



MARCH 2019

A Changing University

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

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Introduction >>

Over the last eight years, the University of Houston's College of Education has been on a quest to become the strongest institution of higher education in the state. In 2011, the University earned the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching designation as a Tier One University¹ for its active faculty research work -- one of only 7 in the state.

That same year, associate dean Robert McPherson was promoted to dean of the College of Education and began to focus on strengthening the quality of teacher preparation through merging research and hands-on teaching experiences as a way of achieving the college's mission: to help eradicate inequities in education and health in Houston and beyond. "Teaching is an art and a science. It takes time and coaching in order to be effective. The amount of time in the classroom with support from an experienced mentor teacher makes a tremendous difference," says Dean McPherson. That also included a shift from a focus on inputs and compliance, toward a more collaborative, data-driven approach that is organized around outcomes for teachers -- and ultimately their students and schools.

Since then, the school has redesigned its teacher preparation curriculum and added a year-long student teaching internship as a graduation requirement. The goal is to ensure that all graduates are ready to succeed in Houston classrooms from their very first day on the job. **This programming redesign has included a deeper partnership with school districts, better training for mentor teachers to be effective instructional coaches, more ongoing observation and actionable feedback for teacher candidates, and stronger performance-based mechanisms for assessing whether teachers are effective instructors.**

Much of this intensive clinical work requires more hands-on site coordinators² who help bridge the university's coursework and the work on the ground in district schools.

The college was the first in Texas to meet the more rigorous new standards set by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and earned a ranking by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) as among the top 1 percent of teacher preparation providers in the nation.³ "Accreditation is an outstanding accomplishment, but our work doesn't stop there," adds McPherson.⁴ **"We at the College of Education are committed to continuous improvement, ensuring we produce educators who are ready to work in our most underserved classrooms on day one."**

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– DEAN ROBERT MCPHERSON

1. <http://www.uh.edu/news-events/stories/2011articles/Jan2011/011811CarnegieTierOne.php>

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM2Cwpzqaqc&feature=youtu.be>

3. <https://www.nctq.org/review/view/University-of-Houston-TX-1>

4. <http://www.uh.edu/sugarland/news/2017/february/National%20Accreditation%20College%20of%20Education%20/>

WORKING WITH US PREP

University of Houston is one of 15 universities partnered with University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP), a national collaborative 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 can meet ALL students where they are and advance their learning by giving them what they need —especially historically underserved students.



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS INCLUDE:

- ☒ Shared expectations for teacher candidates across the faculty, which are reinforced through practice-based coursework and clinical fieldwork
- ☒ Strong district partnerships with historically underserved schools that include shared decision-making, aligned expectations for candidate preparation, regular sharing of data, and 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, placing students)
- ☒ A year-long clinical experience that allows teacher candidates to experience a complete school year, including strong supervision, regular feedback from trained mentor teachers, coaching, and professional development
- ☒ Consistent use of a teacher candidate evaluation instrument to measure teacher candidates' competencies and implementation of standards-aligned instruction
- ☒ Commitment to using data for continuous improvement

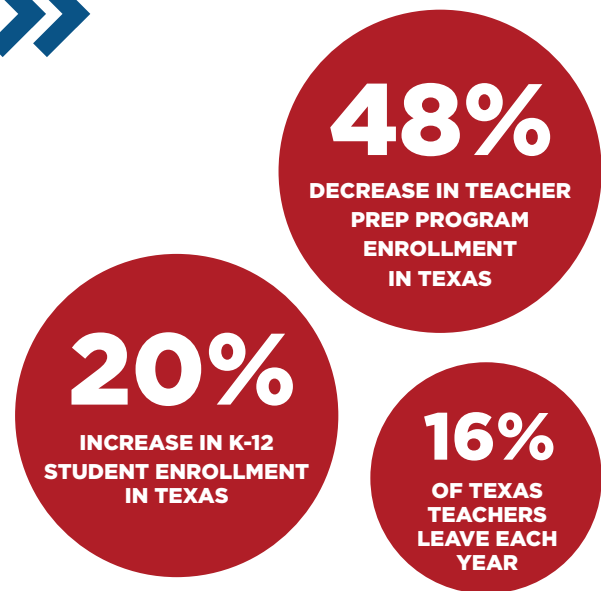
Background >>

Across the state of Texas, student enrollment and diversity had been climbing steadily. According to Educate Texas,¹ **K-12 student enrollment in Texas increased by nearly 20% between 2002 and 2012**; the percentage who are economically disadvantaged grew to 60% between 2004 and 2015, and 18% are English language learners (double the national average).

This has fueled demand for more and better teachers. **Enrollment in the state's 260 teacher preparation programs, offered by 135 different providers, fell 48% between 2009 and 2014** -- far more than the national average of 31% over that same period. Statewide, 16% of teachers leave every year, and rural districts struggle especially hard to find new teachers to replace them.²

Making matters worse, the state is not seen as welcoming to teachers: the Learning Policy Institute assigned Texas low ratings³ on both “how supportive it appears to be of teacher recruitment and retention” and on “the extent to which students, in particular students of color, are assigned uncertified or inexperienced teachers.”

State policy hasn't helped. Texas' teacher preparation policies earned just a B- from NCTQ⁴ (compared to a national average of C-), in part by setting a low bar for teacher certification. For example, state law requires 300 hours of training -- far lower than the 1550 hours required to become a hairstylist.



1. https://www.edtx.org/our-impact-areas/effective-teaching/texas-teacher-preparation-collaborative/2017_edtx_teacher_prep_collaborative_report.pdf
2. <https://www.teachthevote.org/news/2018/02/21/steering-committee-looks-at-long-term-goals-for-educator-prep-retention/>
3. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/understanding-teacher-shortages-interactive>
4. https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ_2017-State-Yearbook_Texas

05 | Background

For alternative teaching pathways, the training requirement hours are even lower. This has allowed inexpensive and low-quality alternative certification providers to thrive, leaving just 30% of Texas teachers to be prepared by more traditional institutions of higher education.

“We have a large alternative teacher certification presence in Texas, and those teachers have little to no training prior to stepping foot into the classroom,” says Dr. Amber Thompson,⁵ Associate Chair of Teacher Preparation at the University of Houston. **“We’ve chosen to focus our efforts on how we can scale up university-based programs, given that our graduates stay in the field and are equipped with the skills needed to be ready on day one.”**

Indeed, a Teach Plus survey of 225 teachers across Texas⁶ found that they relied on reputation, relevant teaching experience, and flexibility when they chose which program to attend -- but want programs that can deliver demonstrated teaching skills and knowledge as well as more immediate impact on K-12 student learning. **“I wanted a school that offered real-world application of the skills I was being taught,” one teacher told Teach Plus. “I did not only want theory, I wanted to know what it was going to be like when I was actually in the room in front of kids.”** In response to educator and program needs, the Texas Education Agency has recently begun to create an “educator data dashboard” that will aggregate individual and program-level data that can help link teacher effectiveness back to the programs that prepared them.⁷



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– DR. AMBER THOMPSON

5. <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/08/03/q-xx/>

6. https://teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/teach_plus_tx_teacher_prep_.pdf

7. <https://deansforimpact.org/step-right-data-direction/>



“

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Progress >>

In 2015, the University of Houston partnered with Houston ISD with a mission of collectively creating and maintaining a robust internal pipeline of excellent teachers who have the foundational knowledge, skills, and mind-sets necessary to maximize student achievement and character development; ensuring that all HISD students, regardless of race or socioeconomic background, are equipped to succeed in college and life. That same year, the university joined a coalition of six others, coordinated by US PREP (University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation), all of whom are collaborating with their local districts to transform teacher preparation.

Since then, the University of Houston's College of Education has made progress on a number of fronts in order to better prepare teacher graduates for the rigors of teaching in Houston-area schools.

AREAS OF PROGRESS INCLUDE:



01

Better faculty
understanding
and revised
coursework



02

Deeper district
partnerships
include site
coordinators to
support year-long
apprenticeship for
all students



03

Standardizing
performance
assessment

BETTER FACULTY UNDERSTANDING AND REVISED COURSEWORK

Before the partnership started, college education faculty had already begun talking about common instructional frameworks and language for defining new teacher readiness, and had redesigned many courses around this goal. The addition of the year-long teacher residency for all students also meant that faculty had to more tightly integrate theory and practice in senior-year courses, so that students could make the most of their fieldwork during that year. Siloes fell: rather than university-based faculty who teach classes and traditional supervisors at the school site who are disconnected from the university, many University of Houston education professors now serve as site coordinators.

They bridge this gap by teaching classes and also working directly with mentors and students, giving these professors a more complete understanding of the experiences and needs of their student teachers. In addition, teacher educators use pre- and post-assessments to measure the impact of course instruction on teacher candidates' growth and development. **"This process is having an enormous impact on coursework and instruction by providing data on preservice teachers' growth," says Dr. Jahnette Wilson, UH Faculty and Site Coordinator.**¹

COURSEWORK

MENTORS
& EXPERIENCE



1. <http://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/march-2018-forging-best-practices-in-teacher-preparation/>

DEEPER DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDING SITE COORDINATORS TO SUPPORT YEAR-LONG APPRENTICESHIP FOR ALL STUDENTS

By the end of spring 2019, all 312 undergraduates will do a yearlong clinical teaching experience at a partner district school during their senior year. The program has grown to include 28 site coordinators, who place student teachers in concentrated cohorts across 78 schools. Placing larger numbers of students in fewer schools has allowed the site coordinators to provide rich coaching experiences for teacher candidates. Site coordinators work on-site and in partnership with the schools to place teacher candidates, provide training for mentors, coach teacher candidates, and collect and share data with university, school, and district stakeholders.

Additionally, they facilitate regular governance meetings where school administrators and university staff review data and refine the program accordingly. **“They’re involved in everything from admissions criteria to the program itself, influencing our courses, shaping the student teaching experiences and designing supports after they leave,”** says Thompson.¹ **“It really is a true partnership; both sides are paying attention to making sure there’s a high-quality teacher in that classroom. That’s rather than us preparing them at the university all on our own, sending them out to districts and telling them take it from there.”** There is now significant collaboration in the shaping and implementation of the teacher preparation.



1. <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/08/03/q-xx/>



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STANDARDIZED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT



Just as University of Houston faculty began its own internal redesign work by getting professors on the same page about what new teachers needed in order to succeed, it has ensured partner districts and their mentor teachers have a shared understanding of the teacher competencies that candidates need to know and be able to do. “We always had a framework for teaching that described the teacher competencies and skills we cared about, but we hadn’t really trained our teacher educator faculty on the framework nor were we very explicit in thinking about how candidates were being taught and assessed on the competencies throughout our program,” says Thompson.¹ University of Houston adopted a robust instructional rubric, and all faculty and mentors have engaged in training, including watching videos of teachers, discussing objective evidence of the competencies, and scoring each of the competencies together. **“We now have a good mechanism for evaluating our teachers’ readiness and identifying the ones who are struggling so we can support them,”** says Dr. Wilson, noting that student teachers benefit from multiple classroom observations and feedback throughout the year. “If they don’t meet the benchmark, they don’t move forward.”

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1. <http://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/march-2018-forging-best-practices-in-teacher-preparation/>

Impact >>

The work involved in the University of Houston's transformation effort is beginning to pay off. **"Survey data, interviews and continued placement of candidates in Houston schools demonstrate mutually beneficial, positive relationships,"** concludes a site visit report from the rigorous Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).¹

About 80% of University of Houston education school graduates say they were well-prepared for their first year of teaching.² Several graduates have earned "teacher of the year" awards³ in their Houston-area schools, including Ashley Rodriguez, a spring 2018 UH graduate who now teaches in a diverse dual-language kindergarten classroom at Pflugerville Elementary near Austin, where she was recently named Rookie Teacher of the Year. **"Having an entire year in the classroom while still being a full-time student really pushed me to see how bad I wanted this for myself,"** she reflects. The support of her site coordinator helped prepare Rodriguez not only for teaching but also for professional growth. "When I had my first observation as a teacher a few months ago, I was nervous, but I soon realized that the rubric and the process was the same that UH used," she says. "This made me feel more at ease because I knew what to expect." "Some of the teachers I work with from other colleges, they feel overwhelmed and don't know how to manage the workload," agrees Christina Torango, another UH graduate who won a teacher of the year award.⁴

Administrators agree that University of Houston teachers are well-prepared. "I had so much faith in Ms Lesniak her first year, I put my own daughter in her class," said Harvard mentor and teacher Heather Moore⁵ of University of Houston graduate Kristina Lesniak, who was not only a Teacher of the Year winner but also a finalist for the district's annual elementary school teacher award. (Moore is also a University of Houston alumnus.)

Indeed, on a survey of mentor teachers and principals, most mentors and principals say they would recommend hiring the University of Houston graduates they have worked with (37/49) and would recommend those graduates to other principals (38/49). **"I enjoy being able to work with young people that are new to the profession and I enjoy being able to place them in the right environment for them to learn,"** noted one survey respondent. **"I also like the idea of being able to see these teachers in action to determine if they are someone that I would like to hire for my campus."**

Principals also say that University of Houston graduates are well-prepared for the classroom,⁶ rating them an average of 3.4 out of 4, where 3 is "sufficiently prepared" and 4 is "well prepared." Eric Tingle, principal of HISD's Foster Elementary School, said the student teachers who intern at his campus from UH stand out,⁷ noting, **"We can clearly see the difference with this program as opposed to other programs that partner with us."**

"Teacher candidates are a lot more prepared -- they're truly ready to walk into a classroom and teach," says Dr. Shea Culpepper, University of Houston's Director of Teacher Education, who adds that, "While we're asking more of our district partners than we have in the past, the payoff in stronger new teachers and professional growth for mentor teachers is worth it."⁸

Over time, the University of Houston stands to grow even stronger as staff and faculty reflect together on what they're seeing and learning. "We're increasingly looking to data such as district satisfaction surveys and observations of our teacher candidates to inform our practice," says Thompson.⁹ **"It's a reciprocal relationship between the college and our district partners. We both have the same end goal - to ensure all students have access to a high-quality teacher."**

1. <http://www.uh.edu/education/features/caep/index.php>

2. <http://www.uh.edu/education/about/teach-ed-data/pdf-2/5.exit-survey-2015-2016-2017.pdf>

3. <http://www.uh.edu/education/features/teachers-of-year/>

4. <http://www.uh.edu/education/features/caep/index.php>

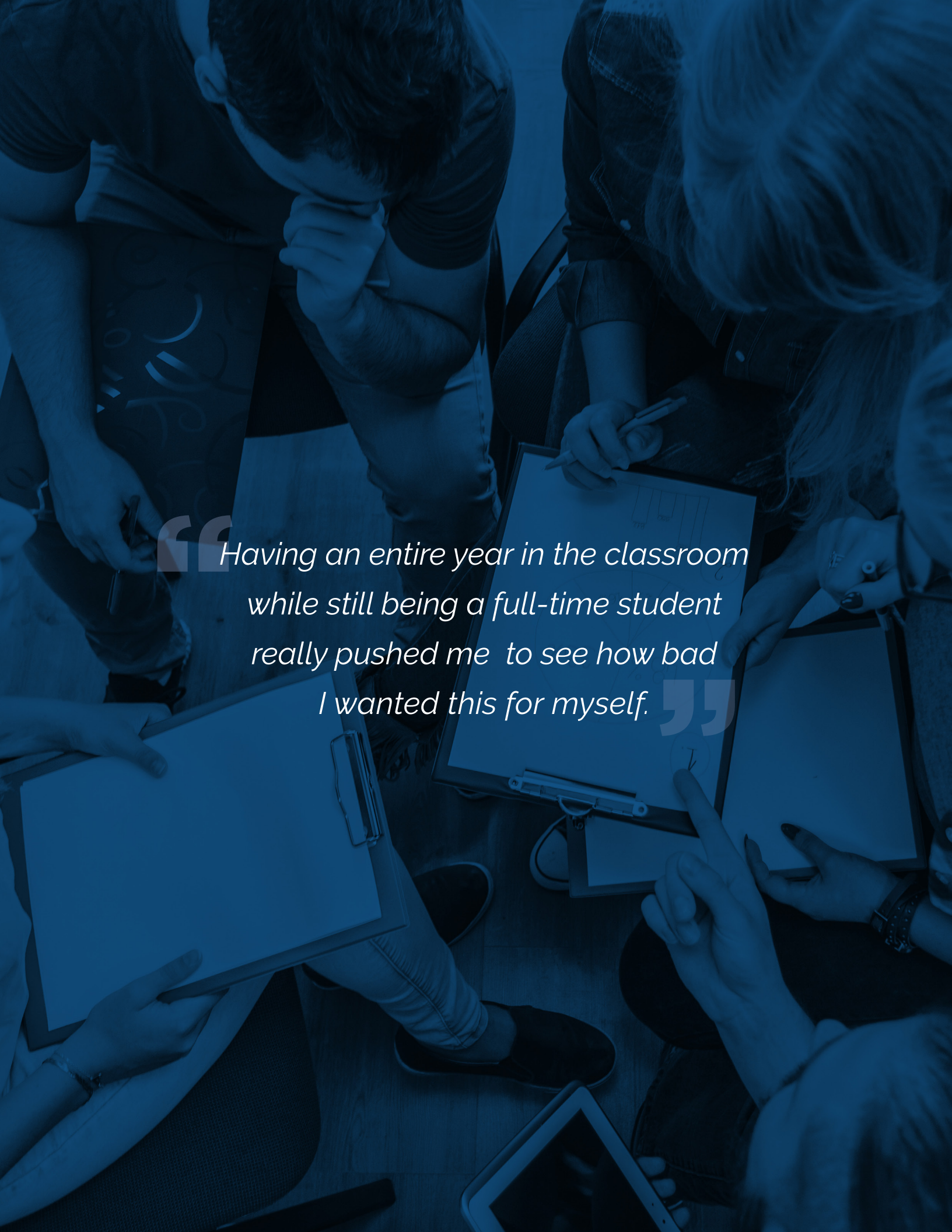
5. <http://www.uh.edu/education/features/harvard-elim/>

6. <http://www.uh.edu/education/about/teach-ed-data/pdf-2/3.principal-survey-summaries-2018.pdf>

7. <https://www.uh.edu/education/features/us-prep/>

8. <http://www.uh.edu/education/features/ate-award-2018/index.php>

9. <https://www.uh.edu/education/features/us-prep/>



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Moving Forward >>

As University of Houston moves forward, there is still plenty of work ahead. The program's success has led to high demand from new district partners, and even existing partners would like to partner even more deeply to provide teacher candidates with greater exposure to different learning experiences and with more observations and feedback. **"We have a tendency to put our student teachers in classrooms with veteran teachers that are teaching advanced classes or Gifted and Talented classes,"** said one district survey respondent. **"The reality is that most first year teachers will be in a regular class with students who have greater discipline issues and motivation issues. I see many new teachers that come into the classroom and struggle with this adjustment."**

However, more student teachers and more deep partnerships requires more site coordinators -- and therefore more funding. Unfortunately, the college has already exhausted its budget for these coordinators, even though it needs to hire another six (and at a higher salary than it pays faculty, given the expanded scope of responsibilities) in order to support the full cohort of teaching candidates next year. One district, Tomball, is underwriting the cost of its own site coordinator by releasing one of its administrative staff members, Juan Santos, 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. As a former teacher and school leader, Santos was already skilled in coaching teachers and familiar with the University of Houston faculty. "We took as much as we could off his plate to free up time for him to take on the site coordinator role," says McCanna. "Our student teachers are getting the best professional development because of his deep experience and knowledge of the inner workings of the district. He has worked at every level and has relationships with all of our principals." Over time, other districts might also choose to share the costs of this effective model.





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