on co-teaching and highly encourage the co-teaching model." Craig leads quarterly mentor teacher trainings, which provide critical spaces for mentors to get support around challenges their student teachers are facing, how to support them, and

to discuss how to have difficult conversations with student teachers.

Craig was a Supervisor in Cajon Valley 20 years ago, and says the level of engagement with the district and school sites is completely different now. "In the past, we were just sending a few student teachers there. Faculty didn't really interact with Principals, and Supervisors rarely visited students in their placements." Now, school Principals are actively involved in governance meetings, as are the Assistant Superintendent and Director of HR. The HR Department has also become much more intentional about student teacher placements, now only placing student teachers at sites where principals are actively involved in governance.

## HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MENTOR TEACHERS

Similar changes have taken place in the San Diego Unified School District. Site Coordinator Liz Buffington says they are working much more collaboratively and with intentionality to support candidates at school sites. "We're talking about student growth data and co-designing school-based professional development based on the competencies candidates need to develop to support student growth and engagement." Mentor teaching selection and support is also much more robust. Buffington explained that, before they started working with US PREP, mentor teachers weren't vetted for quality, and there wasn't a process in place to ensure a good fit between student teachers and mentors. Now, they are much more intentional about mentor selection, placements, and coaching based on what each school site needs.

Candidates participate in a residency where they student teach for the full-year, experiencing

the school year from the beginning to the end. Schools are also engaging student teachers much more deeply in all aspects of the teaching experience. At Feaster, student teachers are involved with parent-teacher conferences, participate in school events, and are co-teaching in classrooms. "Principals have really embraced the co-teaching model. Now, you go into the classroom and you really can't tell who is the mentor teacher and who is the teacher candidate," said Sheila Solorzano, a Site Coordinator working with Feaster. Observations have also become more focused. Student teachers are receiving more specific, data driven feedback, which supports their growth and sense of connection to the school. "They're more committed to being a part of their schools. They feel more a part of that community, know their students better, and are more able to address students' needs," explains Solorzano.

# STRATEGIC STAFFING

SDSU and their district partners are also starting to think more strategically about how to break down the financial barriers that hinder many aspiring teachers from earning a credential. SDSU is well aware that unpaid student teaching placements are a significant barrier to entry. *"The current preparation model is a model of privilege,"* says Laura Craig. *"It is very difficult for someone to quit their job and become a student teacher."* After learning about [strategic staffing](https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/strategic-staffing)<sup>15</sup> (a creative reallocation of funds that allows schools to compensate student teachers for their work) at a US PREP learning tour, Feaster's Principal was inspired to figure out how to put this model into place at his school. With support from US PREP, San Diego State and the school worked together to pilot a strategic staffing model. Student teachers receive a \$7,000 stipend for substitute teaching 1 day a week. They also have the option to work in the afterschool program and during interessions if they want to make additional compensation. They can earn up to \$28,000. Word has gotten out among SDSU teacher candidates, which has boosted interest in student teaching at Feaster. *"Now, we have teacher candidates who have heard*

*they can get paid to student teach and are reaching out to us about it,"* said Solorzano. SDSU is looking to replicate strategic staffing with other school districts in an effort to fill vacancies and provide a more affordable path into teaching. Cajon Valley recently signed an agreement with US PREP to design and implement a fully sustainable strategic staffing model over the next 2 years. Several other SDSU district partners are exploring the model as well.

***The current preparation model is a model of privilege. It is very difficult for someone to quit their job and become a student teacher.***

**Laura Craig**

*SDSU Site Coordinator  
Cajon Valley Union School District*

15. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/strategic-staffing>

## OPPORTUNITIES

### SCALE SITE COORDINATOR & GOVERNANCE MODEL

Leadership has a scale plan to build the capacity of new Site Coordinators and strengthen district partnerships over time through shared governance structures

### EXPAND STRATEGIC STAFFING

The university is working with partner districts to implement and scale strategic staffing to create accessible, year-long paid student teaching experiences



# CHALLENGES

Transforming a teacher preparation program of the size and complexity of San Diego state is not an easy undertaking. While the program has made tremendous strides, the work has come with numerous challenges.

**Key challenges have included:**

## 01 Building a **Shared Vision**

Building and sustaining a shared vision for teacher preparation across departments.

## 02 Creating **Shared Language**

Creating a shared language and tools to support and evaluate candidates on the TPEs.

## 03 Communicating **Common Goals**

Understanding each department's needs to create common goals, then clearly communicating those goals to all university stakeholders engaged in the US PREP partnership.

## 04 Designing the **Site Coordinator**

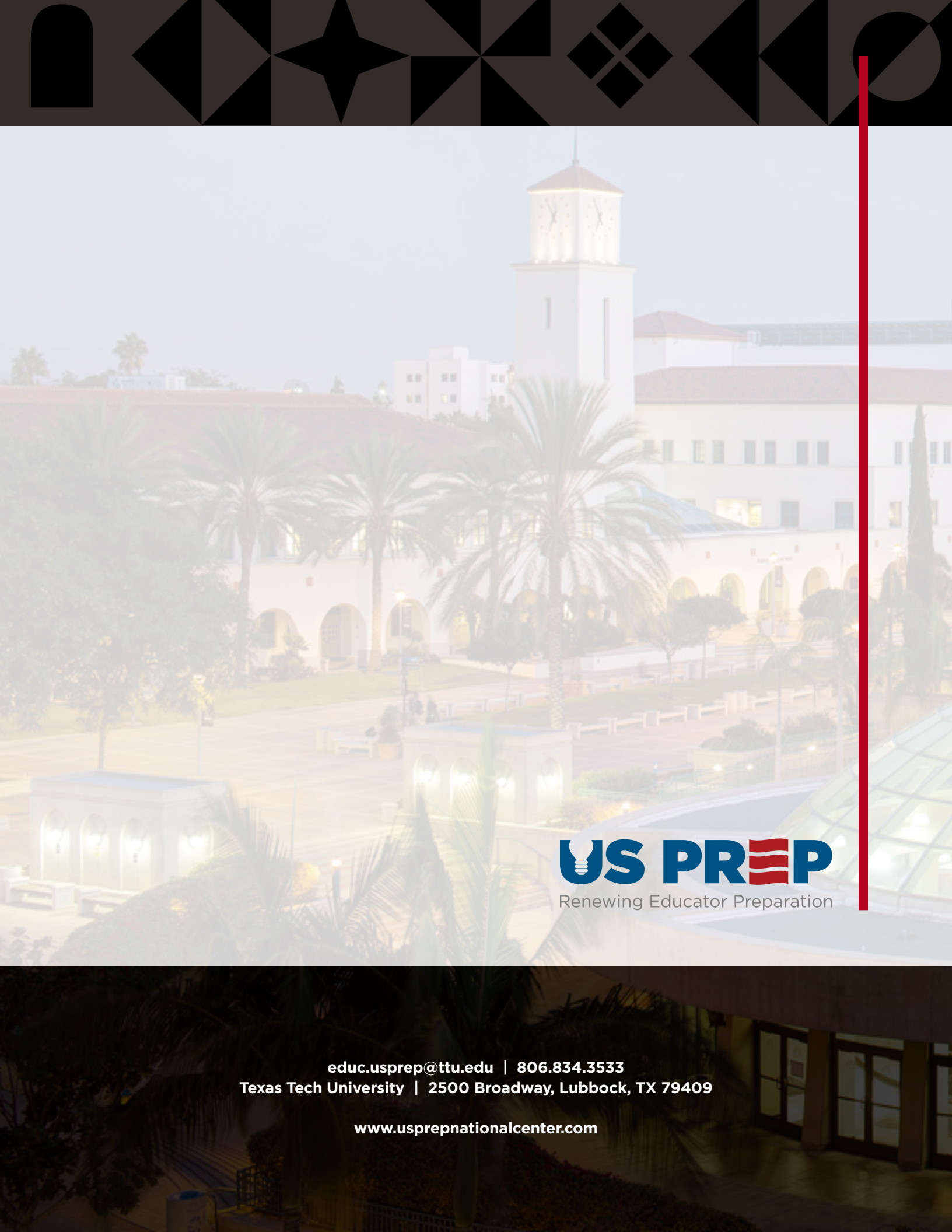
Designing a Site Coordinator role that meets the unique needs of each department, and building a shared understanding of the role Coordinator role among faculty.

### **LAUNCH AN UNDERGRADUATE PATHWAY**

SDSU will be launching an undergraduate credential pathway for Liberal Studies majors in Fall 2024

### **STRENGTHEN FOUNDATIONS FOR THE RESIDENCIES**

Leadership will continue their focus around enhancing district partnerships through collaborative governance, crafting a multi-faceted site coordinator role spanning across three departments, and providing comprehensive training to support all mentor/guide teachers.



**US PREP**  
Renewing Educator Preparation

**educ.usprep@ttu.edu | 806.834.3533**  
**Texas Tech University | 2500 Broadway, Lubbock, TX 79409**

**[www.usprepnationalcenter.com](http://www.usprepnationalcenter.com)**