

HOW A TEXAS COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IS BUILDING MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY: TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY, LUBBOCK, TEXAS

This case study provides an in-depth look into the work of Texas Tech University's College of Education, an institution that has bucked stereotypes of bureaucratic, teacher preparation programs. Instead, it has developed a nationally renowned institution, known for its quality teacher graduates and its client-facing orientation towards its partner districts. **Texas Tech's College of Education serves as a unique model of what is possible when teacher preparation programs and districts truly strive towards authentic partnership, where the goal is tightly focused on teacher and student success.**

INTRODUCTION

In the world of education reform, where cities like D.C., Denver and New York City are often recognized for their innovative leaders and groundbreaking policies, the work of a Texas college of education and its partner districts has quietly, but surely begun to shine a light onto a masterful new model of teacher preparation and district reform. Enter Lubbock, Texas, population 300,000, known as "Hub City" for its role as the economic, education, and healthcare hub of its region. Lubbock boasts the largest contiguous cotton field in the United States, is the birthplace of rock and roll legend Buddy Holly and is one of the fastest growing medium-sized cities in the U.S. At the heart of Lubbock is the Texas Tech University System, and its largest university, Texas Tech University, has a College of Education that produces over 550 teachers per year.

A CHANGING UNIVERSITY: TEXAS TECH

Until a few years ago, Texas Tech's College of Education operated as a traditional teacher preparation program. It provided theory-based coursework and placed student teachers in local classrooms for 6–12 weeks to meet state requirements. Candidates were sent to districts wherever volunteer mentors could be found, with little attention to the mentors' skill or capacity. By and large, the program operated independently of the local districts it was training teachers to join.

While Texas Tech was standing still, however, the world around it was changing. Texas had become a majority-minority state; in 2013, of the over five million public school students, 52% were Hispanic and 13% identified as Black or African American. The percentage of the state's population that would obtain a post-secondary degree (38%) lagged behind the national average.

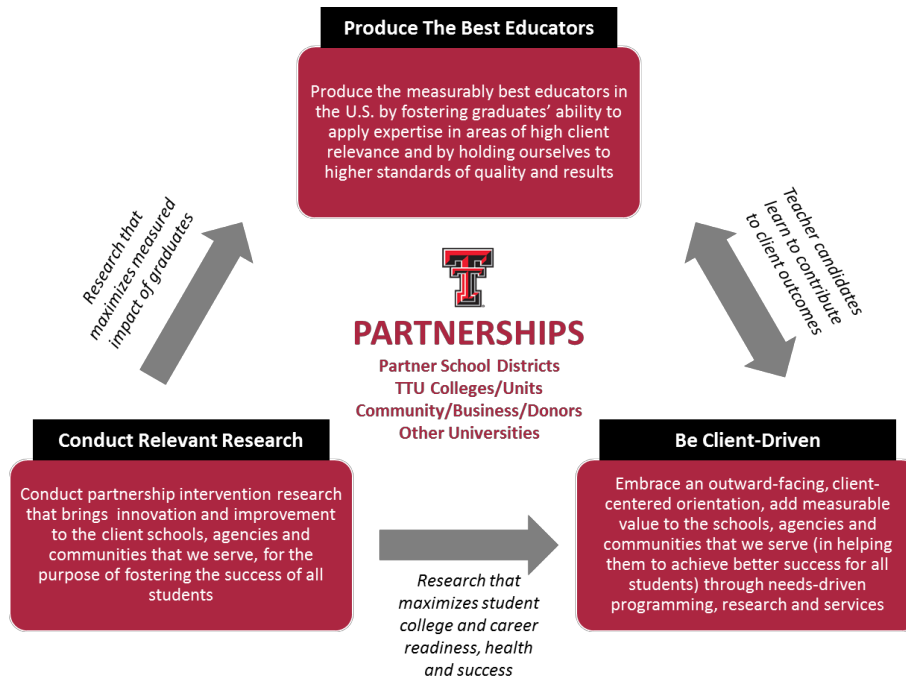


Dr. Scott Ridley, Dean
Texas Tech University
College of Education

As Texas' population grew, the number of new teachers needed per year had swelled to over 30,000, and demand for alternative certification programs, which, under the "June 15 Late-Hire Rule," allowed prospective teachers with no classroom experience or teacher training to enter the workforce immediately as teachers of record, grew. In 2014-15 there were over 15,000 late-hire teachers and virtually all of them found jobs in the highest needs schools, those filled with students that were non-white, economically disadvantaged, and at risk. Though some succeeded, Texas Education Agency principal survey data indicated widespread levels of dissatisfaction and concern over late-hire, alternatively-certified teacher quality and effectiveness. Meanwhile, districts such as Lubbock ISD and Dallas ISD, continued to look for a plentiful source of quality new teachers.

When the Dean position became vacant at Texas Tech University's College of Education, university leadership capitalized on the opportunity for change. They recruited Dr. Scott Ridley, whose work with teacher preparation through deep district partnerships had proved noteworthy. Ridley accepted, with a key question in mind: **What role can colleges of education, in partnerships with schools and districts, play in changing the trajectory of students in Lubbock? Or even across the entire state?**

Ridley developed a three-part vision for Texas Tech's College of Education, grounded in district and community partnerships:



With Dr. Ridley at the helm, Texas Tech would begin to provide a refreshing answer for local districts. First, he created a new administrative structure in the College of Education, strategically developing roles and responsibilities to implement his vision. Then, together with his faculty and staff, starting in 2010, Ridley implemented a model of teacher preparation partnership that would attend to the Texas context and the needs of its districts. Texas Tech developed carefully defined MOUs that would encourage deep sharing of data, and strict tracking of outcomes to create accountability for Texas Tech to produce quality teacher graduates.

Most notably, the initial reforms at Texas Tech were funded internally. Building on his experience at Arizona State University, Dr. Ridley both thoughtfully advocated for new university funding, but also made significant reallocations in existing funding practices at the College of Education to implement the new reforms. For example, he replaced the traditional student teacher supervisor roles with highly specialized Site Coordinator roles (see call-out box for more detail). Unlike many reform efforts, which are largely funded by short-term grants, this approach led to greater sustainability and fewer wasted resources across the College.

What is a Site Coordinator?

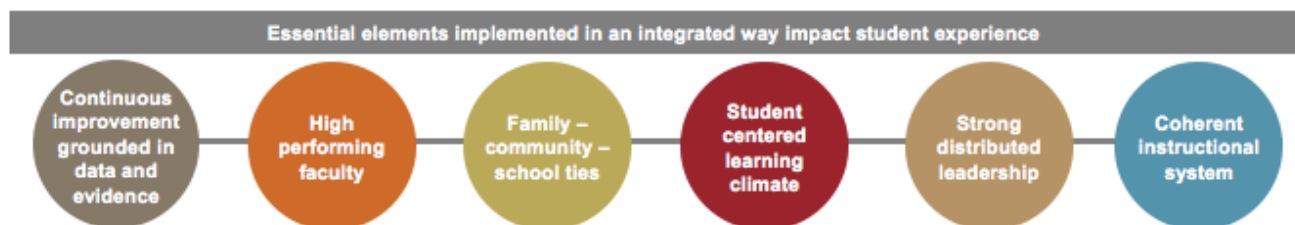
The Site Coordinator is a lynchpin of the Texas Tech College of Education reform. He or she “lives” in the district and schools where assigned, coaches and mentors the teacher candidates, gets to know schools and principals deeply, has ongoing meetings with mentor teachers to discuss the progress of teacher candidates, and runs governance meetings with the district. “TTU’s Site Coordinators are here all the time,” Michael Hinojosa, Dallas ISD Superintendent said. “They make our relationship with Texas Tech seamless.”

A BROAD VISION FOR PARTNERSHIP

The idea of teacher preparation-district partnership is not new; over the past ten years, many preparation programs and school districts have been loosely working together to place and train student teachers. However, these partnerships are often ill-defined, and vary greatly in purpose, format, and level of commitment by each partner. On the contrary, Texas Tech’s relationship with school partners is characterized by clear expectations, defined protocols, and an emphasis on producing quality teachers.

Additionally, the TTU College of Education leadership team decided to take it one step further. **Now, in several partner districts, Texas Tech has committed to fully supporting and building the capacity and resources of the district in a way that not only honors community diversity and need, but goes well beyond teacher preparation to provide essential supports for district success. TTU’s approach strongly aligns to our teacher prep outcomes and indicators, specifically quality driver # 4: Programs are driven by K-12 school systems and the communities they serve.** From providing training for veteran teachers around district initiatives, to writing grants to fund district wraparound supports, to training up strong school leaders, Dr. Ridley and his team are committed to the complete success of the districts they work with. And it has the districts wowed. According to Doyle Vogler, Assistant Superintendent of Lubbock ISD, “Bottom line: Our kids are benefiting from this partnership, and will continue to do so in 10 or 20 years and beyond.”

MORE THAN A HUMAN CAPITAL PIPELINE



The Texas Tech leadership team recognized that providing a pipeline of highly performing faculty is critical, but just one ingredient in creating a positive learning experience for children. Thus, Texas Tech’s approach to partnership moved beyond teacher preparation to address six essential elements of effective schools.

■ **Governance Meetings Create Shared Responsibility and Ownership of Student and Teacher Outcomes:** Traditionally, colleges of education and districts rarely meet, much less engage on shared challenges. Interactions that do happen are often ad hoc, between a single teacher preparation coordinator from the college of education and principals of placement schools, or between clinical faculty members and mentor teachers. While these connections are valuable, the challenge is that they rely on relationships and interests of individuals instead of a coherent organizational approach to shared problem solving.

Texas Tech and its districts have developed a thoughtful, integrated professional relationship with ongoing meetings called “shared governance.” Texas Tech’s Site Coordinators hold monthly governance meetings with each participating district’s principals and assistant principals. Though initial meetings can be challenging, as the relationship grows stronger, participants engage honestly, and bring out “skeletons in the closet,” Ridley said. During these meetings, while the bulk of the time is spent discussing teacher candidate performance and mentor teacher support, leaders also identify trends and actively discuss other opportunities for the college of education to meet the needs of a school’s faculty and students. During each meeting, participants engage with data and co-create solutions that will support candidate growth.

■ **Data Days Reinforce Data for Continuous Improvement and Keep the Focus on Impact:** Texas Tech has also implemented “Data Days” twice a year. On these days, clinical and tenure faculty come together to look at candidate performance on course assignments and performance observations, and create plans for how they will modify coursework or clinical experiences to address gaps. Beginning in spring 2017, school and district leaders will be invited to participate in these conversations as partners invested in a shared responsibility for preparing future teachers. Multiple data sources – from both partners – will be used to assess impact and to generate solutions.

■ **A Year-Long Residency Builds Teacher Candidate Capacity and Adds School Level Support:** Texas Tech’s partners are convinced that the year-long residency—fully funded by the university and far-exceeding the state minimum of 6–12 weeks of fieldwork—is a key to the success of the teacher candidates in its program and a major contributor to high-performing faculty in schools. All TTU teacher candidates participate in the residency in which they:

- **Start early.** Teacher candidates engage with their mentor teachers before the start of the school year and participate in district and school-level professional development, legal training, and content learning communities alongside their mentor teachers.
- **Are fully embedded.** Teacher candidates are treated as school employees (in fact, this is a part of the MOU that both parties sign), engage in all teacher conferences and professional learning community meetings, and use co-teaching strategies with increasing opportunities to lead the classroom over the course of the school year.
- **Co-plan and co-teach for the entire residency year.** Teacher candidates have access to the same online district lesson planning resources that employees do, and are required to develop quality lesson plans aligned to the state standards.
- **Practice advanced skills.** Teacher candidates learn about response to intervention strategies and how to analyze data; these are especially valuable as districts seek to grow teachers into administrators who can drive whole school change.

As a result, per a third-party evaluation, on average, students in classrooms of mentor teachers with teacher candidates score higher on both the district assessments and the STAAR exam.¹ Ultimately, “we principals have what amounts to a year-long job interview with Texas Tech’s teacher candidates,” Joshlyn Cotton, Principal of Ervin Elementary School said. With few exceptions, candidates are highly sought after and hired quickly.

“I was skeptical at the beginning of the school year about co-teaching... [but] it (co-teaching) has been helpful to have fresh eyes, be able to discuss teaching methods, curriculum, and various strategies needed to help students deepen their knowledge. But the biggest surprise has been the amount of student growth for both struggling and gifted and talented students.”

– Kendra Andersen, Mentor Teacher, Roscoe Wilson Elementary, Lubbock ISD

■ **Recruiting Community Members Builds a Cadre of Diverse, Committed Teachers:** Across the U.S. and in Texas, research shows that poor, diverse districts in large cities are more likely to have a high concentration of beginning teachers compared with all other districts.² This means that students in these districts, those most in need of effective teachers who can provide strong instruction and inspiration, are frequently exposed to new, struggling teachers.

With the goal of addressing teacher shortages and turnover in schools that serve low income, Black, and Hispanic students, and the goal of increasing the number of teachers of color, Texas Tech built the “TechTeach 2+1 program,” a community college transfer, district immersion teacher preparation partnership program, which targets and aggressively recruits members of the local community with an associate’s degree to become teachers. The part-virtual program option, now in Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Houston, two rural West Texas districts, and two Texas Hill Country districts, uses video capture and continuous on-the-ground coaching by a district-based Texas Tech Site Coordinator to train up future teachers from within their own ranks.

George Hardeman, a former cafeteria worker in one of TechTeach’s placement schools, gained an interest in teaching through his success tutoring students after school. “I chose the Texas Tech program because I heard it was challenging, but strong, and I could move right into it from my current role.” Hardeman said. A year later, he is preparing to teach Kindergarten at a nearby elementary school.



George Hardeman
TechTeach 2+1 Graduate

We have gone to Mexico and Spain to recruit teachers, but they don’t know our local communities. [TechTeach’s 2+1 graduates] know the culture and dialect of our families. They never want to leave this community, and now they get to add value here”

--Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District

■ **Site Coordinators Embedded in the District Improve Practice of Teacher Candidates and Existing Teachers:** While traditional teacher preparation programs provide sporadic faculty supervision for teacher candidates while they are student teaching, Texas Tech provides an embedded coach called a “Site Coordinator” to oversee and drive candidate success. Site Coordinators are responsible for three to five schools within a district, teach the once-a-week fieldwork course to senior year residents and are tasked with deeply knowing principals, mentor teachers, and teacher candidates. “Sometimes the TTU Site Coordinator knows the teachers in a school better than the principal,” Dr. Ridley said.

¹ Osborne, C., & Farber, M. (2014, February). Were the promises of TechTeach realized? Evaluation report for Part A (Teacher Preparation) of the i3 grant at Texas Tech University. Center for Health and Social Policy, The LBJ School of Public Affairs | The University of Texas at Austin.

² Gagnon, D., & Mattingly, M. J. (2012). Beginning Teachers Are More Common in Rural, High-Poverty, and Racially Diverse Schools (Summer 2012 ed., pp. 1-6, Issue brief No. 53). Durham, NH: Carsey Institute

The Site Coordinator provides a monthly professional development session to mentor teachers in the school he/she oversees, to problem solve around teacher candidates and discuss classroom strategies. In addition, Site Coordinators can be called upon by school leaders to play a more active role in professional development for the broader faculty (given the expertise they bring to the schools). School leaders cite the benefits of having teacher candidates and an instructional leader on campus. For example, one teacher candidate's work with her Site Coordinator on classroom management routines and higher level questioning resulted in the mentor teacher's adoption of new practices in these areas, as well. "Both of my mentors would consistently say: "We're glad you're here co-teaching with me because you're bringing all the latest strategies to my classroom," Texas Tech 2+1 graduate George Hardeman said.

Family –
community –
school ties

The Texas Tech model supports collaboration between families, communities, employers and schools to help drive student motivation and performance.

■ **East Lubbock Promise Neighborhood Run by Texas Tech Provides Wraparound Support:** Schools, especially those serving low-income Black and Hispanic students, have many more needs than just effective teachers in each classroom. Often, these needs exceed a district's financial and staff capacity. To address these needs, Texas Tech and the Lubbock Independent School District partnered to establish East Lubbock Promise Neighborhood (ELPN), a multi-faceted initiative across six high-need schools in the district. Using grant funding, Texas Tech hired a key staff member to lead its implementation, which includes supports for: attendance, academics, and behavior; alternatives to in and out of school suspension; health and wellness clinics; early learning support; tutoring; adult education; and after school enrichment.

What set ELPN apart from many other Promise Neighborhood initiatives was its attention to in-school supports as much as out-of-school supports. AVID is a one key strategy across the six ELPN schools as well as the establishment of an early college high school model at the high school within the ELPN community. With a focus on **Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization and Reading (WICOR)**, AVID has become the primary instructional framework for increasing academic rigor in the six ELPN schools. The AVID framework – in combination with the promise of earning up to 60 credit hours of Texas Tech lower division coursework (at no cost to the student) before high school graduation (see "Early College High School" below) – is driving new levels of academic rigor, teaching and learning previously unseen in the East Lubbock community.

"We've seen dramatic results in those schools: tardiness and suspension have seen significant improvements, creating an environment that is really focused on learning," Dr. Ridley said. For example, in the last three years, Ervin Elementary School has seen a 28% increase in 4th grade reading scores and a 14% increase in 4th grade writing scores. There has been an over 56% reduction in the number of referrals and a 99% reduction in the number of in school suspensions. Estacado High School, similarly, has had an over 82% reduction in student tardiness over the last two years, and over 55% reduction in in school suspensions over the last three years.

In another example of how the programming in TTU's teacher preparation program is driven by the K-12 community, Lubbock ISD recently asked Texas Tech to make AVID a cornerstone of its teacher preparation program and the College of Education agreed. Teacher educators at Texas Tech are now working to preparing teacher candidates to implement the WICOR framework as well as a number of specific AVID strategies to foster students' critical thinking.

■ **Texas Tech Partners with Lubbock to Open Early College High School:** As post-secondary attainment remains below the national average in Texas, this remained an open topic for discussion in shared governance meetings between Texas Tech and its partners. And in 2015, after a year of collaborative research and planning, Texas Tech and Lubbock ISD opened an Early College High School at Estacado High, which, according to the Texas Education Agency school report card, serves low-income (64% economically disadvantaged), Black (44.9%), and Hispanic (51%) students. This program will allow high school students to earn dual credit hours that count toward high school and college degrees; students who start their first year of high school at Estacado will graduate four years later with 60 hours of college credit, classifying them as college juniors. Students will not have to pay tuition on these college courses, valued at nearly \$40,000, as the program is funded entirely by Texas Tech University and the East Lubbock Promise Neighborhood initiative.³ In addition, Texas Tech University signed an agreement to fund the tuition costs of the Early College High School when grant funding concludes.

³ <http://lubbockonline.com/education/2016-05-17/texas-tech-estacado-unveil-new-early-college-high-school-program>

Student
centered
learning
climate

The Texas Tech model works alongside its school partners to build school culture that fosters safety, trust, and agency among students, where learning experiences are personalized.

■ **Texas Tech Bolsters Dallas and Lubbock ISD’s Instructional Initiatives Related to Student-Centered Learning:** With Dallas ISD, Texas Tech’s College of Education leadership team is revolutionizing the way that teacher preparation programs support their local districts’ unique initiatives. During shared governance meetings, Dr. Ridley and his team learned that Dallas was engaging in initiatives around personalized learning, STEAM, and dual enrollment. The TTU team immediately offered Texas Tech’s support. Dallas ISD superintendent Michael Hinojosa recognizes that Texas Tech’s approach to partnering with schools is unlike most universities, “He (Scott Ridley) is always asking: What are you doing, and how can we help?” Since the partnership began, Texas Tech has built a graduate certificate in personalized learning, and specialized trainings in dual enrollment and STEAM education. It also plans to build a [video library around personalized learning](#) just for Dallas ISD teachers. All of this is in addition to a strong teacher preparation pipeline, tailored to meet Dallas ISD’s needs. “They are adding value in each of our strategic areas; they know us just as well as we know ourselves,” Hinojosa said.

Similarly, in Lubbock ISD, the district requested Texas Tech’s support in implementing writer’s workshop at specific K–12 campuses in the district as part of the East Lubbock Promise Neighborhood initiative. The district didn’t have a systematic approach to supporting teachers in implementing writing instruction, and students at those campuses scored lower in statewide writing assessments than at other campuses. In response, Texas Tech developed a model of professional collaboration that utilized a “literacy champion” (a tenure-track faculty member in literacy) research assistants, and writing resources at each site to identify and solve problems of practice with writing instruction.

Strong
distributed
leadership

The Texas Tech model prepares school leaders who enable the conditions for student success at the school level.

■ **Competitive Principal Fellows Partnership Program Builds Prepared School Leaders:** Honest conversations between partners always lead to stronger outcomes, and the partnership between Texas Tech University and Lubbock ISD was no different. After establishing the renewed partnership focused on improving the teacher pipeline, the conversation turned to school leaders. “They told us they really wanted better principals that they would hire,” Dr. Ridley said. These principals needed to be rigorously trained and ready to go on day one in district schools. Current Texas Tech graduates weren’t making the grade.

Texas Tech was determined to improve its principal product, and together with Lubbock ISD, they organized a site visit to the widely-regarded Ritchie Program for School Leaders, created through a partnership between Denver Public Schools and the University of Denver’s Morgridge College of Education. Conversations after the site visits revealed challenges with the current Texas Tech program: faculty members tended to pontificate on theory, with minimal practice of key skills, rather than enabling aspiring school leaders to develop needed competencies in the field through a rigorous application based curriculum.

Together, the preparation program and district co-created the Principal Fellows Partnership Program, a selective, competency-based, administrator residency to develop future Lubbock ISD school leaders. Only a few applicants are selected each year, and they spend a full 15 months as an Assistant Principal at a Lubbock ISD school, mentored by a strong principal. Lubbock ISD pays the trainee’s salary for a year, and Texas Tech provides a faculty coach, covers the cost of their principal certification, and awards them a Masters in Educational Leadership upon successful completion of the program. The “just-in-time” oriented coursework and fieldwork are focused on instructional leadership skills, understanding Lubbock ISD systems, engaging with stakeholders, and building principal candidates’ skills with data analysis of teacher and student performance to drive interventions. The two-year pilot in Lubbock was successful: in both years, candidates were hired as assistant principals immediately.

Because of the historically poor quality of university-based principal preparation programs, districts have instituted their own labor intensive “principal academies” to further develop future leaders. However, with the advent of the co-created Principal Fellows program, Lubbock ISD is discontinuing their academy. In addition, Lubbock ISD is willing to continue to incur the cost of preparing a very selective number of elite principal fellows. For Texas Tech, the use of video capture and sharing technology across Texas and other states allows both extreme selectivity of admissions *and* cohort numbers sufficient to make economic sense.

Buoyed by its success and in partnership with NIET, Texas Tech University wrote and was awarded a U.S. Department of Education SEED grant to expand the program to additional districts, relying on video capture and on-the-ground principal coaches to maintain the same level of rigorous coaching and site-based feedback.

Coherent
Instructional
system

The Texas Tech model promotes partnership to build strong instructional systems.

■ **Use of the TAP Rubric Drives Strong Instruction:** To address a common complaint that teacher training is not applicable to day-to-day life in the classroom and does not align to the instructional systems of schools, the Texas Tech team adopted the [TAP System](#) Rubric from the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to undergird their revamped model for preparing teachers. The rubric articulates practical standards for instruction, learning environment, designing and planning instruction, and teacher responsibilities, and (as adopted by the state of Tennessee under the name “TEAM”), is in the top 25% in alignment to Common Core.⁴ Site coordinators, faculty members, mentor teachers and teacher candidates are all trained in use of the TAP, and use it regularly to assess teacher candidate performance, as described in the next section. As several districts also used the TAP or a similar rubric, e.g. the Danielson Group’s rubric, this provided Texas Tech and its partner districts with a common language to describe instructional quality.

But Texas Tech did not stop there. Seeing the success of using a common, high-quality rubric, it co-wrote a grant with Lubbock ISD to implement TAP in five middle schools that the district indicated needed a critical intervention in math instruction. Using the framework, TTU faculty worked with math coaches and other leaders at the schools to practice scoring and norming around the rubric for use in driving stronger instruction among its veteran teacher staff through a multi-step feedback model called the PoP cycle, which includes a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference. Although the steps in the PoP cycle may seem like obvious components of teacher candidate support, many teacher preparation programs lack this type of rigorous structure to hold teacher candidates and their observers accountable to driving towards improvement. In the case of Texas Tech, however, “the PoP Cycle is integral to shaping teacher candidates’ teaching competencies, instructional decision making, and objective self-analysis,” Dr. Ridley said. TTU later used the PoP cycle in Dallas ISD, and the state of Texas is moving towards a similar model. Dr. Ridley extols the benefits of using a common, high quality rubric such as TAP, and accompanying PoP feedback cycle. He admitted that it was challenging to implement it with fidelity in schools, and honest conversations with district and school leadership have been critical to ensuring that the schools continue to use the observation tool and protocols in ways that lead to valid, reliable, and useful feedback to teachers.

CONCLUSION

Teacher preparation programs can no longer afford to stand still. The needs of the communities around them are changing and growing, and they must act to ensure that schools have the teachers they require. Districts and schools, too, like those in Lubbock and Dallas, must be open to partnering with teacher preparation programs in new and innovative ways. **And both districts and programs need to tear down barriers between institutions to allow for effective collaboration beyond teacher preparation.** This will require committing to deep relationships, flexible staffing arrangements, reallocated and sometimes new financial resources, data sharing, shared control, and more. “Most universities act like there are walls around them, but Texas Tech has broken down those walls,” said Lubbock ISD Assistant Superintendent Vogler. Dallas Superintendent Michael Hinojosa concurs, “Our relationship with Texas Tech is so valuable...we will always find a way to work with them.”

Texas Tech University is preparing teachers in 15 districts around the state, including Lubbock, Dallas, Grand Prairie, San Antonio and Houston, and demand continues to outstrip capacity; the College added four new district partners this summer alone. **“The word is out about the work we are doing,” Dr. Ridley said. And districts want in.**

⁴ <http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Teacher-Evaluation-Common-Core-Alignment-October-2016.pdf>

NEXT STEPS

Texas Tech University continues to make tremendous strides within and outside its district partnerships to truly hear and address the needs of its community. In November 2016, Dr. Ridley was appointed by the governor to the Texas State Board for Educator Certification. This will enable him to participate in the Board's discussion around preparation, certification, and standards of conduct for public school educators. In addition, other universities are starting to take notice of Texas Tech's success. In response, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Texas Tech launched the [U.S. PREP \(University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation\) National Center](#), which currently works with six regional teacher preparation programs in Texas and neighboring states to implement the same client-driven programming seen at Texas Tech.

“With the help of the Gates foundation, U.S. PREP is working to establish a new norm in university colleges of education. Historically, the focus has been on conceptual understanding and publication of research *without the expectation of impact*. Teacher education suffered in that context. Through U.S. PREP, we're establishing a new norm of not only conceptual understanding, but deep skill-based competencies developed in the context of partnership with the schools, agencies and communities that we serve.”

– **Scott Ridley, Dean, Texas Tech College of Education**
