

# **SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY:**

**ENSURING ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY  
TEACHER RESIDENCIES FOR ALL CANDIDATES**



Renewing Educator Preparation



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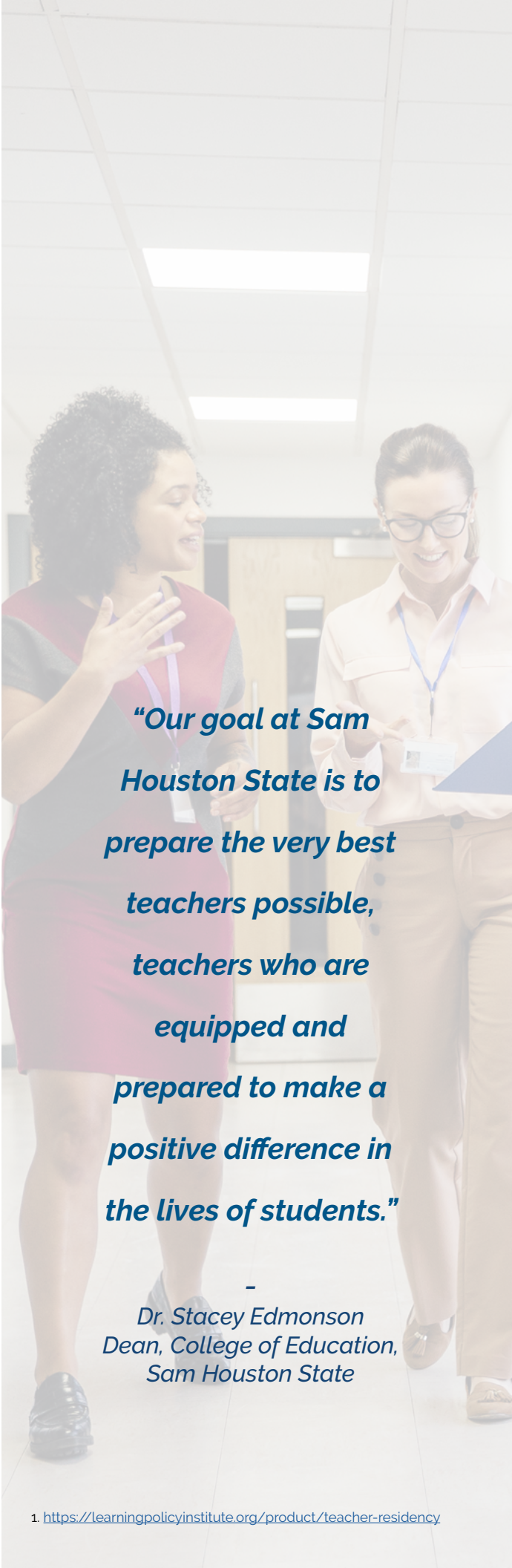
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# Background

Sam Houston State University (SHSU), located in Huntsville, Texas (about 70 miles north of Houston) has a long and proud history of preparing future educators. Founded in 1879, it's the third-oldest public university in Texas, and the first teacher preparation program in the state. With over 1500 undergraduates and graduate students enrolled in its teacher education programs, and more than 400 program completers per year (475 candidates completed the initial certification program in 2020), SHSU is the single largest higher education producer of new teachers in the region. Approximately 45% of SHSU students are first generation college students, and over 75% of students work while pursuing a degree.

While proud of its roots and longstanding relationships with local districts, Sam Houston's leadership recognized the need for continuous program improvement to ensure their candidates were fully prepared to meet the learning needs of students in the community. "Our goal at Sam Houston State is to prepare the very best teachers possible, teachers who are equipped and prepared to make a positive difference in the lives of students," said Dr. Stacey Edmonson, dean of the College of Education. "We asked ourselves 'what do we need to do to ensure our candidates are ready for tomorrow's classrooms?' " In thinking about what steps to take, Edmonson delved into the research on effective approaches to preparing teachers, and became familiar with teacher residencies, coursework alignment to field-based experiences, and pre-service clinical experiences that pair teacher candidates with highly effective mentor teachers in a K-12 classroom. Teacher residencies are emerging as a highly successful model of teacher preparation, developing candidates that are more diverse, more likely to stay in the classroom longer, and have a greater impact on student learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on high quality mentorship and clinical practice being at the core really resonated for her. "We need to give our students as many opportunities as possible to be out in the field practicing strong instruction under the guidance of a highly effective mentor teacher."



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***Dr. Stacey Edmonson  
Dean, College of Education,  
Sam Houston State***



# WORKING WITH US PREP

Sam Houston State University is one of a growing number of universities partnered with University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation<sup>2</sup> (US PREP), a national coalition of teacher preparation institutions. The mission of the collaborative 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. These preparation programs are transforming their approaches to ensure teacher candidates meet ALL students where they are and advance their learning by giving them what they need — especially students who have been historically underserved.

Essential elements include:

- 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;
- Site coordinators that help bridge the university (faculty/instructor coursework) and the district (selecting/coaching mentors, selecting sites, and placing teacher candidates);
- A yearlong clinical teaching experience that allows teacher candidates to experience a complete school year, including strong supervision, regular feedback from trained mentor teachers, coaching, and professional development;
- Practice-based coursework aligned to clinical fieldwork;
- Consistent use of teacher candidate evaluation instruments to measure teacher candidates' competencies and implementation of standards-aligned instruction; and
- Commitment to using data for continuous improvement.

<sup>2</sup>. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com>

# The Redesign Process:

## TRANSFORMING TO THE RESIDENCY MODEL

In 2018, in partnership with US PREP, SHSU began redesigning their teacher preparation program, with the ultimate goal of shifting all of their candidates to a yearlong residency. Recognizing that this was an ambitious undertaking that would require significant time and effort to implement with quality, Edmonson and her team decided to phase in yearlong residency over three years, piloting the residency in the Fall of 2018 with a cohort of 18 bilingual and elementary candidates with two district partners: Klein ISD and New Caney ISD. In Fall 2021, SHSU moved to full-scale with the residency program for all elementary and middle level candidates. One hundred sixty-five yearlong residents began in the Fall and another 110 began in Spring 2022 across 12 partner districts (See Table 1). SHSU plans to expand the residency program with secondary candidates in Fall 2022.

The first district they approached with implementing the transformed model was Klein ISD, a district serving an estimated 50,000 students on the outskirts of Houston. Klein had a long history of partnership with SHSU, and was known for its innovative spirit and commitment to providing strong clinical experiences to future teachers. New Caney ISD partnered shortly after Klein and has been an integral part of the yearlong residency program (YLR). With the increased growth over the past four years in clinical teacher placements, new district partnerships have increased. Currently, SHSU has developed co-coordinated partnerships and MOUs with more than 13 districts to scale the residency and meet the unique needs of teacher candidates in diverse urban, suburban, and rural areas.

### Managing Change

In the Spring of 2018, Dean Stacey Edmonson, Dr. Sandra Stewart, and Dr. Jannah Nerren, both Associate Deans in the College of Education, began reaching out to faculty in the elementary program to get them engaged and build their understanding of the residency model and its impact in other education programs. “Building

engagement was about identifying the right faculty to get it started. We chose faculty very carefully,” explained Nerren. “We looked for early adopters and people who were really enthusiastic about the idea of a yearlong residency.” Edmonson and Nerren were highly intentional about helping faculty understand the new vision and the “why” behind it. Nerren stated, “We started really early introducing faculty to the vision and the research on the yearlong residency model.” They also anticipated and proactively addressed potential concerns. For example, many faculty were nervous about the time commitment, particularly travel time required to visit different school sites. To address this concern, they assigned each site coordinator to a partner school zone, composed of schools that were all located within close proximity to one another, significantly decreasing travel time.

Another faculty concern was related to workload. “We spent a lot of time thinking about how this change would affect faculty workload, what it would mean in terms of new responsibilities, and what they needed to be successful,” explained Edmonson. These early investments in stakeholder engagement helped pave the way for a smooth, and largely positive, experience for the pilot group, which led to greater faculty ownership. “Our early adopters gave voice to the new model and its benefits. Most faculty championed the vision because they heard from their peers about the positive impact [the residency] was having. It didn’t come from us – that was key,” said Nerren. For the site coordinators, seeing their students in action has been a very meaningful experience. Daphne Johnson, a professor of elementary education and former department chair, is in her first year as a site coordinator. She had the opportunity to observe one of her former students teaching a class of 4th graders, and was deeply moved to see how much the aspiring teacher had grown. “Her ability to know where kids are developmentally and how they learn is really amazing.” Johnson also noted that, while she has a lot to learn in her new role, she’s enjoying the challenge, and finding ways to use her time more efficiently. For example, when she first started conducting classroom observations, Johnson was

often showing up during recess or independent work blocks, which meant having to return for multiple visits. Now, she checks school schedules first so she can plan the timing of her visits to coincide with lessons. "I've learned to pay attention to the details, to work smarter not harder. It's not that it's a lot more work, it's just a learning curve."

Faculty rotation as site coordinators was a primary goal for the administrative team. The motivation for this decision was two-fold – to create a deeper system-wide understanding of the residency model and to strengthen the coursework to practice

connection. Faculty collaborate on the development of curriculum; therefore, they should be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the program by evaluating the effectiveness of teacher candidates in P-12 classrooms. "It helps inform modifications to coursework - how well are teacher candidates able to transfer what they learn in our coursework into their own effective instruction with P-12 students? When faculty directly see our residents teaching, they have a much better understanding of how to adjust their courses to improve classroom practice," Edmonson noted.

**Table 1. Residency Program Scale Progression**

COHORT	TEACHER CANDIDATES	DISTRICTS	SITE COORDINATORS
Fall 2018 - Spring 2019	18	2	2
Fall 2019 - Spring 2020	16	2	2
Spring 2020 - Fall 2020	5	2	1
Fall 2020 - Spring 2021	39	6	4
Spring 2021 - Fall 2021	10	1	1
Fall 2021 - Spring 2022	165	10	12
Spring 2022 - Fall 2022	110	12	10



# Implementing the Residency Model

SHSU students enter the residency program in their senior year of college. They are paired with a highly effective mentor classroom teacher for a yearlong clinical teaching experience. Residents student teach three days a week in the first semester, and five full days a week in the second semester. First-semester residents complete coursework on the two days not in the field. Candidates take a student teaching companion course led by a faculty site coordinator and complete a student perception survey<sup>3</sup> (an action research assignment) during the second semester to better understand the student experience and design interventions to support a more learner-centered environment.

## Site Coordinator Role

Site coordinators serve as the bridge between SHSU and P-12 district and school partners. Before residency, teacher candidates were in a semester-long traditional program. SHSU employed part-time or retired faculty to supervise student teachers. They rarely spent a significant time on school campuses, and had little purposeful interaction with principals or mentors. With the launch of the residency program, faculty shifted to full-time site coordinators who are deeply embedded both at the university and on school sites. Most site coordinators are full-time faculty members, supporting residents during their clinical teaching experiences, training mentors, supervising residents, and refining coursework to reflect the needs of district partners and students. In addition, site-coordinators forge deep relationships with school sites by meeting regularly with principals, mentor teachers, and clinical teachers. They conduct walk-throughs and "POP" (pre-conference, observation, and post conference) cycles to provide frequent and actionable feedback to mentors and residents. Site coordinators also facilitate regular district partnership meetings – called "governance meetings" – where school administrators and university staff review data, such as student perception surveys and student achievement

data, to identify opportunities for program improvement. "They are much more involved in understanding the impact of our candidates on student learning," said Jannah Nerren. They also help ensure that what's being taught in university courses truly reflects what future teachers need to know and be able to do to be effective classroom teachers.

During the initial phase of the residency program, the site coordinator role was voluntary. As the EPP has scaled, participation in the yearlong residency program has become an expectation of all faculty. SHSU has 15 faculty site coordinators and plans to add more as they continue to scale the transformed model. The Director of Yearlong Residency is a new position created to support new site-coordinators and teacher candidates. Dr. Susan Harte, who served as one of the very first site coordinators alongside Dr. Helen Berg during the pilot year, is fulfilling this role. She coaches and leads professional development sessions for site coordinators, attends governance meetings, and provides support as needed.

## Professional Development

Mentors and residents participate in quarterly professional development sessions tailored to fit the emergent needs of each district partner. Mentors are trained in how to effectively coach and support residents in co-teaching and how to provide constructive feedback. Residents and mentors receive training in Culturally Responsive Teaching, and the co-teaching model. Professional development takes place through a combination of in-person and virtual sessions, based on the needs of the district and mentor teachers.

Professional development for site coordinators include training on the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) evaluation instrument, the POP cycle, co-scoring and calibration, and effective oral and written feedback. In addition, support is provided to

# WHAT IS A SITE COORDINATOR?

each faculty site coordinator on data use and leading governance meetings. This professional development helps ensure deep collaboration with district and school leaders is possible and, in turn, helps ensure that the university-district partnerships are successful at scale.

## Observations and Feedback

Teacher candidates are evaluated by their site coordinator and receive feedback a minimum of eight times over the course of the residency year. At least two informal walkthroughs and two formal observation cycles are conducted each semester. Formal observations are scheduled in advance and include the T-TESS rubric as the assessment tool. Residents are also provided with coaching and specific academic feedback in the pre and post conferences around the formal observation. Teacher candidates are expected to score "Proficient" on T-TESS, demonstrating effectiveness in the classroom by the end of the residency. For candidates that need additional support, a growth plan is developed with the candidate, mentor teacher, and site coordinator.

## Governance Meetings

Shared governance is a core element of the residency model. Governance meetings, facilitated by site coordinators, are held quarterly with partner districts/campuses to review data, address issues or concerns, and identify areas for improvement. These meetings facilitate decisions around mentor and site selection, training and support for mentors and residents, and changes to coursework to better align with classroom practice.

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



## District Partnerships

SHSU prides itself on the building of strong relationships with local districts for clinical teaching placements and hiring of their graduates. The residency program has enabled even deeper partnerships with a handful of districts that understand the value in the residency model as a way to attract and retain high quality, day-one ready teachers. Before the redesign, SHSU had clinical teachers spread across 75 different districts. Working with so many districts made it challenging to build deep relationships and align expectations around the quality of the clinical experience. Now, SHSU partners closely with 15 districts where residents are clustered together (See Table 2). This consolidation has significantly reduced transportation time for site coordinators, and, more importantly, allowed for much deeper relationships with site principals and district leaders.

While the residency program is still relatively new, school leaders are already seeing the benefits. Melissa Sciba, Principal of Rice Elementary in Conroe ISD, has hosted several Sam Houston residents over the past two years. She's been impressed by how hands-on they are in the classroom, and the multiple ways they are stepping up as active members of the school team. "Our student teachers [residents] are pulling small

groups, coming to parent conferences, and leading PLCs." Sciba also notes that residents are moving up the learning curve much more quickly than traditional candidates, and building stronger relationships with students. "They have really solidified their classroom management skills because they have a full year in the classroom." Several residents have been hired as full-time teachers, and others have filled short-term vacancies as subs. "The residents we've hired have all been phenomenal," said Sciba.

Brenda Blackmon, a Principal at Decker Prairie Elementary in Tomball ISD, welcomed three Sam Houston residents to her campus this year (January 2022). She sees the residency as a great hiring pipeline, and wants residents to fully experience what it's like to be a teacher at her school. Residents attend all professional development sessions, participate in collaborative planning meetings, and are given opportunities to observe and teach in other classrooms. "If they're going to be hired, I want to make sure they've been provided with lots of exposure to all aspects of the school. I think it should be part of what the university expects of all student teachers." Blackmon is straightforward about what she expects from teachers at her school, and what it takes to be successful there.





*Table 2. District Partners and Residency Placements*

<b>District</b>	<b># of Residents</b>	<b># of Campuses</b>
<b>Aldine</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Bryan</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Cleveland</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Conroe</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Crockett</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Cy-Fair</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Huntsville</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Klein</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Madisonville</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Montgomery</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>New Caney</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>New Waverly</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Splendora</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Tomball</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Willis</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4</b>

# Shifts in Cost Structure

Universities are often hesitant to start residency programs because of cost. There is a common misperception that university-based residency programs are more resource intensive than traditional models, but Sam Houston State has found creative ways to keep the budget impact as minimal as possible. There is a common misperception that university-based residency programs are more resource intensive than traditional models. This is not always the case and, in many transformations the budget impact is minimal. For Sam Houston State's shifts to the program, Edmonson has found creative ways to keep the budget impact as minimal as possible.

The biggest cost driver is scaling the site coordinator role. Sam Houston State has covered these costs by reallocating funding

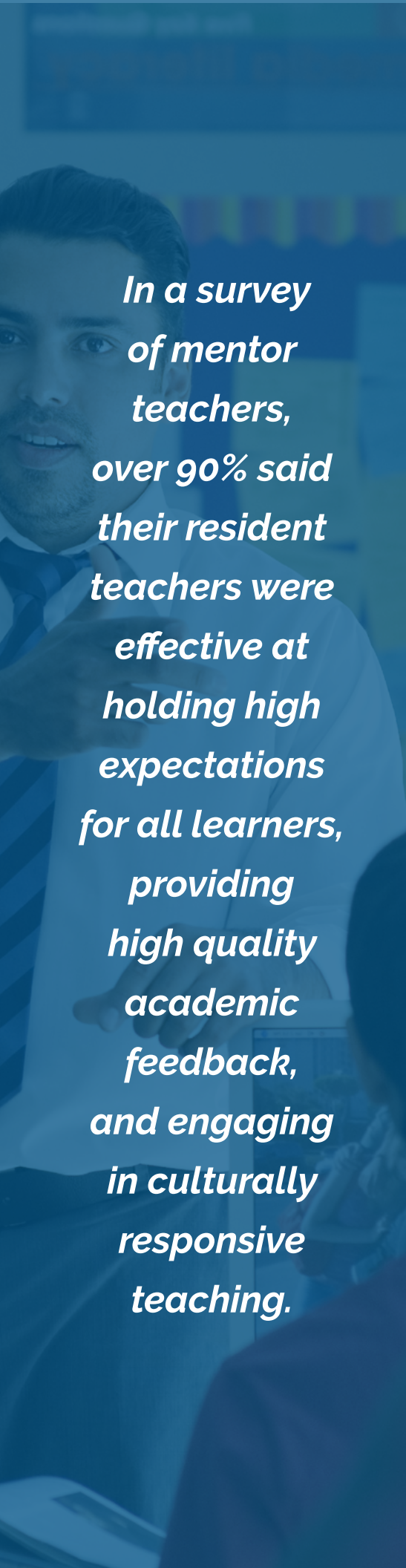
from positions that were no longer needed with the residency model, such as part-time clinical supervisors that were paid on a per student basis, as well as using existing salary savings from open positions and carefully designed strategic cohorting for clinical placements. In addition, one university funding request was awarded to support moving the model to scale. These shifts have required an innovative approach to resource reduction, reallocation, and allocation, yielding an excellent return on investment through an increased quality of candidate clinical preparation and faculty engagement in the model. SHSU is also exploring cost-sharing models with some of their smaller, rural district partners who still need high quality teachers but don't have the capacity to take on a large number to create a full cohort given their size.

## Building a Sustainable Teacher Pipeline

In an effort to address the financial challenges many residents face, several SHSU district partners have begun rethinking staffing roles in order to provide sustainable resident stipends. Two districts – Klein and Aldine, have teamed up with Public Impact<sup>4</sup> to implement Opportunity Culture<sup>5</sup>, an innovative staffing approach in which highly effective teachers – known as “multi-classroom leaders” (MCLs) – coach and support small instructional teams while also teaching part-time. School budgets are reallocated to permanently fund resident stipends (\$24,000) and provide additional compensation (\$12,000) for multi-classroom leaders. Participating schools in Klein have leveraged vacancies to cover the cost of an MCL and two paid residents. The 2021-22 school

year was the first year of implementation, with 30 candidates in paid residencies across the two districts. The initiative has been very well received. Schools that piloted Opportunity Culture this year are eager to bring on more MCLs, and the district plans to add 8 more campuses next school year in Klein.

Sam Houston State will be adding approximately 5 new strategic staffing district partnerships over the next year. Strategic staffing will reallocate underutilized district funds to provide sustainable resident stipends. In turn, residents will fulfill immediate instructional needs as a part of carefully designed development and co-teaching/co-observation structures. Starting in the fall,



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and engaging  
in culturally  
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teaching.***

Sam Houston leaders will work closely with district partners to rethink their staffing models using US PREP strategic staffing<sup>6</sup> strategies so that resident stipends become part of school operating costs. As a result, in the 2022-23 school year and beyond, residents will begin receiving sustainably funded stipends while completing a full-year residency under a highly effective mentor teacher. This structure meets immediate personnel needs of the school districts, ensures high-quality development of teacher candidates, and establishes a sustainable, scalable staffing model that positively impacts student achievement.

## Impact

Recently, Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) published findings from a longitudinal analysis of the Teacher Candidate Survey (spring 2019 through spring 2021) and the Mentor Teacher Survey (spring 2021) that revealed the positive perceptions both teacher candidates and teachers mentors have of the impact of program improvements.

Teacher candidates trained in the renewed teacher preparation model compared to those in the traditional model are:

- Nearly 15 percentage points more likely to “strongly agree” that they were well prepared to teach.
- 6.3 percentage points more likely to “strongly agree” that their EPP has a shared vision.
- Mentor teachers supervising a candidate in the transformed model are 18 percentage points more likely to strongly agree that the EPP has a shared vision for effective instruction.

While the SHSU residency is still in the early stages, there are clear signs of success. Over 80% of program graduates surveyed said they were “well prepared” for their first year of teaching. Mentors and administrators agree. In a survey of mentor teachers, over 90% said their resident teachers were effective at holding high expectations for all learners, providing high quality academic feedback, and engaging in culturally responsive teaching. While graduate data is not yet available, anecdotal evidence from Principals and Superintendents indicates that residents are entering the classroom much better prepared than traditional candidates. During her visits to classrooms on the first day of school, Jenny McGown, superintendent of Klein ISD, said that yearlong residents really stood out from other first year teachers. They were much more confident and presented like second year teachers.

6. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter/strategic-staffing>



# Challenges

## SCHEDULING:

Scheduling was a challenge initially. SHSU expected 3 full days of clinical teaching in semester one of the residency and 5 full days a week of clinical teaching in the second semester. This was a challenge for some districts, though collaborative planning enabled partners to ensure candidates gained access to high-quality mentors and the classrooms necessary in the more robust model of preparation. "It took extensive planning and input from districts to shift from a traditional one-semester model to a yearlong residency." (Jannah Nerren)

## ALIGNING COURSEWORK AND CLINICAL PRACTICE:

SHSU learned much from the first cohort of 18 residents. One challenge for the residents was the misalignment in coursework during the first semester. Candidates were taking 12 hours of coursework two days per week and practicing in the field three full days during the week. Course assignments from multiple classes had not been adjusted for these candidates and therefore, they were completing assignments that were not aligned to their field work. Program faculty collaborated and redesigned the curriculum to meet this challenge. The full progression of the curriculum has been realigned with practice-based coursework for all field-based blocks. This was done intentionally to bridge theory and practice, as we develop day-one ready teachers.

## BUILDING SCHOOL-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT:

Schools didn't have the level of input in clinical teaching decisions prior to the implementation of the yearlong residency. It took strategic planning and scheduling to enable both the educator preparation program and schools to more deeply examine student level, candidate, and programmatic data. This included having direct conversations - with faculty, mentors and teacher candidates - about teacher quality and the impact it is having on students.

## DEVELOPING MOUs FOR RESIDENCY:

Each district had different processes for developing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), including either superintendent and/or board approval. This was especially challenging in larger districts. In addition, most had to go through their own legal authorities, both in the district and at SHSU. Negotiations were often more cumbersome with some districts and required numerous modifications. With the scaling of the transformed model and an enhanced appetite in the region for more robustly prepared candidates, districts are now more informed and ready to quickly sign MOUs that meet the needs of candidates and the district alike. Improved and streamlined processes now ensure districts no longer need to wait an entire academic year to bring on residents.

# ADVICE & LESSONS LEARNED

## STARTING WITH THE RIGHT PARTNERS

SHSU was intentional about identifying pilot districts. Klein ISD administration identified two well-positioned principals to pilot the first cohort of Bilingual teacher candidates. These principals attended US PREP convenings, attended trainings, co-identified quality mentors, and worked with site coordinators to ensure the highest level of success for teacher candidates, teacher mentors, and their students. This level of commitment was vital to the success of the pilot and helped establish a framework for scaling and sustaining future pathways. "As we moved to other districts, we had a framework for what strong engagement looked like." (Stacey Edmondson)

## DESIGN WITH INTENTIONALITY

SHSU understood the importance of connecting theory and practice. This drive to make meaningful connections influenced their decision to use tenure track faculty to scale the site coordinator role and ensure all faculty served as site coordinators. It was important for stakeholders to co-develop goals that are specific to the unique needs of the university and district partners so that planning, implementing, and evaluating is aligned and adjusted to meet those goals. The combined efforts of leadership from both SHSU and school district partners has led to increased communication and co-construction, and therefore shared ownership, of the SHSU residency.

## GO SLOW TO GO FAST

SHSU piloted and progressively added teacher candidates and site coordinators over a three year period. Developing a model that best met candidate and district needs took time to establish, implement, and scale. Budget reallocation, faculty workload structure, and communication with teacher candidates were issues that needed to be addressed before fully scaling the residency.

## FOCUS ON COMMUNICATION & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The leadership spent time upfront developing clear and compelling communications rooted in evidence of the efficacy of the residency model and based on learnings from listening to faculty and district partners. SHSU demonstrated their commitment to building relationships with district partners through ongoing communication, while fostering strong relationships between site coordinators and site leaders.

## SHARED GOVERNANCE IS KEY

A shared governance structure between Sam Houston and district partners drives the innovations and quality candidate development of SHSU's residents. The mutually beneficial partnership allows for quality teacher preparation which, in turn, ensures strong P-12 student learning outcomes and the development of a teacher pipeline.



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