



# SCALING THE SITE COORDINATOR ROLE

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# Introduction

As educator preparation programs prepare teacher candidates to be successful in the classroom on day one, they recognize that they must anchor that preparation in teacher residencies – high-quality clinical experiences where candidates receive a full year of practice under an experienced, highly effective mentor teacher in a K-12 classroom (also known as a residency).

What's more, these experiences optimally take place in a school and district that is partnering deeply with the university program to ensure that "residents" have the preparation, support, and feedback they need to teach students and learn critical skills themselves during this experience – and beyond, as they take on full-time teaching roles after graduation (often in those same schools and districts).

The University School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP) has been working with cohorts of university-based teacher preparation programs to redesign their preparation models. (See full list of US PREP coalition members on right.) US PREP offers these institutions a combination of on-the-ground technical assistance as well as the support of a network of experts and like-minded institutions who are compelled by their convictions to disrupt inequities in our PK-12 school systems by ensuring *all* students have a day one ready teacher.

US PREP has found that in order to ensure strong, mutually beneficial university-school partnerships and high-quality clinical experiences at scale, educator preparation programs need to think strategically about their staffing models. Traditionally, colleges of education allocate most of their resources to the higher education campus (e.g. research, coursework, etc.). Part-time adjunct faculty supervisors typically supervise the clinical experiences but are not responsible for leading partnership meetings, selecting and training mentor teachers, or teaching classes. Further, many programs do not offer support and training to their supervisors which can result in variable levels of coaching quality and observation ratings. Because the supervisors do not teach teacher

## US PREP Coalition Members

### COHORT I

- Jackson State University
- Southeastern Louisiana
- Texas Tech University
- University of Houston

### COHORT II

- Brooklyn College
- Lehman College
- Sam Houston State University
- San Diego State University
- Touro College
- University of Texas - El Paso
- University of Texas - San Antonio
- University of the Pacific

### COHORT III

- California State University - San Marcos
- McNeese State University
- Portland State University
- Tarleton State University
- Texas A&M University - Commerce
- Texas State University
- Touro University California
- University of Houston - Downtown
- University of Texas - Permian Basin
- University of Arkansas - Pine Bluff



preparation courses, they often aren't aware of the skills and competencies that are being taught and therefore, may not be as capable of supporting the transfer of learning to the field. Many of the faculty don't know who the supervisors are – and vice-versa, supervisors don't know the faculty. Oftentimes, this model results in a disconnected training experience for the residents.

In US PREP, educator preparation programs commit to redesigning their staffing models to include site coordinators. Site coordinators are full-time faculty members who support residents during their clinical experiences, working on-site at schools to train mentors, supervise residents, and shape coursework based on the needs of the district's students. Their role combines practice-based instruction in one or more university courses, along with the hands-on guidance that both residents and their mentor teachers receive. This deep collaboration with district and school leaders helps to make university-district partnerships successful at scale.

Some leaders from partner districts say that the greatest impact they have seen has come from US PREP's support of mentor teachers and residents through its work to structure and scale

the site coordinator role as a bridge between the university program and the district. **"The site coordinators are in school on a consistent basis, and are able to provide the coaching and support that mentor and student teachers need,"** says Dr. Sherard Hollins, Director of Accountability, Jackson Public Schools. **"Having site coordinators actively involved with teacher candidates and being on school sites regularly, they have a better understanding of the need to make adjustments to their curriculum."**

To help university-based teacher preparation programs prepare to scale up the number and capacity of their own site coordinators, this paper examines the way that three programs in the US PREP network have designed and scaled the role of site coordinator to support their programmatic redesign and to extend strong, yearlong clinical teaching experiences to all programs and graduates. As of the end of 2020, these programs were collectively preparing nearly 6,000 teacher candidates through teacher residencies, including about 1,000 through programs in US PREP's inaugural Cohort I of providers that have all fully developed a yearlong teaching residency supported by mentor teachers and overseen by

## 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:

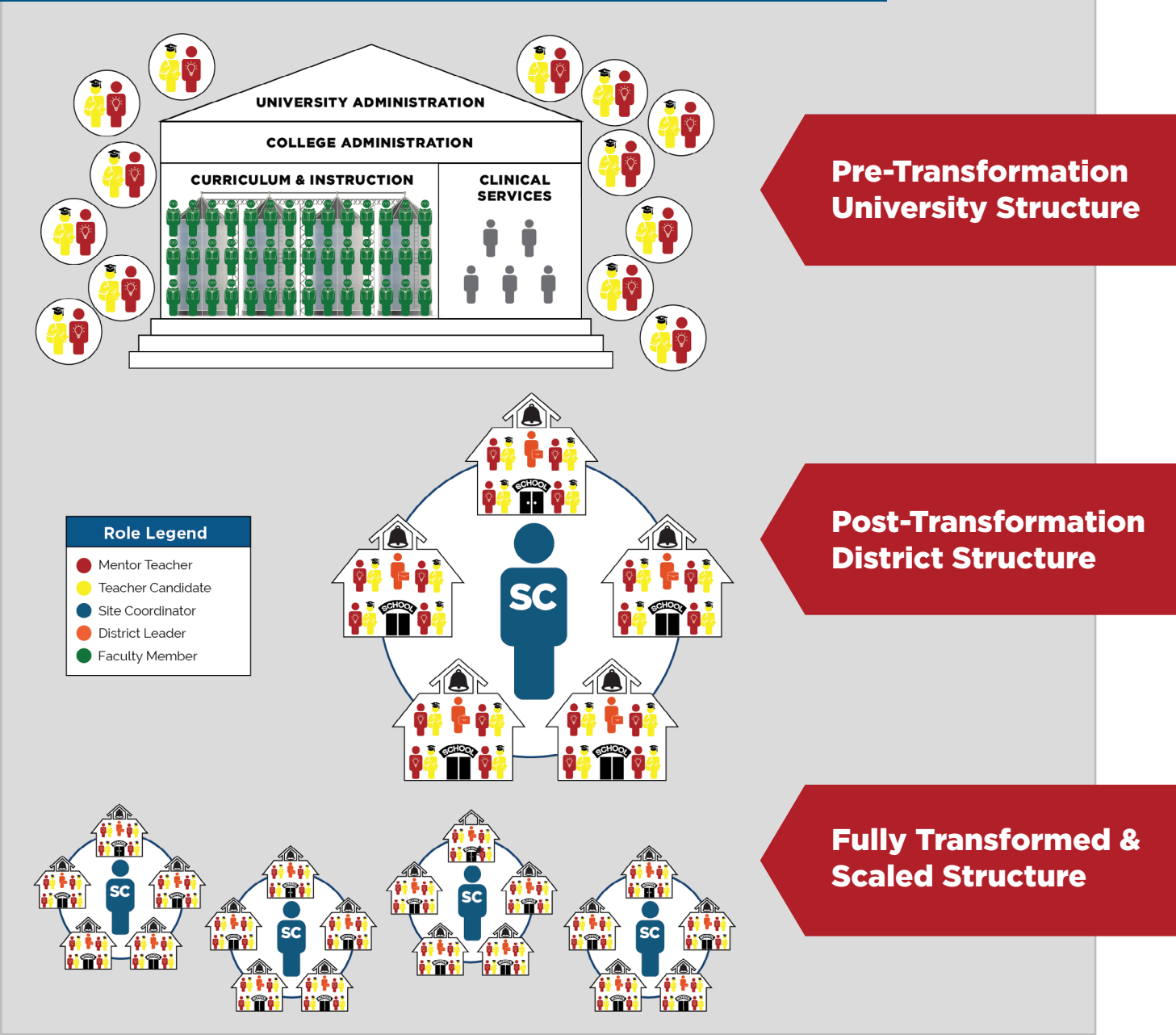
- A member of the university faculty who evaluates residents and teaches courses (student teaching seminars & methods)
- Conducts walkthrough observations, formal observations, and coaching of residents
- Trained and calibrated on the resident evaluation tool
- Have demonstrated proficient coaching practices
- 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

site coordinators, who supervise resident cohorts, select and train mentor teachers, facilitate quarterly district partnership meetings, and teach methods courses.

Within this cohort, Texas Tech University has reallocated existing funding to create entirely new roles, while University of Houston added onto its existing field supervisor positions for the site coordinator role, and Southeastern Louisiana University enhanced the roles of several faculty members to include the duties of a site coordinator.

Each of these approaches has had different implications on the structure of the role, the associated cost and resource needs, and the way governance of the university-district partnership works. This paper will explore these approaches as well as the challenges and lessons learned that each program has discovered that can help other university-based teacher preparation programs consider how they might scale up their residents' clinical experiences in partnership with mentor teachers in nearby districts and schools.

Figure: Shifts in Scaling the Site Coordinator Role



# Roles and Hiring Process

By recasting informal supervisory roles as site coordinators, these programs have created more formal full-time roles that span both instruction and supervision. Prior to transforming their programs, all three universities employed university/field supervisors to oversee student teachers. These supervisors were typically retired administrators who rarely taught courses. However, site coordinators nearly always teach at least one methods course and sometimes others as well, and are responsible for supervising residents in a more rigorous and consistent way.



Texas Tech University was one of the earliest US PREP programs to recast its field supervisors as site coordinators. The university's college of education used to have part-time supervisors who were not Texas Tech faculty and who only observed student teachers a few times each year. Today, its site coordinators are full-time faculty members who work on-site at their assigned district, teach one university-based course but also host training sessions and coaching meetings for mentor teachers, and supervise 17-20 residents, typically spread across 3-5 school sites within a district or geographic region. Similarly, University of Houston has created site coordinator positions that include teaching responsibilities, but the position largely remains part-time and adjunct, with only a few in full-time faculty roles. Site coordinators supervise a cohort of residents and take on more responsibilities for resident coaching and support.



A third program, at Southeastern Louisiana University, took a different approach, reallocating 14 of its faculty members as site coordinators. Their primary responsibilities include course instruction, coaching teacher residents during walkthrough and performance assessment cycles, and training and coaching mentor teachers, who in turn provide daily feedback to the residents.

Across the programs, the enhanced expectations for site coordinators have changed the way that programs interview and select for this role, shifting from an informal process to a more structured interview that covers coaching and curriculum as well as supervision, and often includes real-life scenarios. For example, Southeastern Louisiana noticed that use of data, knowledge of K-12 standards-based curriculum and providing resident feedback were areas of growth for many site coordinators around high quality, standards-based curriculum, so it has added interview questions and a simulated coaching session to address those needs. University of Houston started hiring site coordinators initially from among the ranks of existing field supervisors. **"We went with the strongest field supervisors and interested faculty first,"** said Shea Culpepper, Director of Teacher Education, noting that some self-selected out due to the increased demands of the position. **"Our ultimate goal was to get more faculty members in the field, but in the end, they didn't need to be full-time faculty to reach that goal."** Still, all site coordinators are required to have a masters in education and a minimum of three years of teaching experience in K-12 schools.





Pre-Transformation: University Supervisor			
	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY	UNIVERSITY of <b>HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Hiring</b>	Typically retired principals or other administrators, usually identified by former professors; generic interview	Typically retired K-12 administrators; informal hiring process	Mostly adjunct professors; interviews focused on content rather than coaching or curriculum
<b>Supervision</b>	Part-time, Supervise 6-7 student teachers	Part-time, supervise 25-26 student teachers	Average of 6 (one semester only)
<b>Instruction</b>	No instructional expectations	No instructional expectations	Rarely taught courses

Post-Transformation: Site Coordinator			
	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY	UNIVERSITY of <b>HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Hiring</b>	Typically former teachers with recent experience; rigorous selection process including performance-based interviews	Typically K-12 administrators; clear job description as part of the faculty, selective process that includes experience with instruction and technology (video visits, data)	Nearly all are full-time faculty that also teach methods courses; structured interview process includes simulated coaching session
<b>Supervision</b>	Full-time, Supervise 17-20 residents	Part-time, Supervise 17-18 residents	Average of 6 (for 2 semesters)
<b>Instruction</b>	All teach at least one teacher preparation course, either methods or a content class	Most instruct teacher preparation courses	All teach at least one methods course

# Quality Assurance: Training, Support, and Oversight

Site coordinators play a major role in ensuring that teacher residents will become high-quality classroom teachers from day one. As such, their interaction with residents has shifted from the intermittent interactions that field supervisors tended to have with student teachers to a more regular commitment that includes structured coaching and observation.

For example, all three programs use “POP Cycles” (pre-conference, lesson observation, post-conference) to structure site coordinators’ observation of student teaching throughout the year so that both site coordinator and resident understand the expectations for supporting quality teaching.

To ensure that site coordinators are prepared to support residents as they strengthen their instructional practice, site coordinators at these programs tend to receive upfront and ongoing training. For example, at Texas Tech and University of Houston, site coordinators receive initial training on the instructional rubric they use to evaluate residents’ instructional competencies. They also work together to calibrate their findings across residents, observing the same video and script and scoring it so that they can see where their ratings are aligned. Texas Tech and University of Houston then conduct additional professional development for site coordinators based on the results of that calibration exercise to ensure that all site coordinators are aligned regarding resident expectations. Each year, site coordinators calibrate scoring and renew their certifications.

While mentor teachers at partner districts are trained by their employing district, they also receive upfront training from the university on the instructional rubric from their assigned site coordinator, as well as additional refinements based on observation ratings of residents over the course of the school year. Mentor teacher training at Texas Tech and University of Houston focuses on preparing to co-plan with teacher

candidates and to utilize co-teaching strategies. In addition, mentor teachers are supported in working with teacher candidates by having the site coordinator present on a frequent basis in schools and classrooms, so that mentor teachers need not be challenged with candidate professionalism issues alone (as had been the case in the past). Site coordinators also support mentors using data from performance assessments and walkthroughs to help focus mentor support on high-impact areas that candidates most need. In this way, mentors and site coordinators are working on the same areas to support candidates.

Over time, both Texas Tech and University of Houston have added an additional role – the Professional Development Facilitator – that helps to support and develop site coordinators by assembling data for meetings, hosting monthly site coordinator meetings, and providing on-the-ground support with site coordinators as they support residents in the field. At University of Houston, the Professional Development Facilitator role is filled by Jahnette Wilson, a former site coordinator who helped pioneer the site coordinator role on the ground in Houston, and is now helping ensure the university’s dozens of site coordinators are working closely together. At Texas Tech, this role is filled by Sherre Heider, also a former site coordinator, and includes teaching one course and overseeing 8-10 site coordinators, helping them to facilitate mentor training sessions and governance meetings in addition to the above duties.

The emphasis on quality assurance for site coordinators and residents has led to uncomfortable, but necessary, conversations. Prior to transformation, nearly all teacher candidates passed their student teaching course simply by virtue of serving their time as student teachers. Today, residents who are not meeting the performance gates or making expected improvements may be counseled out of the program.

# THE TEACHER CANDIDATE'S SUPPORT SYSTEM DURING STUDENT TEACHING

*This excerpt from pages 4-5 of the Student Teaching Handbook at University of Houston summarizes the important work of the site coordinator in supporting residents.*

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One of the most important ways Teacher Candidates will be supported during their preparation as a teacher will be through the work of the Site Coordinator. The Site Coordinator (SC) is a UH faculty member assigned to supervise, coach, and evaluate teacher candidates during field placements.

A Site Coordinator will be assigned to a group of Teacher Candidates in the same school or "site." This arrangement will enable the Site Coordinator to understand Teacher Candidate goals and recognize strengths and weaknesses related to instructional competency and professionalism, and then assist the Teacher Candidate to develop and excel in these important dimensions. The Site Coordinator will actively promote Teacher Candidates positions in partner districts - on the condition that the Teacher Candidate has satisfied the expectations of the program.



The Site Coordinator will also be the Teacher Candidate's primary point of contact for communication about the Teacher Education Program, and the point of contact for the Mentor Teacher. To the extent possible, all communication will flow through the Site Coordinator.

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*See also Site Coordinator's Expectations and Responsibilities on page 24-26 of the handbook in the Appendix below.*



### Pre-Transformation: University Supervisor

	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY.	UNIVERSITY of <b>HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Meetings</b>	Never outside of lesson observations	Three times per semester	Four times per semester
<b>Observation</b>	Three observations per semester with limited training beforehand and no calibration/co-scoring across supervisors	Short post-observation debrief focused on all improvements the student teacher could make, Not targeted and with little self-reflection by the student teacher	Short post-observation debrief focused on all improvements the student teacher could make, Not targeted and with little self-reflection by the student teacher
<b>Oversight</b>	None	Limited	None

### Post-Transformation: Site Coordinator

	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY.	UNIVERSITY of <b>HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Meetings</b>	Teach a weekly class with a cohort of 20 residents	Teach a weekly class with a cohort of 20 residents	Teach a weekly class with a cohort of 20 residents
<b>Observation</b>	Four POP cycles over the course of the full school year with training and co-scoring/calibration with other site coordinators, as well as at least 2 walk-throughs that include suggestions/feedback afterwards	Structured POP cycles that include coaching conversation before and after, with time for resident self-reflection, focused feedback, and actionable next steps	Walkthrough 2 times per semester, 2 POP cycles per semester that include coaching conversation before and after, with time for resident self-reflection, focused feedback, and actionable next steps, plus final collaborative conference
<b>Oversight</b>	Professional Development Facilitators provide support to Site Coordinators	One Professional Development Facilitator supervises Site Coordinators	Director of Clinical Practice and Residency supervises site coordinators; clinical coaches also support site coordinators to improve their ability to give feedback and have crucial conversations

# Governance

Prior to transformation, most of these teacher preparation programs did not need to have a governance function because there was only a loose relationship between the university and the schools and districts where student teachers were placed. However, program transformation includes a strong partnership between the university and

frequent communications with mentor teachers about residents' experiences and progress (who in turn communicate with principals).

At Southeastern, however, the Dean's office owns responsibility for governance of the district partnerships. *"When our site coordinators had to take on more students, we took the governance structure and put it under the Office of Clinical Practice and Residency,"* says Paula Calderon, Dean of the College of Education at Southeastern. *"With the year long residency and our partnership with US PREP, governance meetings became a part of the residency experience, conducted quarterly by the site coordinators."* Prior to that, district meetings were held informally and only on an as-needed basis. Conducting governance meetings regularly ensures a more cohesive and partner-driven experience for all stakeholders.

Calderon notes that this alternative structure has also led to more collaboration between Southeastern's partner districts, on everything from the design of governance meetings to the creation of rubrics and tools. *"Before, districts were siloed and were much more competitive,"* she notes. *"Now, we're starting to see districts working together and supporting each other."* For example, some districts have co-created and facilitated professional development sessions on the curricula Eureka Math and Wit and Wisdom, in order to address content-specific curriculum knowledge and skills.

Much of site coordinators' support for the residents they supervise is actually indirect, delivered via the mentor teachers that they help coach to be strong leaders and instructional exemplars who can in turn guide residents on site, co-teach with residents, and give residents feedback on their instruction. As such, most of these teacher preparation programs have their site coordinators take an active part in selecting mentor teachers, training them, and then meeting with mentors regularly to coach them on instructional guidance and data use.

*Before, districts were siloed and were much more competitive. Now, we're starting to see districts working together and supporting each other.*

*– Paula Calderon, Dean of the College of Education, Southeastern Louisiana University*




school districts, who collaborate to identify needs, structure placements, and ensure that residents have the support of qualified mentor teachers ensuring their experience prepares them to be effective classroom leaders upon graduation. As such, site coordinators often plan and lead regular meetings with district and school leaders, and take more of a hands-on role in recruiting, training, and supporting mentor teachers to effectively coach residents.

At University of Houston and at Texas Tech University, site coordinators are responsible for the governance of the partnership with their assigned district(s) and coordinate communication between the program and the districts and schools with which it partners. While some of this governance happens in regular formal governance meetings with superintendents and assistant superintendents, much of it happens in informal communications that take place throughout the year as site coordinators work closely with principals on mentor teacher selection, and in their

## Pre-Transformation: University Supervisor

	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY	 <b>UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Role in Governance</b>	Supervisors had no governance role (governance didn't exist)	Supervisors had no governance role (governance didn't exist)	No structured governance meetings
<b>Relationship with School Sites and Principals</b>	Minimal, supervisors did not know their schools and student teacher placements were handled by a central office	Minimal, supervisors did not know their schools and student teacher placements were handled by a central office	Minimal, supervisors did not know their schools and student teacher placements were handled by a central office
<b>Mentor Recruitment, Training, and Coordination</b>	Gave mentor teachers a packet of information listing expectations, only met with them if there was a problem	Infrequent meetings and no participation in mentor selection or training	No role in mentor selection or training

## Post-Transformation: Site Coordinator

	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY	 <b>UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Role in Governance</b>	Site coordinators facilitate quarterly governance meetings with principals	Site coordinators facilitate quarterly governance meetings with principals	Site Coordinators participate in all governance meetings (but do not lead them as at other programs) along with others from the residency team (including Director of Clinical Practice and Residency and clinical coaches)
<b>Relationship with School Sites and Principals</b>	Meet with principals to review performance data, work closely with principals to place residents and work with the same school over time	Meet with principals to review performance data, work closely with principals to place residents and work with the same school over time	Meet with principals to review performance data, work closely with principals to place residents and work with the same school over time; school-based curriculum coaches assist struggling candidates and host professional development to address needs
<b>Mentor Recruitment, Training, and Coordination</b>	Rigorous mentor selection and matching between mentors/residents, facilitate mentor trainings; meet three times per semester with each mentor; regular informal conversations include data and coaching support	Rigorous mentor selection and matching between mentors/residents, facilitate mentor trainings; meet three times per semester with each mentor; regular informal conversations include data and coaching support	Work with districts on mentor selection and placements of residents (to reduce burden on school principals), three formal training sessions per year with mentor teachers, monthly mentor progress reports, and regular informal conversations that include data and coaching support



# Cost Structure

Scaling the number of site coordinators and paying them more than the salary for field placement office staff can increase costs – but most programs have found ways to keep the budget impact neutral.

At University of Houston, some of those costs have been covered by hiring retired faculty and paying them hourly with no benefits for several of the site coordinator positions. The university has also instituted a student teaching fee that helps offset some costs.



Meanwhile, at Texas Tech, funding for site coordinators was reallocated from positions that were no longer needed due to the expanded role of the site coordinator. This included nearly

\$100,000 freed from salaries once allocated for a coordinator of pre-clinical experiences, a second staff position solely for arranging field placements for candidates, and piecework payments to university supervisors based on the number of students supervised. Now, Texas Tech provides site coordinators with a \$10,000 stipend on top of their base pay (\$45,000 for sites close to the university, and \$50,000-\$70,000 for distance sites served through the university's Tech Teach Across Texas) to account for the added responsibilities they take on beyond teaching. All in all, these shifts have actually brought the

administrative cost per resident down slightly and dramatically increased the quality of candidate clinical preparation.

*Even though money is tight, we realized this was an investment in education.*



*Jeff McCanna, Tomball ISD  
Chief of Human Talent*

Pre-Transformation: University Supervisor			
	 <b>TEXAS TECH</b> UNIVERSITY	<b>UNIVERSITY of</b> <b>HOUSTON</b>	 <b>SOUTHEASTERN</b> LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY
<b>Number of students who do full-year clinical teaching experience</b>	0	400	60
<b>Number of district partnerships</b>	4	20	3
<b>Number of field supervisors</b>	Approximately 15	15	Approximately 7-8

One promising development that may help inform future partnerships is that one of University of Houston's partner districts, Tomball ISD, has underwritten the cost of its own site coordinator by releasing one of its administrative staff members and a former principal to perform this role. "Even though money is tight, we realized this was an investment in education," says Jeff McCanna, the district's chief of human talent. Over time, as districts begin to recognize the critical importance of the site coordinator role and its impact on teacher quality, retention, and long-term cost savings from reduced attrition, others might also choose to adopt this cost-sharing model.

These programs all agree that the work and expense of shifting to site coordinators from field supervisors has been worth the expense. "Full-time faculty are much closer to the classroom, but they also know our process, competencies, and [instructional] rubrics," says Jordan Ahrend, Director of Clinical Practice & Residency at Southeastern. "This allows us to go back and improve our own curriculum."



Post-Transformation: Site Coordinator			
	 <div>TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY</div>	<div>UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON</div>	 <div>SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY</div>
Number of students who do full-year clinical teaching experience	350 (200 locally, 150 at a distance)	400	120
Number of district partnerships	41 - including local, rural and distance	15	9
Number of field supervisors	35-38 Site Coordinators 4 Professional Development Facilitators	28-30 Site Coordinators 1 Professional Development Facilitator	17-20



## Challenges & Lessons Learned

There are a variety of challenges that university-based teacher preparation programs have discovered in developing and scaling the site coordinator role.

First and foremost, it has not been easy for administrators, faculty, and other staff to adjust their mindset – and the perceived workload – from a simpler model of university employee as supervisor and coordinator to more of a hands-on instructional coach and district liaison. At many programs, this shift has been met with reluctance by both traditional supervisors – who worried about additional hours and work in the field – and by full-time faculty – who typically do not want reduced teaching and research responsibility.

Because the site coordinator role is dynamic – involving many responsibilities from course instruction, facilitation of governance meetings, coaching residents, and training mentor teachers – program leaders must ensure that they are providing training to the site coordinators. The area that most site coordinators feel ill-equipped to lead is the mentor training sessions. Doug Hamman, who chairs the Teacher Education Department at Texas Tech, adds that “many site coordinators were initially hesitant to work directly with principals. Before, the university supervisor might stop in and say a quick hello to the principal in order to maintain good relationships,” he says. “Now, they interact in a more purposeful, quality-focused manner, negotiating mentor teacher selection and mentor teacher feedback.” Site coordinators also review candidate performance, especially during the time of year when principals are eager to hire the new Tech graduates.

These new demands have made it difficult to find the best talent for the site coordinator role. Initially, most programs recruit from among their existing supervisors or faculty, but often find that they are resistant to the additional work given that the salary is similar, or that they are not a fit for the balance of instruction, coaching, and guidance that are required. As a result, many have begun to recruit brand-new people into the role from outside the university, such as former teachers, instructional coaches, principals, or administrators from K-12 school systems, who are often eager to work hands-on with mentor teachers and residents, and can be trained to teach university courses.

Program leaders recommend that changes be made relatively quickly, regardless of whether they are large or small. University of Houston leaders recommend that programs consider scaling up one component or program area at a time, to allow people and budgets the time to adjust to a different set of expectations. At Texas Tech, Hamman suggests that university supervisors and short-term clinical

*Remember what your goal is – to improve student achievement – and remain flexible about how you implement the role while keeping your end goal in mind,*

*– Sherre Heider,  
TTU Professional  
Development Facilitator*



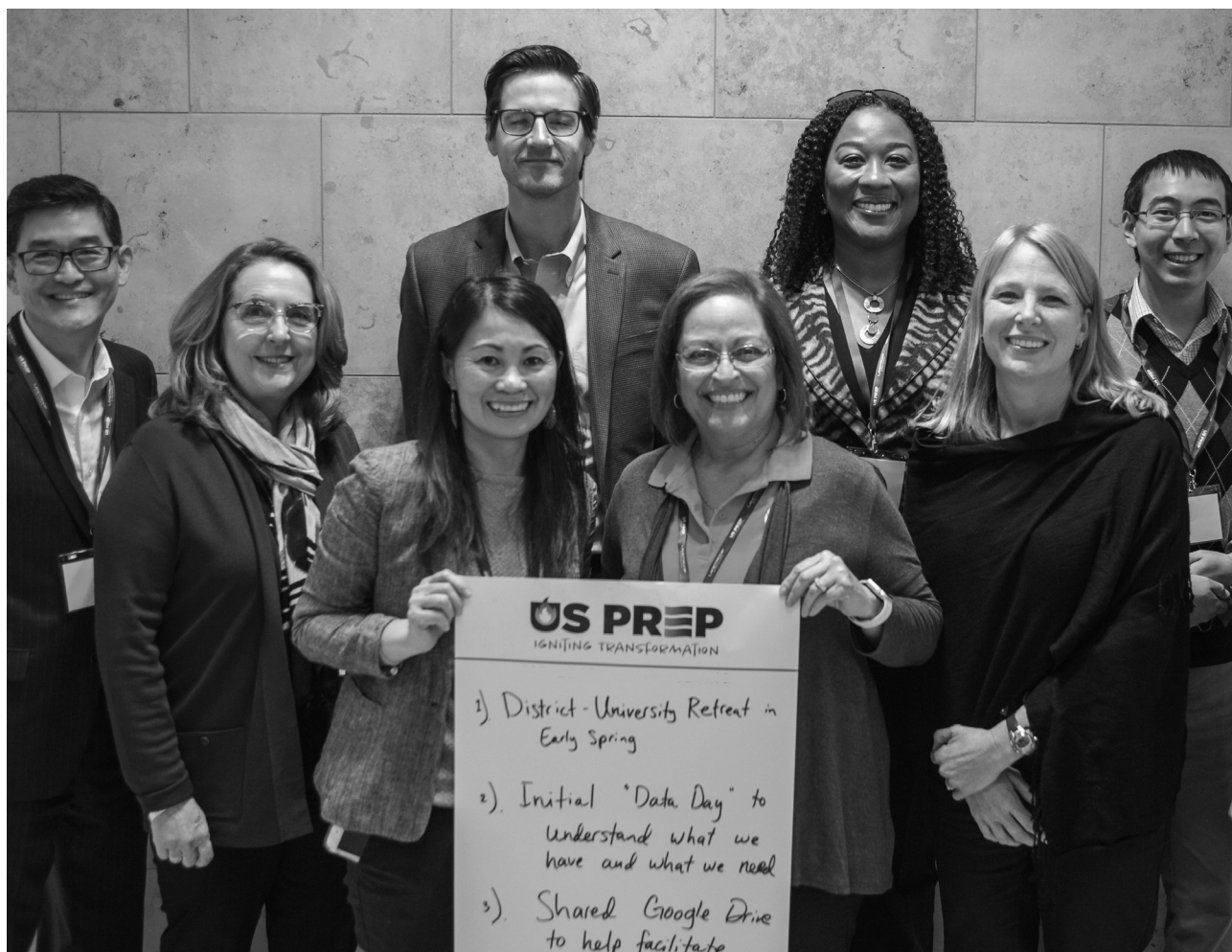
experiences be phased out quickly across the board in favor of site coordinators and a full year residency model, so that there is no redundancy of work and cost during a transition period.

Program leaders also recommend that clear scoping and ongoing training become a central part of the site coordinator role, particularly on what strong instruction looks like. Having a common instructional rubric helped Texas Tech understand the variation between its site coordinators. *“When we did site coordinator evaluations, we found that some were scoring candidates really high – as high as an experienced teacher – to avoid conflict with candidates,”* says Hamman. *“We had to emphasize that ratings should be based on evidence, not on whether the candidate likes you. We need to make sure graduates are capable of being effective teachers.”* Southeastern Louisiana has all site coordinators meet monthly to co-score one another’s residents

as a way to ensure that all of its site coordinators are normed and calibrated with one another on expectations for instructional excellence.

In addition to the technical aspects of the site coordinator role, it is also critical for them to cultivate relationships with individuals and groups in the school districts in which they work. Hamman notes that partner districts that have had frequent leadership turnover have required the site coordinator to ensure that there are regular meetings to build and strengthen the relationship with district leaders in order to smooth the path for their work with schools and mentor teachers.

Above all, Hamman’s TTU colleague Sherre Heider, a professional development facilitator there, suggests balancing clarity with flexibility. *“Remember what your goal is – to improve student achievement – and remain flexible about how you implement the role while keeping your end goal in mind,”* she says.



# Recent Shifts: The Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Site Coordinators



Since the coronavirus pandemic forced most college campuses and K-12 schools to close in 2020, all three of these teacher preparation programs have shifted most activity online, including coursework, university-district governance meetings, site coordinators' "walk-throughs" and other observations of residents' instruction, and their training and coaching of mentor teachers.

Although the pandemic was the catalyst for this virtual engagement, most programs intend to keep many of the effective approaches to resident development online. For example, Southeastern Louisiana University has found that handling walk-throughs, evaluations, and mentor coaching virtually has not only saved site coordinators time and effort, it has also allowed mentors to more openly share feedback about residents. Texas Tech University also took the opportunity to redesign how walk-throughs work, **"not only do site coordinators join residents' K-12 classrooms via video, they also have residents record their lessons intentionally, which ensures they can share a full sample of their best work. These walk-throughs are now followed by a video debrief**

**of the lesson between the site coordinator and the resident, which has proved more powerful than written feedback shared before the pandemic,"** notes Heider of Texas Tech, **"Before, these debriefs weren't as regular and feedback was mostly written."**

Heider says, **"Texas Tech will likely resume in-person site coordinator walk-throughs of classrooms once school is back in session, but may keep debriefs online and allow site coordinators to leverage video for additional observations."** Likewise, now that it has developed a more robust protocol for how mentor coaching occurs, University of Houston will likely keep its site coordinators' coaching calls with mentor teachers online, but it also plans to continue virtual walk-throughs of residents' classrooms. In addition, University of Houston expects to save some travel time and logistical hurdles by keeping about half of its governance meetings online as well, while Texas Tech will likely move all governance work online since meeting attendance has been so much better in that modality.

# Conclusion

Preparing teachers to meet the evolving needs of K-12 students and schools requires thinking differently about the mindsets, roles, and structures that university programs must have in place to best prepare teachers. As each of the teacher preparation programs in the US PREP network has redesigned and transformed their programs to include a full year-long clinical residency at a K-12 school, they have found site coordinators to be central players in this transformation. Their central role allows these site coordinators to ensure the quality of district relationships, of mentor teachers, and of the university's teacher preparation curriculum – and ultimately, the quality of residents themselves and their ability to be effective from day one in a K-12 classroom upon graduation.

These transformational changes have required time and commitment to difficult conversations on behalf of each of the university programs. They have had to restructure roles and reallocate funding, two activities that rarely come easily in large institutions. However, with commitment and creativity, the leaders of these programs have seen the mindsets of faculty, staff, and residents themselves begin to shift toward greater collaboration with K-12 schools; these shifts have in turn inspired confidence that teachers who engage in yearlong teacher residencies – with the support of site coordinators – are fully prepared for the challenges that will meet them on their first day in the classroom upon graduation.

*Additional resources related to the Site Coordinator role can be accessed on the [US PREP Toolkit](#).*







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