



## **HUB & SPOKE:** **US PREP'S DIRECT AND NETWORK ASSISTANCE MODELS**





# Background »

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*Never before had programs strived to implement a similar teacher preparation partnership model with a target of district partners that served dominantly children of color living in poverty. If we [US PREP] were to make a difference, it would have to be collectively. What kept my heart pumping was the idea that a group of university school partnerships could make an impact on the quality teachers teaching the highest needs students.*

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– SCOTT RIDLEY  
FORMER COLLEGE OF EDUCATION DEAN  
AT TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Universities are not expected to change because of the complex dynamics among faculty and leadership. However, to ensure that all their graduates are ready for the classroom on day one, teacher education programs must continuously improve. And to do so meaningfully and sustainably, data from accreditation has shown to not be enough. As noted by the [National Education Policy Center](#), teacher preparation initiatives focused on public assessment, state ratings, and ranking of states, institutions, programs, or teacher candidates put pressure on educator preparation providers, but rarely give them the information or guidance they need to make meaningful and sustainable change at scale.

When college of education Deans take on change efforts, they often feel isolated, as if theirs is the only institution experiencing the challenge of change. This often results in taking fewer risks, as they worry about fallout from key stakeholders such as their boards, foundations, faculty, candidates, and central administration. What these teacher education programs and their Deans need are opportunities to learn with and from other teacher preparation programs. They also need opportunities to practice and collaborate with people who have proven, successful track records in overcoming the challenge of change. (For more on how these Deans and institutions are changing their programs to meet the needs of today's teachers, see [“Daring Leadership: Lessons Learned from Transforming Four Colleges of Education.”](#))

For the last four years, the University School Partnership 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 page 3.) At the forefront of these redesigns are deeper partnerships with local K-12 districts, extensive clinical preparation alongside a highly-effective mentor teacher, practice-based coursework taught by trained teacher educators, and data use feedback loops that foster deep learning and improvements.





Through this work, US PREP has learned a great deal about what these institutions must have in place to get started and what support they need. At the outset, they must have enabling conditions in place to begin transformation work, including:

- A **commitment** to disrupting inequities in K-12 schools by better preparing educators to meet the needs of students who have been historically underserved;
- Openness to **district partnerships** and commitment to preparing candidates that meet district needs;
- A clear **vision** of the goals, accompanied by measures and milestones to track progress;
- **Support** of a permanent Dean as well as provost and faculty (including department chairs); and
- **Human and budgetary capacity** set aside to engage in deep reflection and significant program improvement, including retooling of both coursework and clinical practice.

In turn, what US PREP offers these institutions is 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.

This support includes strategic and practical guidance from US PREP staff and national experts, anchored in an institution's local context, needs, constraints, and policy. In addition, they receive not only insight and lessons learned from other colleges of education who have done this work -- about everything from course-work redesign to the use of performance assessment data to district partnerships -- but also motivation to continue forward in the work, even when things get difficult.

This article examines this “hub and spoke” model of assistance provided by the US PREP coalition to its participating teacher education programs, as well as the impact of that assistance on their work.

## US PREP Coalition Members\*

### COHORT I

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

### COHORT II

- Brooklyn College
- Lehman College
- 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

\*As of Spring 2020.

For a full list of current partners, visit the US PREP website at <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/our-coalition-members/>



# Direct Support to Partner Programs »

As described in a [white paper](#) released last year, US PREP offers its partner universities a wide range of support. While this “hub and spoke” model includes significant partner-to-partner support (described in the next section) from others in the coalition, its direct support includes:

- Virtual and on-the-ground coaching through Regional Transformation Specialists, who work with the universities to develop and implement three-year individual transformation plans (ITPs);
- Support for new site coordinators -- full-time faculty who support candidates during their clinical experience -- through experienced site coordinators called “clinical coaches”;
- Building collective research capacity for program improvement through data use [self-studies](#);
- Curriculum coaches to support content and methods faculty as they redesign coursework, with an emphasis on training candidates to be skillful users of K-12 curriculum and assessing candidates’ ability to teach; and
- Co-development of resources that respond to critical shared issues, such as a [developmental framework](#) that measures and supports programs’ progress, and a recent virtual convening to address the challenges in shifting clinical experiences to virtual formats during the coronavirus outbreak, including the [development of a shared resource](#) that was featured in [Education Week](#).

University partners value this assistance tremendously and data demonstrates that it is making a significant difference in the improvement of their teacher



education programs. On a [Technical Assistance survey](#) administered in 2019 to over 100 faculty and key teacher preparation leaders who work directly with US PREP staff in Cohorts I and II, more than 90% feel positive about the changes that transformation will bring, agree that the coalition is a positive and welcoming environment, and confirm that the network promotes collaborative learning that is applicable. “I am very appreciative of the hands-on technical support we have received, both from our RTS and from the convenings and trainings, and I would most definitely recommend the coalition precisely because of the tailored technical support and networked learning opportunities that are provided,” said one respondent. “It has been extremely helpful having the on-ground and on-going support of dedicated Regional Transformation Specialists, who have been extremely patient, knowledgeable and connective (bridging questions and opportunities to resources and other coalition members) for both District and partner alike,” agreed another respondent, adding that “the variety of tools that US PREP has shared, and the trainings that have accompanied these tools, are also major supports to our initial process.”





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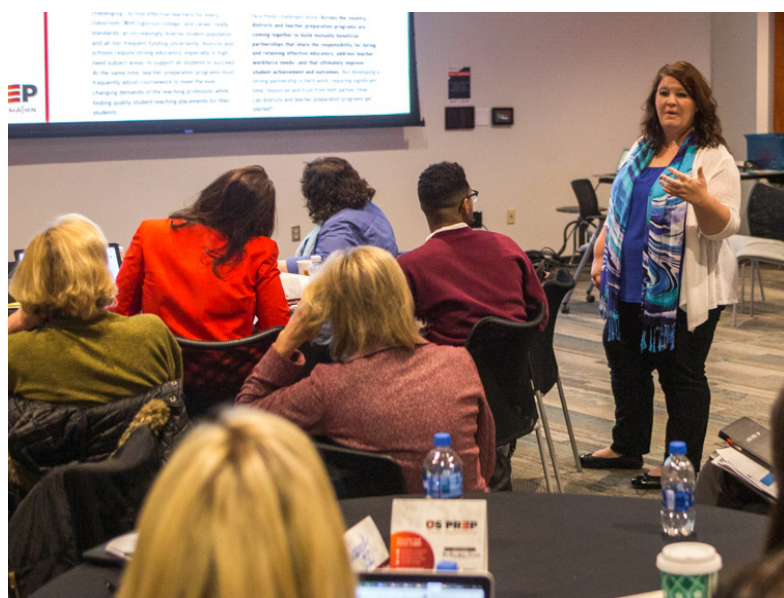
# Voices from the Field: Direct Support

In a recent doctoral dissertation focused on the interconnections between the individuals at two of US PREP's partner universities (University of Houston and Texas Tech University), participants reported that the support from US PREP's Regional Transformation Specialists keeps them focused on their transformation goals<sup>1</sup>. **"They help us turn the noise in our heads into action items and keep moving,"** said one interviewee. **"There is also emotional support from these roles because when you get so wrapped up in your own work, there is someone there to keep it [change] moving forward."** Another interviewee agreed that this guidance has supported them in their role. **"When you're out there in the field and you're meeting with your students, you're pretty much on your own,"** they said. **"But, then when we have our site coordinator meetings, or have access to US PREP support through [their local staff], we can bounce ideas around and get good feedback."**

Some district partners say they have benefited greatly and directly from participation in the US PREP network through convenings, webinars, and direct support from regional transformation specialists and other staff. For example, the St. Charles Parish Public Schools district in Louisiana has been working with Southeastern Louisiana University for several years and was interested in yearlong residencies. However, they knew they wanted more support with evaluating mentor teachers and with measuring growth of student teachers and their readiness to take over as a full-time teacher, says human resources recruiting specialist Tobi Flair. She says the district received hands-on support from US PREP, as well as valuable insights on using data to give teachers and mentors constructive feedback in a powerful and positive manner. **"US PREP has given me language and tools for how to work with principals and assistant principals to provide feedback to residents and mentors,"** says Flair.

Flair also received this support directly in her former role as a principal. **"It's one thing to have an assessment tool, but using the data that's collected from that tool and turning it into feedback is what really matters,"** says Flair. **"US PREP provided training in how to analyze data and make meaning of it once we collected it so we could provide meaningful feedback to our teacher candidates. US PREP also helped us slow down the process and be very deliberate and strategic, and really helped us clarify and codify expectations of student teachers and components of an effective lesson."**

Flair and other district partners have participated in US PREP convenings and say they appreciate talking with other districts and providers, who help provide them with valuable insight and motivation. **"It was nice to see what other universities and districts were doing,"** says Diana Castil, Principal, Pilgrim Academy PK-8, Houston ISD, who has been working with US PREP for four years. **"It helped me feel less isolated."**



<sup>1</sup> Wilson, C.K. (2019). *Changing teacher education: A social network analysis of US PREP* (Dissertation). Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.



Other district partners say they appreciate the active partnerships with the university provider, whose collaboration has responded to their needs and helped to improve both the quality of the student teaching experience as well as those teachers' preparation for full-time roles in the district. **"US PREP has enabled us to have a more collaborative relationship with Jackson State University and create more of a feedback loop to support our hiring needs,"** says Dr. Sherard Hollins, Director of Accountability, Jackson Public Schools, noting that Jackson State has made several changes to its program as a result of the district's needs, including a focus on the use of student perception surveys and other data. **"JSU really understood the importance of looking at student achievement data at one of the US PREP convenings. Teacher candidates are now looking at student achievement data and student perception surveys to make changes to instruction,"** says Dr. Hollins. **"The site coordinator reviewed this data with each teacher candidate, and it shifted their practice and behaviors in the classroom around classroom management and delivery of instruction."**

Ultimately, says Dr. Hollins, US PREP's biggest impact has been its support of mentor teachers and student teachers through the work with site coordinators, who act as a bridge between the university program and the district by working on site at schools to train mentors, supervise student teachers, and shape coursework accordingly. **"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. Hollins. **"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."**





# Network Support Between US PREP Coalition Members

In addition to the direct support that US PREP offers its partner universities, there are also opportunities for the coalition members -- including university deans, administrators, and faculty, as well as site coordinators and district representatives -- to work together collaboratively, including:

- Bi-annual convenings that bring together coalition members and their district partners to share ideas and learn from each other in the work;
- Regular virtual US PREP collaboration meetings for deans, program chairs, directors, and site coordinators;
- [Leadership retreats](#) for deans and department chairs to engage in collaborative work and research; and
- Collective advocacy on behalf of quality teacher preparation, such as a [roundtable at the Department of Education with the U.S. Secretary of Education](#) that included US PREP coalition members, alumni, and staff.
- [Being highlighted as a best practice by the Southern Regional Education Board \(SREB\)](#); and
- Presenting at multiple state-level convenings such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).



In the recently published dissertation on the ties between individuals in the US PREP coalition, university leaders in the US PREP coalition shared with scholar Courtney Wilson that their connections with other programs have been valuable. “Administrators have an opportunity to sit down and talk about ... what could I expect or how can I avoid this problem?” said one interviewee. “From the dean’s perspective, the opportunity for us to talk informally or by phone shows the real value of what US PREP could do for colleges of education.”

Respondents to the technical assistance survey agreed, with most (3.4-3.6 out of 4) saying that they are learning new things and learning a lot from other coalition members about how to do their work. “It is energizing to be a part of a network of like-minded professionals and peers identifying and creating industry standards together,” noted one respondent. “As a program, we (as a faculty) have benefited from a community of teacher educators all trying to address similar goals and having an opportunity to learn from one another - both the successes and the dismal failures,” said another.

## RECIPROCAL LEARNING

### LEARNING TO IMPROVE

I am frequently taught new things by other people in the transformation Center network.	3.51
I learn a lot about how to do my work by talking with the people in the Transformation Center network.	3.49
When we address problems in this Transformation Center network, we tend to examine it carefully so that we can come to an understanding of the problem and why it occurred.	3.48
In this Transformation Center network, we frequently learn about new things together as a group.	3.56
I learn how to do things in this Transformation Center network by sharing knowledge with other members.	3.53



# CONCLUSION »

US PREP's value to its coalition members comes from both the direct support provided by its staff -- including its Regional Transformation Specialists -- as well as from other participants in the network such as other universities and districts.

Over time, the US PREP network is poised to become even more valuable, as US PREP staff refine their support and as established cohorts of university partners (and their districts) develop their ability to help new cohorts of institutions start the change process. In addition, the ties between these individuals and institutions will continue to grow and potentially strengthen as they problem-solve together at convenings -- and informally through the relationships they build. This network continues to grow in size and strength: In spring 2020, US PREP welcomed nine new university providers to its coalition, representing diverse communities such as San Marcos, California, the Permian Basin in Texas, and Portland, Oregon.

Indeed, these connections may be the key to transformation that truly lasts. By creating connections between like-minded teacher preparation programs -- and by providing them with the means to receive support and to support one another -- the universities in the US PREP coalition are making a powerful difference in ensuring that more of our nation's teachers are truly prepared for the demands of today's classrooms and schools.





Renewing Educator Preparation

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