



# Radically Improving Teacher Training



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# Introduction >>

In a state whose educational attention has been focused on the schools of New Orleans in the decade since Hurricane Katrina, a rural public university an hour north of the city has been quietly transforming the way teachers are prepared in partnership with nearby districts and schools.

Guided by its core values of excellence and caring, Southeastern Louisiana University has grown since 1925 from a small college focused on teacher education and arts & sciences, into Louisiana's third-largest university.<sup>1</sup> Southeastern is also the state's third-largest teacher preparation program, sending more than 400 educators (mostly elementary school teachers) into the state's schools over the last five years.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last decade, the university's College of Education has partnered with many neighboring districts and schools to provide its aspiring teachers with field experiences -- but that work became tighter and more urgent over the last few years in response to state policy. Beginning in 2014, the state's Believe and Prepare initiative began to move toward requiring all teacher preparation programs to include a competency-based curriculum, centered on the knowledge and skills they need from day one in the classroom, as well as a yearlong teacher residency supported by an expert mentor.

Since then, Southeastern's College of Education has redesigned its coursework in alignment with the state's required teacher competencies, and has strengthened its district partnerships in order to support a dramatically expanded teacher residency. In addition to 70 hours of field training that students experience prior to student teaching, the residency program has grown from a single semester of teaching experience into a full year residency required for all teaching majors.



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1. <https://www2.southeastern.edu/orgs/NCATE/ncate/InstitutionalReport/OverviewIR.htm>

2. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/teaching/2017-2018-state-educator-workforce-report.pdf>



# WORKING WITH US PREP

University of Southeastern Louisiana is one of 15 universities partnered with University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation <sup>1</sup> (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.



**US PREP**  
Renewing Educator Preparation

## 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 yearlong 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

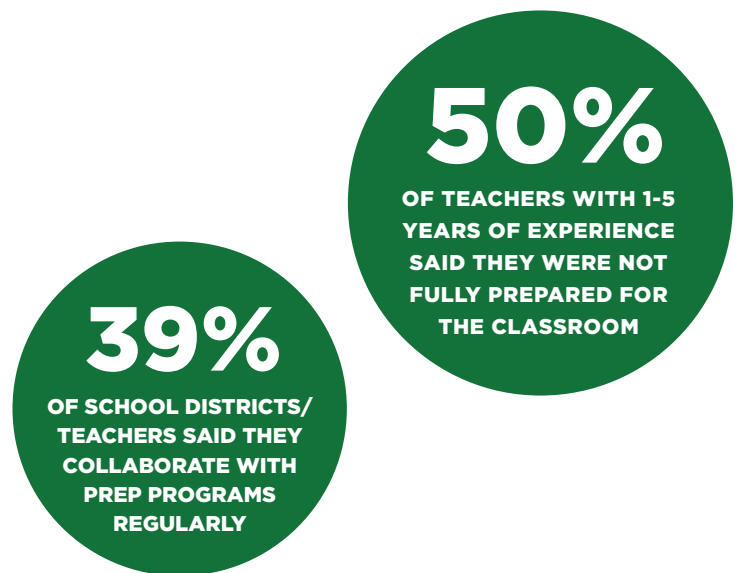
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1. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/our-coalition-members/>

# Background >>

In 2014, the Louisiana Department of Education surveyed more than 6000 teachers, school leaders, and preparation programs, and found challenges at all levels. “Only 39 percent of school and district leaders surveyed said that they regularly collaborate with preparation programs to align preparation practices to ensure that aspiring teachers’ preparation is focused on the most important knowledge and skills a new teacher will need in order to be successful. This leads to preparation experiences that are disconnected from realities and expectations that teachers face on day one in the classroom,” found the “Partners in Preparation” report.<sup>1</sup> “Teachers experience this gap, too: 50 percent of teachers with one to five years of experience surveyed say that they were not fully prepared for the realities of a classroom in their first year of teaching.”

Southeastern and its local districts had already recognized this challenge, and began developing a year-long residency with St. Charles Parish Public Schools in 2013. Teacher candidates and mentors were provided with training and coaching, and the university and district began quarterly meetings to deepen and coordinate partnership efforts. In 2014, Using the COMPASS rubric to measure teacher effectiveness, the university determined that all 5 of the first cohort’s apprentice teachers were in the Proficient range -- giving the university and the district the fuel they needed to move forward.



1. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/links-for-newsletters/partners-in-preparation-survey-report.pdf>



## 05 | Background

The state's efforts have only reinforced this early work, and innovations like Southeastern's have in turn bolstered the state's commitment to more rigorous teacher certification requirements and more "clock hours" of experience for teacher candidates. These changes helped increase Louisiana's state policy ranking from the National Council on Teacher Quality from a C- in 2011 to a B+ in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Its Believe and Prepare effort grew from a pilot program focused on a handful of programs into a statewide mandate focused on<sup>2</sup> "the development of greater collaboration between teacher preparation programs and schools/districts ensuring that candidates are provided high quality clinical experiences while being

supervised by highly effective teacher mentors," including a required yearlong residency.

In December 2015,<sup>3</sup> to continue advancing its work, Southeastern 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. In addition, the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education<sup>4</sup> has awarded over \$9 million in grants to teacher preparation providers and their school system partners to advance their partnerships, as well as stipends to undergraduate residents and mentors.




1. [https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ\\_2017-State-Yearbook\\_Louisiana](https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ_2017-State-Yearbook_Louisiana)

2. <https://regents.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Final-2017-Teacher-Preparation-Fact-Book-6.25.18.pdf>

3. <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/2017/05/31/school-university-partnerships-work-to-reform-teacher-education/>

4. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/teaching/believe-and-prepare>





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# Progress >>

Since embarking upon the redesign process, Southeastern has redesigned its coursework, expanded its district partnerships, and added yearlong residency for early childhood, middle school, and special education majors (which had only included elementary education majors in the past). By 2020-2021, about 110 education graduates each year will complete the yearlong residencies with a cohort of peers in a partner school district, receiving feedback from a trained mentor. This work is supported by site coordinators<sup>1</sup> whose pivotal role spans teaching as a member of the university faculty as well as supervising residents and mentors in schools and conducting governance meetings with district stakeholders. Specific progress has included:

## AREAS OF PROGRESS INCLUDE:



01

Strengthened  
district & school  
partnerships  
through the role of  
site coordinators



02

Redesigned  
coursework  
around content/  
performance  
expectations



03

Selected &  
trained  
mentor  
teachers



04

Strengthened  
the use  
of data

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



## STRENGTHENED DISTRICT & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH THE ROLE OF SITE COORDINATORS

In the last several years, Southeastern has expanded from working with just three districts (St. Charles as well as St. Tammany Parish and Ascension Parish) to 7 districts and 32 schools this semester as yearlong residency sites, as well as “pre-residency” partners at more than 430 school sites and after-school programs. School district personnel serve on the college’s Council for Teacher Education and the College Curriculum Committee, which gives them insight and input into the coursework that aspiring teachers take and the competencies they are developing. Through its 6 site coordinators, who also serve as senior methods instructors at the university, Southeastern has also expanded those partnerships to include not only supervision of residents but also selection and training of mentors and placement of residents (see “Selected & Trained Mentor Teachers” section below). Regular governance meetings between site coordinators and district representatives help connect the dots between the needs of student teachers and the needs of their schools and students, including reviewing data related to teacher candidates’ effectiveness in the classroom. These meetings often include principals, many of whom are eager to participate, says Jordan Ahrend, Director of Field Experience at Southeastern and a former mentor teacher. In addition, site coordinators conduct regular observations and walkthroughs in residents’ classrooms, as well as professional development and coaching for mentor teachers.

**Site coordinators** have helped bridge the gap between initial resistance and real transformation in preparation and coursework. “Initially, there was a fear of the unknown,” says assistant professor and director of student teaching Ellen Ratliff. She says faculty were concerned not only about the amount of driving time they would need to put into visiting far-flung schools (with partner districts often located an hour or more

from campus) but also about the working and commuting time required of student teachers themselves. “Now [faculty members] really understand how the methods courses impact student teaching. Seeing students in classrooms teaching shows them how what they’re teaching affects students’ command of the classroom, and allows them to go back to their methods courses and make a lot of changes.”

Southeastern site coordinators also receive significant support from the residency co-directors, including resources for mentor and resident training, technical support with data entry, guidance on giving feedback, co-scoring events to ensure that site coordinators score teacher performance assessments in a reliable way, and bi-monthly training on topics such as coaching, pre-conference, and post-conference activities.



## REDESIGNED COURSEWORK AROUND CONTENT/PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS



The Southeastern college of education has re-organized its course requirements around the state's teacher competencies as well as the instructional rubric used to assess teachers upon graduation, which is now integrated into courses that teachers take along the way. This has resulted in meaningful learning for both districts and Southeastern. "When St. Charles Parish Public Schools and Southeastern Louisiana University came together, they realized that the district field experience, university coursework and professional learning sessions were disconnected and misaligned. Student teachers were getting different messages around what to focus on at different times in the residency experience," explains a report by Education First.<sup>1</sup> **"The partners realized that when, for example, the district was focusing on training student teachers on questioning techniques, it was important that university coursework had a similar focus. As a team, they redesigned their programming, jointly agreeing on the short list of best practices they wanted students to learn, and in what order, and re-organized assignments and professional development."**

1. <https://education-first.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Ensuring-High-Quality-Teacher-Talent.pdf>





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## SELECTED & TRAINED MENTOR TEACHERS

One of the most critical components of the teacher residency is the support teachers receive from their mentors. Therefore, Southeastern's co-directors of residency, Dr. Ratcliff and Jordan Ahrend, focus heavily on mentor selection, training, and on matching mentors and residents to ensure a strong fit. For example,<sup>1</sup> St. Charles Parish Public Schools chooses mentor teachers based on their instructional effectiveness as well as their ability to coach others, working with Southeastern to match them with residents based on where teacher candidates live, certification, personality, and school need. **"We need mentors who are strong communicators and willing to share their experiences,"** explains Ahrend. **"Our residents co-plan and co-teach with their mentors. So, we have to have mentors who are willing to open up about how they teach, but they also need to allow the resident to stand on their own two feet."**

Before the residency year begins, mentors and residents have an orientation session together, and sign a partnership agreement that covers how they will work together. Southeastern also provides mentor training in addition to what the state of Louisiana currently provides to all of its mentors. Topics include co-planning, co-teaching, and crucial conversations that must happen when things don't go as planned, and a second day is focused on rehearsing some of those actions. In addition to regular meetings with their site coordinator, mentors also participate in 2-4 additional seminars throughout the year on presenting instructional content, managing student behavior, aligning standards and objectives, and academic feedback. Mentors say working with residents helps them as much as it helps the aspiring teacher. "We have supported each other, guided one another, and reflect on our practices every day," notes mentor Bethany Dowdy, a kindergarten teacher at the Southeastern Louisiana University Lab School on campus, part of the Tangipahoa Parish district.<sup>2</sup>

"It has definitely improved my own teaching instruction because I have to critique her strategies, which in turn causes me to reflect on my own practices."

Graduates say their mentors are a critical component of their preparation. Southeastern graduate Payton Bryant, a first-year first grade teacher at Luling Elementary School in St. Charles Parish (where she completed her residency as a second grade student teacher last year), says her mentor Shelby Chiro-Cabibi prepared her for the challenges she faces as a classroom teacher today. "During her observations, she went above and beyond to supply me with feedback and would check in to make sure I was staying resilient, adaptable, and flexible," says Bryant. "She helped me develop clear, aligned assessments, objectives, and activities. She taught me how to use formative assessments to guide subsequent learning. Most of all, she taught me how to engage and motivate my students because of her deep knowledge of the learner."

*"We need mentors who are strong communicators and willing to share their experiences. Our residents co-plan and co-teach with their mentors. So, we have to open up about how they teach, but they also need to allow the resident to stand on their own two feet."*

– JORDAN AHREND

1. <https://education-first.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Ensuring-High-Quality-Teacher-Talent.pdf>

2. [https://www.southeastern.edu/acad\\_research/programs/labschool/](https://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/labschool/)

# Impact >>

A recent US PREP brainstorming session on the future of teacher preparation with the U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos included Dr. Paula Calderon, dean of the College of Education, and Payton Bryant, a Southeastern graduate and current teacher at Luling Elementary School.<sup>1</sup> **“Pre-service teachers need a chance to fail with a mentor teacher there to guide them because we do not have this chance when we begin in our own classroom,”** Bryant told DeVos. **“We cannot retain teachers without giving them the tools necessary to be successful in the classroom.”**

Southeastern’s student teachers feel much more prepared for the classroom -- from classroom procedures to planning and delivering instruction, from talking with parents to being observed and evaluated by their principal. More than 90% of Southeastern’s recent graduates have been rated proficient or effective on the state’s Compass evaluation system across the 2013-2016 school years, and about three-quarters of 2010-2011 completers were still teaching 5 years later.<sup>2</sup> One of those graduates is Bryant, the Southeastern graduate and first grade teacher in St. Charles Parish, who recently earned a score of Highly Effective in the classroom management domain. She credits her Southeastern experience with preparing her for the realities of classroom teaching. **“As a resident teacher candidate, I was able to observe how routines, procedures, and expectations are developed and taught to students, which is not something most student teachers get to see,”** explains Bryant. **“I believe my management is more effective than peers who went through other programs because I was given the opportunity to develop it every day for an entire school year. Most of my peers did not have this chance until they were in their own classroom and at that point, there is no time to practice or fail because real students are depending on them.”**

It is too soon to tell whether more recent graduates who have completed the residency year will have greater



retention or higher evaluation scores. But district partners are impressed. **“Southeastern teachers are able to see how teachers use data and points of information about students to make informed decisions about how to support the needs of struggling students, how to challenge advanced students and how to differentiate curriculum so that content is diversified,”** explains Tobi Flair, a human resources recruiting specialist in St. Charles Parish. **“This kind of data-driven decision making and use has not been an area of focus in past years, because the traditional student teaching time frame did not allow for that to take place.”**

Since teachers who have completed the residency are so far further along the curve, partner districts’ support of these teachers can shift from basic support to more thoughtful coaching. **“Our residents are so much better prepared to implement curriculum and content material, whereas in the past, they were just figuring out the nuts and bolts of teaching in their one semester of work,”** Flair adds. **“I have noticed that our principals and administrators are having to challenge themselves in order to provide more strategic, deliberate, thoughtful and tiered feedback to residents once they enter their own classrooms! These teachers are so much further advanced in their delivery of curriculum, and their ability to pinpoint student needs through assessments.”**

1. <http://lionsroarnews.com/19468/news/training-the-teachers-of-tomorrow/>

2. <https://regents.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2017SLU-UndergradDataDashboard1.22.18.pdf>



A high-angle, top-down photograph of a group of people, likely in a meeting or collaborative work environment. The image is heavily overlaid with a solid green color. Several individuals are visible, some leaning over a table, others sitting. They appear to be engaged in a discussion or working on documents. One person in the upper right is holding a pen over a clipboard. Another person in the lower right is pointing at a document. The overall scene suggests a professional, collaborative setting.

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– TOBI FLAIR



# Moving Forward >>

As Southeastern moves forward toward extending the residency year to all undergraduates, strengthening and expanding its partnerships with districts, and ensuring that all its teacher graduates are ready to succeed on day one in their own classrooms, the college of education faces several challenges. It is crucial that the university finds the right balance of districts and schools in need of student teachers that can also provide those student teachers with a strong mentoring experience -- and do so within a reasonable commuting distance of the rural university. In addition, like other programs in Louisiana, Southeastern and its partners need to figure out how to balance the costs of the residency -- including mentor

stipends, as well as site coordinator salaries -- against their other budgetary priorities, particularly once state grants run out in a few years. In St. Charles, the district is seeking grant funding to help it continue to commit \$30,000-\$50,000 annually in stipends to mentors (and notably, to residents who commit to teach in the district for two years after graduation) participating in the Southeastern partnership.<sup>1</sup> But by building on the strong foundation the university has put in place with its district partners, the next generation of Southeastern-trained teachers is likely to be more ready than ever for the realities of teaching in Louisiana's schools.



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1. <https://education-first.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Ensuring-High-Quality-Teacher-Talent.pdf>



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