

Preparing and Supporting “Day-One Ready” Teachers in Arkansas

A Synthesis of Feedback and Recommendations

April 22, 2021



Table of Contents

[Purpose and Context](#)

[Stakeholder Groups](#)

- Design
- Demographics and Representativeness

[Voices from Arkansas](#)

- What might new teachers need to know and be able to do to be Day-One Ready?
- What are some ways programs and experiences are successfully supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready?
 - How might existing programs and experiences improve and/or what else might you like to see offered?
- What are some ways K-12, Educator Preparation Programs, and DESE partnerships are successfully supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready?
 - How might they improve and/or what else might you like to see offered?

[Connections to Research & Recommendations](#)

[IHE Survey Highlights](#)

Preparing and Supporting Day-One Ready Teachers in Arkansas

A Synthesis of Feedback and Recommendations from the Field

Purpose and Context

The Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) had the privilege of conducting digital stakeholder engagement groups to gather input regarding the most salient considerations for preparing and supporting day-one ready teachers in Arkansas--particularly in light of lessons learned due to COVID19. At the request of the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Office of Educator Effectiveness and Licensure, OIE coordinated and facilitated virtual feedback sessions with 176 stakeholders and 48 survey respondents, from across the state of Arkansas to gather feedback. Stakeholders represented a diversity of demographics, roles, and relationship to the work of preparing and/or hiring newly prepared teachers.

This summary is a synthesis of the feedback from the field collected between December of 2020 and March of 2021 and is supported by examples from national research and thought leadership on preparing and supporting teachers. The purpose of this summary is two fold. A primary purpose is to authentically represent voices from the field in Arkansas to provide actionable recommendations to DESE based on their feedback as stakeholders. A secondary purpose is to link these recommendations to national efforts and published work related to preparing and supporting day-one ready teachers to offer considerations for continued transformation.

Stakeholder Groups

Design

From December of 2020 through March of 2021, OIE coordinated and conducted twenty-eight digital stakeholder groups and a one-on-one stakeholder session using Zoom technology. With DESE's assistance in recruitment, 468 stakeholders were invited to participate in the focus groups. Of the 468 invited, 238 stakeholders registered to participate in a focus group. Of those registered, 176 stakeholders, or 74% registered invitees, participated in the first series of focus groups and 48 stakeholders from institutes of higher education (IHEs) Colleges of Education participated through a follow-up survey. In addition, OIE conducted a follow up focus group with staff from IHEs/EPPs scheduled in late March, 2021, in which six participants offered additional insights.

Stakeholders were contacted by both DESE and OIE. OIE coordinated the invitations based on participant's availability and role. Participants in like roles were guided through a semi-structured set of questions using a set of slides shared before and during the Zoom session. Following the Zoom session, participants had the option to add to their thoughts as part of a reflection survey. Participants were provided a set of current research and policy documents that were optional to review in advance of the Zoom sessions. DESE staff graciously vetted the questions and format of the semi-structured protocol ahead of time by participating in trial Zoom Sessions. These trial sessions, along with ongoing surveys conducted after every group, allowed OIE to continuously improve the quality of the experience for stakeholders maximizing input. Time spent with groups varied; however, most sessions were between 45-60 minutes.

Demographics/Representativeness

Demographic data were collected from stakeholders when they registered for a focus group. DESE assisted OIE in monitoring and recruiting additional participants to ensure representativeness of the stakeholders involved in teacher preparation and/or impacted by teacher preparation. The information they provided was compiled and analyzed. Key demographics from the focus groups, and state data, are provided below in Figures 1-3.

Figure 1: Focus Group Participants by Organization Type

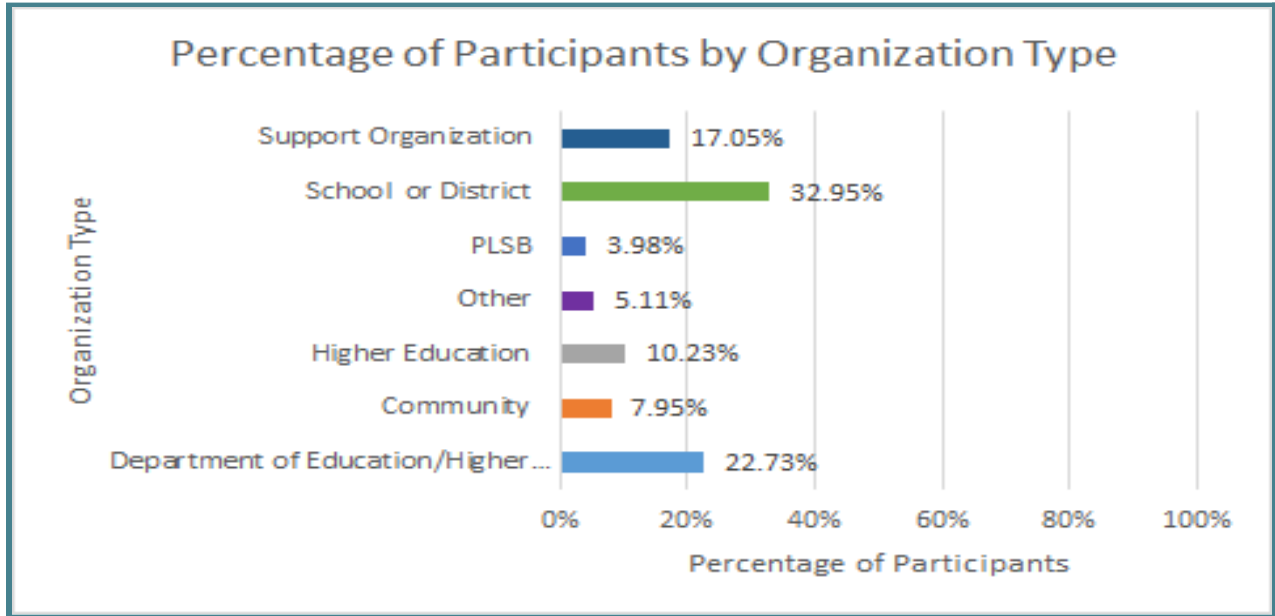


Figure 2: Focus Group Participants by Ethnicity

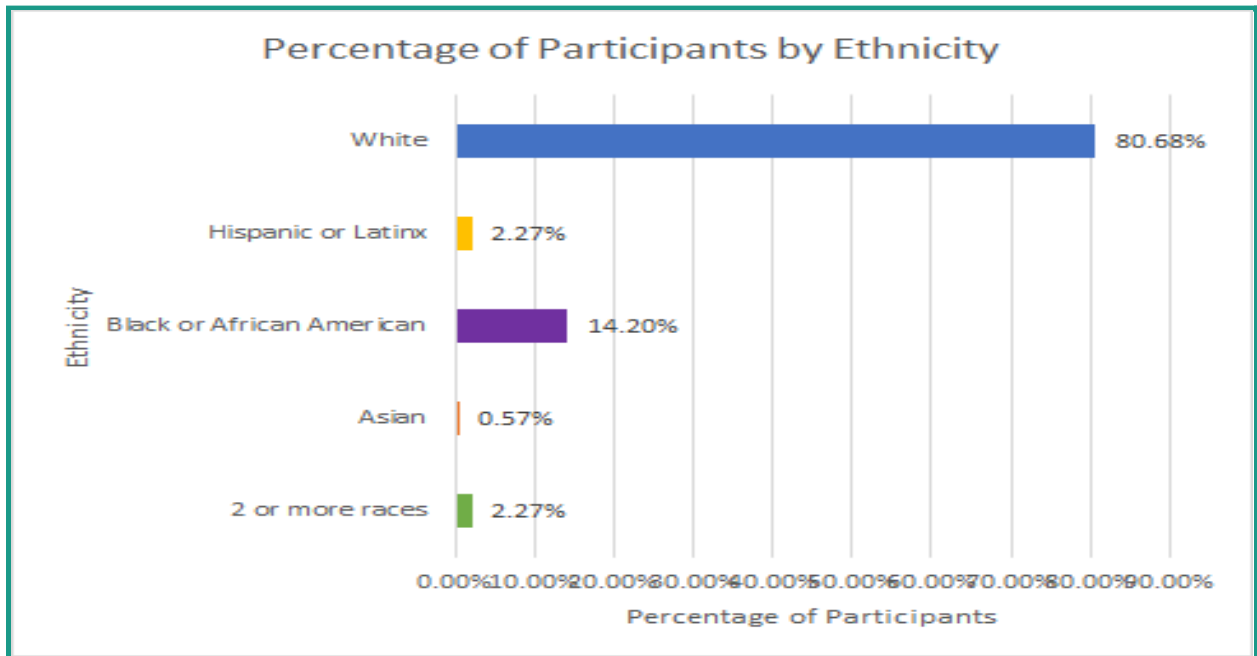
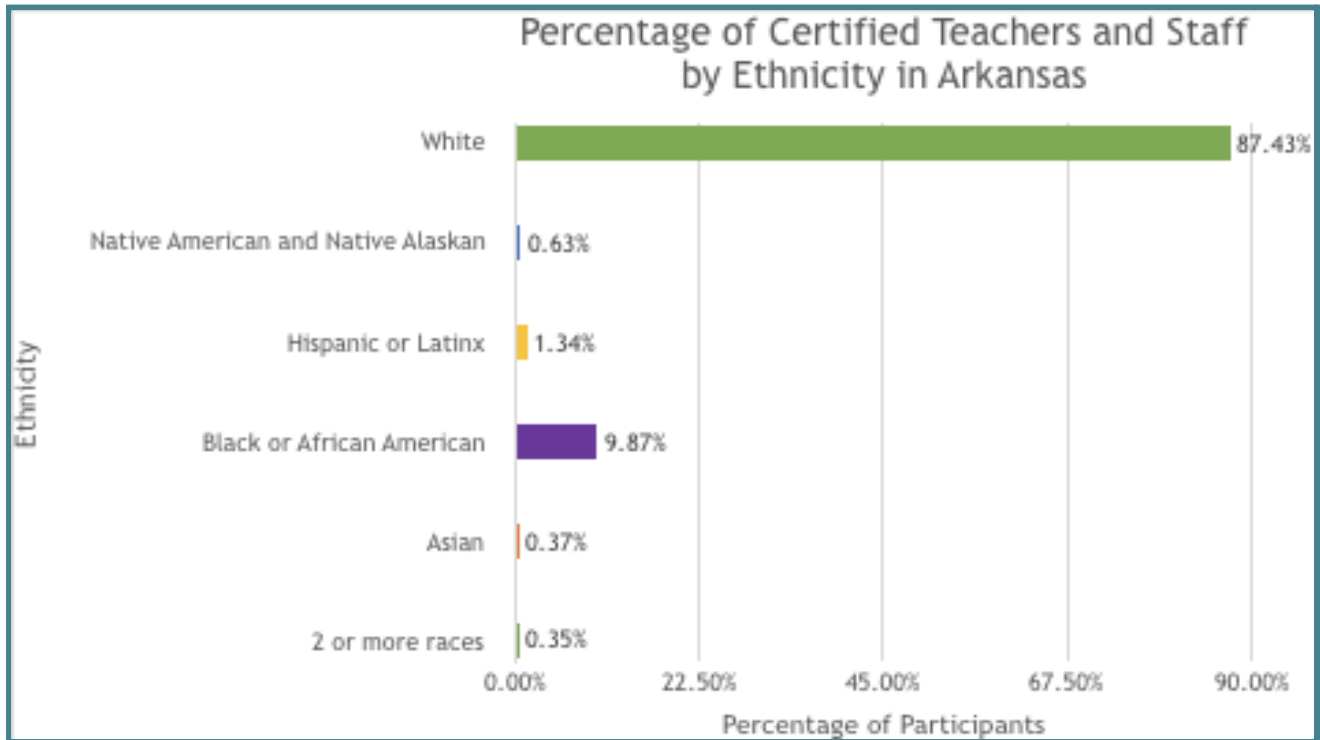


Figure 3: Percentage of Certified Teachers and Staff by Ethnicity in Arkansas



Voices from Arkansas

Across the stakeholder groups, participants were asked questions from the following semi-structured set:

- What might new teachers need to know and be able to do to be Day-One Ready?
- What are some ways programs and experiences are successfully preparing teachers in being Day-One Ready?
 - How might existing programs and experiences improve and/or what else might you like to see offered?
- What are some ways K-12, Educator Preparation Programs, and DESE partnerships are successfully supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready?
 - How might they improve and/or what else might you like to see offered?

The findings are organized under the following questions.

- What might new teachers need to know and be able to do to be Day-One Ready?

- What are some ways K-12, Educator Preparation Programs, and DESE are successfully preparing and supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready and what might they do to improve?

An overview of the themes that emerged from stakeholder responses are offered in the next section.

What might teachers need to know and be able to do to be Day-One Ready?

“While it is hard to predict what the world will be like when young people now entering kindergarten begin their careers, we know we must prepare students for a lifetime of learning. Teachers must be prepared to provide students with the tools that will be useful over time and durable no matter what changes occur.” (CCSSO, Our Responsibility, Our Promise, 2012)

Stakeholders were asked to consider new teachers entering the classroom to support their students within the context of today’s world, particularly given the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on teaching and learning. In this context, and considering their own experiences, participants were asked, what might a new teacher need to know and be able to support their students to be day-one ready? Stakeholders approached their answers to this question from different perspectives based on their own experiences with education. Stakeholders who identified as educators focused on their own experiences as new teachers and their current work with aspiring and new teachers, while many community stakeholders reflected on their children’s experiences with new teachers. Other stakeholders zoomed out and considered broader skills and dispositions needed in the world today such as communication and collaboration. These stakeholders wondered, how might new teachers be more prepared to support development of broader skills?

Emergent themes clustered around new teachers being able to: **build relationships, be culturally competent, use technology to serve learning, be responsive to all learners, be strong communicators and collaborators, and practice and model personal competencies, SEL for themselves and be trauma-informed.** The themes and sub-themes are detailed below.

- Teachers need to know how to **build relationships** with
 - student learners,
 - families and community members, and
 - peers and administrators; as well as
 - how to communicate and engage in outreach with all of these groups.
- Teachers need to **be culturally competent**, demonstrating an array of knowledge, skills, and dispositions including
 - self-awareness (especially understanding personal biases)
 - adapting learning environments, practices, and curriculum to reflect the learning community (culturally responsive teaching)
 - seeking new understandings in collaboration with others and building diverse relationships.
- Teachers need to be able to **use technology to serve learning**, which includes

- demonstrating foundational technology skills such as effective use of videoconferencing and learning management systems
- experience with and demonstration of skills for designing, implementing, and supporting anytime/anywhere learning.
- Teachers need to know how to **be responsive to all learners**, which includes
 - experiences with and demonstration of designing for and meeting the needs of different learners based on understanding of learner development
 - designing engaging learning that applies content knowledge, skills, personal competencies, and knowledge of learners.
- Teachers need to **be strong communicators and collaborators**, in order to
 - establish ongoing two-way communication with learners, families, peers, administration, and support staff
 - involve the learner, families, school and district staff, and community in meeting common goals
 - engage in collaborative teaming to meet all student needs and impact learner, school, and district goals.
- Teachers need to practice and model **personal competencies, SEL for themselves and be trauma-informed**
 - Learn and practice personal competencies and SEL and know and have access to resources for personal support
 - Learn indicators of mental health needs for students, trauma-informed practices, and strategies to appropriately support student learners.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Teachers need to know how to build relationships with student learners.

Across the focus groups, Arkansas stakeholders expressed the importance of teachers knowing how to build relationships with student learners. Stakeholders saw this as the first and foremost skill set of a teacher, and something that new teachers especially needed experience with demonstrating these skills before taking the helm of a learning environment of their own. Some participants offered characteristics and dispositions, such as being caring, approachable, humble, committed to offering mutual respect, and maintaining appropriate boundaries. Other stakeholders offered, more broadly, how critical it is that teachers serve as a caring person in learners' lives. As one participant shared, "the relationship piece is huge...you can walk in and just, there's a different feeling in a classroom where the relationships are strong and loving, yet firm."

When asked to offer ideas for developing relationships, one participant who identified as a seasoned educator offered practical strategies such as, getting to "know the names of the children...and start doing some research beforehand... and learn a little bit about them." Some stakeholders pointed out that interns miss some of the modeling of behaviors that serve to build relationships early in the school year, simply because they come into the learning environment several weeks in, after the culture and foundational relationships have been established.

Teachers need to know how to build relationships with families and community members.

Most stakeholders discussed building relationships with families in conjunction with learners, and some extended this to discuss community members. When asked to offer some ways teachers might build family relationships, ongoing communication and practical strategies were emphasized. One administrator expressed the importance of a phone call, over an email, “nothing replaces personal communication, and hearing a voice so you can have an understanding of the tone in the voice.”

One stakeholder offered a specific [resource from CAEP](#) (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) that was helping her pre-service teachers learn ways to engage with families, “on the CAEP website they actually have a set of modules that's free for your students to go through, and there are practice phone calls to parents, there are videos for them to watch and reflect on and analyze...what went well with that parent call, how could you improve that? I had my students do it for the first time last semester, and the feedback I got from students was incredibly helpful and they really felt like they had a better understanding of how to communicate with parents.”

Teachers need to know how to build relationships with peers and administrators

In several focus groups, participants addressed the microcosm of the classroom in which many aspiring teachers spend the bulk of their time. In traditional schooling, teachers are often isolated from peers in a single classroom for most of the day and an aspiring teacher is isolated with them. When interns spend most of their time interacting with primarily their cooperating teacher, they miss the opportunity to practice building relationships with peers and administrators. When reflecting on their first year of teaching personally, or in some cases, their role supporting new teachers, stakeholders who identified as educators, felt that this was often a hurdle for brand new teachers. One educator expressed that when supporting new teachers in the past, “I had several teachers reach out to me and say, I don't really know how to talk to my principal [in order to] get what I need.”

Some participants who identified as school leaders expressed the growth aspiring teachers experienced in building relationships with peers and administration as a result of involving them in collaborative team meetings, that may include support staff, grade or content level peers, and administration. One building leader expressed the importance of building relationships and working collaboratively, “this is the big one, can they work collaboratively, because in this day and age...you must be able to do that in our building, we don't allow for any silos.”

Teachers need to know how to communicate and engage in outreach

Communication and engagement are key to building relationships and establishing outreach within and beyond the classroom. As mentioned in the knowing how to build relationships sub-theme, aspiring teachers who had experiences outside of the traditional classroom learning environment, were more likely to also have experience with community outreach. In some focus groups, participants who identified as parents and/or family members discussed having interns participate in summer reading camps, tutoring, parent teacher organizations, volunteer work, and fundraisers. One community member offered, “Seek out opportunities to come volunteer. Just be in the community.. get a feel...be present.” By engaging directly with the community, stakeholders feel aspiring teachers have a better understanding of the various roles they will fill once they enter teaching full-time.

BE CULTURALLY COMPETENT

Teachers need to be self-aware, especially in understanding their own personal biases.

The need for self-awareness as a component of cultural competence was discussed in some form across a variety of educators, higher education staff, community and family, and support stakeholder groups. As one community member offered, “[Teachers] need training in recognizing personal bias and deficit default.” Another stakeholder offered, “I think it's really critical for teachers to unpack their own biases and be willing to do it constantly and think about why they do what they do and [to understand] how [they] can create more positive experiences even where kids are creating negative ones, even if it's unconscious...so I'm thinking about this [as a] whole equity piece for kids, especially students of color.”

Teachers need to be able to adapt learning environments, practices, and curriculum to reflect the learning community.

Stakeholders broached this sub-theme from a variety of angles, some saw it as a way to build relationships, others saw it as a component of instructional planning, and others directly connected it to equity and culturally responsive teaching. A participant who identified as being from a higher education institution offered that in order to build relationships, “you have to know who you serve...[and] do your research on the school and the community” while another educator offered, teachers need to “be aware of their own cultural background/makeup and expectations as well as how other people view life so they can interact with students and families in culturally responsive/respectful ways.”

Seek out new understandings in collaboration with others and build diverse relationships.

When asked how aspiring teachers might build their cultural competence, some participants offered ideas that built on previous themes, such as experiences that allowed interns to practice building family and community engagement, engage in collaborative learning with peers, and implement classroom strategies for building culture, such as strengthening relationships through new understanding and mutual respect. As one participant who identified as a former classroom educator offered, when faced with teaching in a culture very different than his own, he knew his first step was to immerse himself “in some cultural things that [he] might not be aware of, so that [he] could reach those kids” and show them that he “took the time to appreciate and understand.”

USE TECHNOLOGY TO SERVE LEARNING

Teachers need to demonstrate foundational technology skills, such as effective use of video-conferencing tools and learning management systems.

Given the changes in learning world-wide, it is not surprising that participants from all focus groups expressed that for all teachers entering the profession--technology skills should be a given. However, they also recognized that some of these changes happened rapidly due to COVID-19 resulting in a period of innovation and experimentation for newer teachers who may not have practice to develop proficiency beforehand. For this sub-theme, educators, staff from IHEs, and parents, were eager to offer ideas from what's been working, what is needed, and what they anticipated for the future regarding the skills for using technology. One priority was ensuring aspiring teachers demonstrated the ability to video-conference, engage in learning and content management systems, and do so in a way that was engaging and relevant. Many participants saw this as something that EPPs could directly address--by

exposing teachers to more tech tools in their required courses and by partnering with schools (both face-to-face and virtually) who are known leaders in technology integration. As one participant who identified as a district leader offered, “I'm on the hiring side and one of the things I thought...was teachers need to know diverse technologies now compared to the past... because the way things are going, now they have to be able to engage a diverse audience with diverse technologies.”

Teachers need to have experience designing, implementing, and supporting anytime/anywhere learning. This sub-theme emerged as an extension to teachers needing to demonstrate technology skills as a precursor to entering the field as a new teacher. Stakeholders from several groups felt that teachers needed to experience and demonstrate some skill in designing, implementing, and supporting anytime/anywhere learning both in their university courses and through their internships. Most participants defined this sub-theme as aspiring teachers demonstrating their ability to navigate learning and content management systems, integrate technologies into face-to-face learning environments to better support all learners, and demonstrate increasingly adaptive skills by learning about transferring their skills to different systems. Across the groups, stakeholders identified knowing how to design engaging virtual and face to face learning via technology, as part of supporting anytime/anywhere learning. As shared by one parent, teachers need experience in being more “interactive in the classroom, even if they are virtual... I think that maybe the teacher needs to be taught to ask questions [and] to remember what it means to engage” especially in virtual environments. One stakeholder from an EPP program offered, “a lot of universities are looking at including [having a] placement in an online school or an online setting where they [aspiring teachers] have to create a Google classroom assignment, populate [a] classroom... And so we're really thinking that that needs to be a part of preparation as well.”

BE INCREASINGLY RESPONSIVE TO ALL LEARNERS

Teachers need to have experience meeting the needs of different learners based on understanding of learner development.

Stakeholders recognized that the ability to be responsive to all learners was something that teachers developed over time, with experience and often as part of a learning community. Across all focus groups stakeholders expressed the importance of day-one ready teachers having experience in this area. Some discussed innovative ideas, such as co-teaching, extended apprenticeships, and robust mentoring as ways teachers could develop and master this competency. They saw this competency as inseparable from assessment literacy and, in some cases, also connected this practice to a teachers foundational understanding of the science of learning and development. Many did feel that aspiring teachers needed more experience with being responsive to the vast array of learners during their field experiences. As one district leader shared, “when you're in your internship, particularly, you do have an intimate knowledge of kids. And so if [interns] could practice having conversations about students based on data and answering questions... What do we do now? What's the next step? That's part of it. It's not just teach and move on.”

Teachers need to know how to design engaging learning that applies content knowledge, competencies, and knowledge of learners.

Across the focus groups, engagement was an almost ubiquitous topic of dialogue. Parents, educators, personnel from support organizations, and leaders from across state agencies, discussed the importance of

day-one ready teachers understanding that learning that engages is deep, multi-faceted, demands interaction, and is often tailored based on the teachers personal knowledge of the interests, culture, and needs of their learners. As one stakeholder shared, “the ability to plan a quality lesson that engages kids” is a must, and another offered, the learning design, “it’s got to be engaging, on grade level, and culturally responsive.” Another stakeholder saw it as part of the classroom management and culture, and offered, “it’s a matter of student engagement, how do I engage my students, how do I get their interest, how do I connect to them?”

BE STRONG COMMUNICATORS AND COLLABORATORS

Teachers need to have experience establishing ongoing communication with learners, families, peers, administration, and support staff

As discussed in the sub-theme of engaging families, stakeholders felt that oftentimes during internships, the cooperating teacher managed all or most communication with families, peers, administration, and support staff. Stakeholders felt that aspiring teachers should increasingly manage and direct communication during their internship, along with the support of their cooperating teacher, so that this important skill was in place before they took the helm of their own learning environment. As one practicing teacher shared, “communicating with families.. that was never really taught to me.”

Teachers need to know how to involve the learner, families, school and district staff in meeting common goals

An important part of communicating with the learner, families, school and district staff often involves setting and planning for learner goals. While this is another competency that educators agree will develop over time, being able to collaborate and involve others in a learner’s plan for success, was a key part of being able to meet individual learning needs and goals.

Teachers need to be able to engage in collaborative teaming to meet all student needs

From participants identifying as from higher education, to those identifying as practicing teachers and support personnel, many offered the importance of involving aspiring teachers in collaborative teaming. While some offered the PLC process as an example, others spoke more broadly about teachers needing to be able to work collaboratively to meet learner goals. As one district leader offered, “the PLC process...[is] a focus for much of the state...and we know that’s a proven method for schools to be successful. [New teachers] have to come out of a university understanding that this is not [a]close your door and go teach.”

PRACTICE AND MODEL PERSONAL COMPETENCIES, AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND BE TRAUMA-INFORMED

Teachers need to actively practice personal competencies and SEL and know/have resources for support.

While many saw this sub-theme emerge as part of the ongoing pandemic, others felt it was something that teachers were expected to know how to do, and were not explicitly taught. Participants expressed that consideration for developing and maintaining personal competencies (meta-cognition, cognition, social/emotional skills, etc.), as well as social and emotional health, are often overlooked for teachers and any emphasis in this area, where it exists, is focused mainly on student learners. Increasingly, participants

said they noticed the connection, either personally, or from teachers they support or know, between a teachers capacity to manage behavior and emotion, care for self, seek out support, and the health of a classroom. Stakeholders noted this may need to be more explicitly addressed in preparation programs, and by schools and districts, especially given the increasingly demanding caretaking role in which teachers find themselves. Furthermore, they noted that by learning to more deeply care for self and manage their own behavior and emotions educators could more authentically teach personal and social/emotional learning competencies, (such as those outlined in [Arkansas' G.U.I.D.E for Life](#)). A participant who identified as a community member shared, "I think there's not a lot of emphasis on how teachers can kind of fill their own cup and support themselves because when they are taking care of themselves, when they have the resources that they need, when they're supporting themselves and doing things that heal them, they are then able to bring their best selves to the students to their classroom...then they might be more patient, they might have the time."

Teachers need to be aware of the indicators of mental health, trauma-informed practices, and know ways to support student learners.

Participants in several focus groups discussed the need for more trauma-informed training for teachers. This sub-theme was echoed across groups by those that identified as parents and/or community members as well as from those identified as educators. Some participants recognized the sharpened need due to the pandemic, whereas others saw it as a more general need. As one participant who identified as an educator shared, "Give the teacher some training in ... trauma-informed [practices]... for some of the more difficult students to reach." Another connected trauma to learning, offering, "We all know that trauma impacts the brain--it impacts the way the brain learns". One participant connected other comments to a broader need for social and emotional health stating that what has "transpired, more recently, [is] that we need to make sure that our pre service teachers are prepared for the social emotional needs now." As one participant who identified as a parent shared, "I would love for teachers to be more trained in some of the emotional things...connecting with students, validating their feelings, understanding maybe more, what they're dealing with and understanding how kids of all different ages process their emotions... And so I'm thinking maybe more holistically...focusing more on the emotional part of the classroom and their students."

What are some ways K-12, Educator Preparation Programs, and DESE are partnering to successfully prepare and support teachers in being Day-One Ready and what might they do to improve?

"No one person has the answers, but the answers are among us." Arkansas Educator.

Stakeholders were asked to consider programs, experiences, and partnerships in Arkansas and offer insights on what is working well to successfully prepare and support teachers and what might improve. Many focus group participants also offered a vision of what they would like to see in preparation, support, and partnerships with some offering examples of developed or developing models from Arkansas and other states. Stakeholders' experience in teacher preparation and teacher preparation partnerships varied. Across this varied landscape emerged the themes of **providing continuous support**,

expanding and strengthening partnerships at all levels, using technology to model and expand learning, emphasizing teacher field placements, including ensuring more diverse experiences, and aligning programs and experiences with state initiatives and school/district needs, emerged. K-12, Educator Preparation Programs and DESE can prepare and support day-one ready teachers by:

- **Providing continuous support for teachers in aspiring through early career stages of the profession**--including through robust mentoring
 - mentored support is continuous, extending into first year of teaching and beyond
 - link to networked cohorts of new teachers (e.g. statewide PLCs/APPEL)
- **Expanding and strengthening partnerships** at all levels
 - DESE with educator preparation and districts
 - districts, schools, and educator preparation programs
 - strengthen partnerships between DESE, educator preparation programs, schools, districts, and support organizations
- **Using technology** to model and expand learning
 - access master teachers from across the state via technology
 - model and use technology in the ways it will be used in schools and classrooms
 - use technology to expand, diversify, and leverage field experiences
- Ensuring aspiring teachers have **diverse and authentic experiences**
 - emphasize cooperating teacher placements and include master teachers
 - consider co-placement of interns and greater collaboration between school/district and educator preparation program throughout (such as co-observations, coaching, and more)
 - ensure significant exposure to school settings that reflect the full diversity of Arkansas public schools in internships and other field experiences
 - align the educator preparation calendars and internship experiences with districts/schools/community calendars
 - consider innovative placements: year-long residencies, paid internships, co-teaching opportunities, non-traditional placements (summer programs, informal learning, community spaces)
- **Aligning programs and experiences** with state initiatives and school/district needs
 - science of reading, professional learning communities
 - incorporate new learning into preparation programs based on local district and school needs

PROVIDE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT TO TEACHERS IN ASPIRING THROUGH EARLY CAREER STAGES OF THE PROFESSION

Consider robust mentoring that is a part of preparation and continued professional support.

In general, stakeholders noted that having a mentor while learning to teach was paramount. This was a particularly strong sub-theme in focus groups among those participants identifying as teachers,

administrators, and support organizations. Stakeholders discerned between the mentoring that aspiring teachers are part of during their internship from the mentoring they receive as early career teachers. They noted that mentoring aspiring teachers is just one piece of the puzzle. Some cited robust mentoring programs they had been part of that offered them support for multiple years, often by the same person or persons, as an example of what they considered robust mentoring. Others who did not have these robust experiences shared that they could envision the potential benefits. As one stakeholder offered, “I think [mentoring] should be a minimum of about three years and it should be a very structured and a relatively rigorous program,” and another extended, “There’s just not enough time as an undergraduate to provide students with what they need and then once they get into the schools and start having real experiences...that just opens up all kinds of possibilities with our learning [such as] having a more structured and aggressive mentoring that went beyond just a single year.”

Some participants saw mentoring as more of an extended relationship rather than a structured process. Others had experienced mentoring as a part of a system of continuous support for teachers in aspiring through early career stages of the profession, as described here, “[We became an] APPEL site 4-5 years ago. This has really helped us be the bridge for the prep program and our districts. We have been able to go ahead and make those introductions with our co-op mentor support specialist (R&R). Our APPEL participants have some connections to our content specialists and how we can support them in the classroom. It also helps our districts that we can help match them with a candidate.” One IHE stakeholder shared, “as you’re moving into the classroom from the internship process [with] the feedback that you receive... if there was a way to extend that feedback... maybe through continuing the relationship with the prep program. Maybe it [could be] multi-year... feedback [that is] on going. I think it would be beneficial.”

Link together teachers in aspiring through early career stages of the profession in learning networks.

Participants readily saw ways Arkansas might begin to network aspiring and early career teachers from across the state together in learning networks--particularly following the rapid increase in the use of technologies, such as video conferencing. In addition, many participants cited existing ongoing cohort models from their IHEs or non-traditional programs such as APPEL, Teacher Cadets, and Educators Rising as examples of benefits from expanding the time frame and scope of learning networks for teachers in the aspiring and early career stages of the profession. As one participant offered, “[APPEL] teachers continue to get support for a couple of years and you can definitely tell that that support has a positive impact on them, especially mentally/emotionally.” Another participant offered, “a state-wide PLC for new teachers facilitated by master teachers would be helpful” and a participant who identified as a lead teacher offered, “Through having several interns and practicum students in my room, we now have a network of teachers that I now have enough of a relationship with to reach out to for ideas. And I have always gotten new ideas from watching the lessons they share with my class.” One participant who identified as an IHE staff member offered their recent work developing a new teacher network, “We stay in touch with our recent graduates via this program and have offered networking opportunities here on campus as well as virtual.”

EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AT ALL LEVELS

DESE partnerships with educator preparation programs and districts.

Some focus groups discussed the need to strengthen partnerships with DESE, educator preparation programs, and districts with this sub-theme emerging most notably within a group where most participants identified as administrators. Emerging across several topics from teacher evaluation to preparation program curriculum to mentoring, stakeholders saw value in increased collaboration and partnership to prepare and support teachers in Arkansas. Several participants connected this to the theme of aligning programs and experiences. One stakeholder saw it as a way districts could work together to partner with DESE in support of educator preparation, “Similar districts [could] come together to provide feedback to DESE for support or additional resources.” And another stakeholder saw it as a more recent opportunity, “I know that higher ed is new coming into the Department of Ed, I know that this is a new experience for them.” The need for an iterative feedback loop among DESE, EPPs, and districts emerged in this sub-theme to inform policy at all levels.

Districts, schools, and educator preparation programs.

An iterative feedback loop between educator preparation programs and the schools/districts with which they partner was also noted as a sub-theme. As one participant stated, a priority is to build “strong partnerships between universities and schools,” and another offered, “there is more collaboration between higher ed and K-12 schools at some university programs which has helped teacher preparation...the collaboration just needs to be more consistent and state-wide.” Another offered a more dim view, “In my experience regionally, the relationship is one-way. Schools are desperate for teachers and they look to the ed prep providers to send teachers to them. I don’t see a lot of reciprocal support from schools back to the programs, including allowing internships and pre-service experiences in their schools.” One participant who identified as an administrator offered, “K-12 districts in partnership with Educator Prep programs could benefit from real-time feedback loops that capture needs to inform better ways to support and nurture first year educators”. Another participant who identified as a professor described their school partnerships, and their ongoing relationship with recent ed prep graduates, as one that is deeply supporting their program improvements.

A participant offered the idea of “discussion forums between higher education and public education” as a way to increase partnerships in support of preparing new teachers, and a participant identifying as IHE faculty offered some of their work as an example. “We have schools that are in year-long partnerships with us—where we have 12 teacher candidates in that school all year-long—with a faculty member working with the mentor teachers—they really become a partner with us, we feel like we are part of those schools and our candidates feel so supported.” One participant encouraged “quarterly or bi-annually [meetings] to discuss challenges teachers are facing and what could be added or revised in the prep program to better prepare teachers,” and another offered the structure of partnership embedded in a more recent initiative... “I think Ed Rising provides in a really good opportunity to build these kinds of connections between K-12 districts and higher ed and also, I think it gives us an opportunity to build partnerships, not just with four years and full educator prep programs in K-12 districts, but also a way to fold in Community colleges, where students are working on their two year degrees.”

Strengthen partnerships between DESE, educator preparation programs, districts/schools, and support organizations.

A participant described a pilot program in Fort Smith that included DESE, IHE, and their support organization, “it's through the Department of Ed and Higher Ed. It's a partnership” and it is connected to the local IHEs educator preparation program. One participant identifying as from an IHE described their recent educator preparation redesign efforts and offered this connection to the ongoing professional learning they offer, “we have now got to work a lot more closely with our [educational] cooperative... and each year the students say, it is better and better.” A participant who identified as a leader from an educational cooperative discussed curriculum work that had been a part of a regional and statewide partnership and offered a practical strategy, “Invite Teacher Ed Programs to Co-op experiences or group meetings, such as curriculum groups to hear direct needs within the schools.” A district leader offered the idea of “Partnership meetings between schools/Co-ops/Teacher Ed programs for collaborative discussions on improving their crafts. Novice teacher programs have worked with our partners in the colleges/universities in this manner many times”.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO MODEL AND EXPAND LEARNING

Access master teachers from across the state via technology.

Many saw technology as a way Arkansas could expand learning to prepare and support teachers, particularly following a year of increased use of technology tools for teaching/learning/collaborating. One participant identifying as a district administrator offered, “new teachers should be able to visit and talk to teachers from other districts in the state. They should also have access to a network of master teachers.” Ideally, they explained, aspiring teachers would serve as an intern for the entire year starting from the beginning of the teacher calendar year before students arrive. Strategic placement of interns with veteran teachers who model needed skills using technology tools might widen the influences and experiences aspiring teachers accessed before becoming early career teachers.

Model and use technology in the ways it will be used in schools and classrooms.

From participants identifying as IHE staff, to those identifying as teachers and/or support organization members, many saw the importance in using technology in ways that model how it will be used in schools and classrooms. One participant identifying as a district leader offered, “we need pre-service teachers in our virtual/blended/face to face classes now. They need active, engaged experiences” and another participant added, “current programs really need to train teachers to teach virtually.”

Expand, diversify, and leverage field experiences via technology.

Just as stakeholders saw opportunities to expand access to master teachers via technology, several also saw technology as a tool to expand field experiences. One participant identifying as an IHE staff member offered an example from a recent partnership, “One school that I reached out to, they are reaching into our classrooms. This year virtually. And so their education students will be able to get a virtual look into our classrooms, by watching a teacher teach and also having a conversation with the teacher and the administrators” after they watch the lesson.”we should be pushing the envelope of what our classes look like and representing those students not represented.”

ENSURE DIVERSE AND AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

“Everything is dependent on the internship experience - from school, supervising teacher, environment, etc. It’s important for interns to fully engage during the internship. I have found it best to develop those skills we have recently discussed, to have the intern conduct the parent conferences with the supervisor, to assist and lend a hand/voice as needed. This is especially important when addressing student performance and behavior.” Arkansas Educator

Emphasize cooperating teacher placements and include highly effective/master teachers.

The importance of the cooperating teacher assignment for internships was addressed by participants across different groups. Many saw the internship experience as a key opportunity to prepare day-one ready teachers, and yet many also felt internships could be improved. Some participants emphasized placement and others emphasized greater partnership between educator preparation and schools/districts in determining placement. As one district leader offered, “don't just send me somebody who's willing [to have an intern], send me somebody who's willing and is an exemplary teacher.”

Consider co-placement of interns and greater collaboration between school/district and educator preparation programs throughout (such as co-observations, coaching, and more).

Stakeholders recommended that EPPs and their school district partners work hand-in-hand to place interns with highly effective teachers. As mentioned previously, stakeholders saw intern placement as a joint responsibility between educator preparation and schools/districts. Others saw opportunities for continuing that partnership throughout the placement through co-observation and coaching. One participant shared, “one of the things I would love to see and in working with the university supervisors who come to our schools. I would really like to see them work more with the classroom teacher in developing professional growth plans [for interns].”

Ensure significant exposure to school settings that reflect the full diversity of Arkansas public schools in internships and other experiences.

Across focus groups stakeholders emphasized one key component of being day one ready is having significant exposure to school settings that reflect the diversity of Arkansas: racially, geographically, economically, and culturally. A participant identifying as a district leader offered, “I do think it's critical to have a diverse component at some point in the preparation, whether its traditional or non traditional,” and another expressed his role in the work, “ I always felt it was kind of my responsibility to put them in situations where they had to think on their feet... there's got to be a little bit more real world.” As mentioned in the technology theme, stakeholders saw new opportunities to expand exposure, as offered by a district leader, “ a lot of what COVID, it has done [is] open up the world as far as using virtual conferencing. If teacher prep programs could find a way to give students that experience in diverse settings, to let student teachers get some experience in a variety of settings, kind of like what they do with nursing.”

Align the educator preparation calendars and internship experiences with districts/schools/community calendars.

Across the educator focus groups, many participants noted that that education preparation calendars were matched to university calendars. They pointed out that for teachers to have authentic experiences the calendars need to match practicing teachers' calendars, including time spent at the beginning of the calendar year in professional development, time preparing the classroom, and time setting the classroom culture in the first few weeks of student attendance. Overall, stakeholders expressed that when designing the preparation calendar, it should match what participants need to experience, and if it is the final field experience (the internship), it should match a teacher's full experience. One participant shared a pitfall of field experiences, if "you put them in a class with a great teacher who's been in that classroom and has already built the foundation for the culture and the climate in that classroom...but they don't see the first two weeks of, how did we build this culture and climate in this classroom and get it set?" then they are missing opportunities to learn the how of setting up culture and climate.

Consider innovative placements: year long residencies and paid internships, community and informal learning spaces, co-teaching opportunities, job-shadowing, non-traditional placements.

Across the focus groups, stakeholders expressed they were encouraged by the innovations happening in traditional and alternative programs. At the same time, they expressed the need for even more focus on new and creative ways to expose aspiring teachers to more experiences. One participant who identified as a community member offered, "speaking from the informal learning community perspective, I don't think that we can say we are doing much to assist with day-one readiness. A collaborative, statewide effort is needed to assist teachers with ...the use of informal learning organization resources (Zoo, science museums, art museums, etc.)." Another participant offered an opportunity to expose aspiring teachers to more of the behavioral needs and strategies for learners, she recommended bringing "them on to job shadow or work a case, you know, like you bring them aside and [they] help you go through the problem solving process of [working with a student on behavior]. This is the behavior and [here is] what are we going to try...think about the RTI model and go through that four step problem solving process.Walk an intern or pre teacher candidate through...because we know they're going to get the instruction piece. It's all the other things that force them to leave the profession."

Several participants had experienced year long residencies themselves discussed the benefits of paid internships, especially as an equity and recruitment strategy. One district leader offered, "I lost a great teacher and a great instructional assistant this semester, who I didn't have a position for and I would have loved to have had her for a teacher, but she needed to work under a provisional license and be paid. That was the only way for her family financially." One IHE staff offered a summer reading program in which they had recently started involving teacher candidates. Some of the benefits included candidates being more in touch with parents, learning how to integrate video conferencing technology, and practice teaching in small groups and with one-on-one instruction.

ALIGN PROGRAMS AND EXPERIENCES WITH STATE AND DISTRICT INITIATIVES/NEEDS

Science of reading and professional learning communities.

This sub-theme emerged early and was especially present with participants who identified as educational leaders. While some felt that the state agency had moved to prioritize and support initiatives such as the

Science of Reading and professional learning communities, many felt that alignment could be improved at the program and district level, especially in the realm of teacher preparation and internship assignments. Some mentioned the variability in preparation programs, and others felt the alignment of state and district initiatives and EPP programs was not a criteria for candidate placement in schools. One participant offered a wish list, “Get all ed prep programs, traditional and non-traditional, DESE, co-ops and districts to align their expectations and supports and cooperate so every teacher across the state gets equitable supports and experiences and EVERY teacher has the same expectations for success.” Another shared, “we need alignment between all entities.”

Incorporate programs and experiences with district and school initiatives and needs.

Some participants discussed the need to “align teacher prep curricula at higher education with priorities at the state and school levels” and to integrate “current state programs and training within coursework - stay "in tune" with what is going on in the state within our school districts.” These discussions were often part of deeper dialogue that emerged as an extension of the discussion about alignment with Science of Reading initiatives. Within IHEs some staff offered that when change was desired, it was sometimes difficult to keep pace with state, district, and school initiatives and needs, as one participant shared, “within the confines of higher ED we have certain guidelines...that we must follow to make changes...we can't shift quickly,... because we're in the confines of higher ed and so sometimes our place that we are located hinders our ability to shift quickly to accommodate changes that come.”

Recommendations

The following recommendations were synthesized from participant input and integrated with research that connects to the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the focus groups and surveys.

- **Continue stakeholder engagement and co-design**
 - Facilitate effective, intentional collaboration of stakeholders across state, EPP, and district/schools
 - Encourage sharing of promising practices
 - Engage from the ground up and support from the top down
 - Consider what’s working in other states:
 - **“Louisiana** built on the leadership and collaboration between P-12 and higher education officials to advance changes to preparation program approval and accountability regulations. Much of the vision and foundation for the changes grew out of an accountability working group led by the Louisiana Department of Education, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Board of Regents. The changes were informed by Louisiana’s teacher preparation pilot program, Believe and Prepare, and two years of public discussion, input from a survey of 6,000 educators, and more than 50 meetings and focus groups” ([CCSSO, 2017](#)).
 - **Connecticut** state leaders brought together “a broad range of stakeholders to help guide and inform educator preparation reforms for the process to succeed. Connecticut grounded its efforts in the work of the Education Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC). EPAC began meeting regularly in 2012 and was tasked

with conducting research, shaping future policies, and planning for statewide implementation. EPAC identified six teacher and leader preparation principles to guide its work, which included raising program entry and completion standards, improving clinical experience requirements, building supports and partnerships, and ensuring providers receive data needed to inform continuous improvement. State officials believe the approach will help meet the needs of the state's districts and schools, strengthen the quality of Connecticut's teaching force, and improve student learning in the classroom" ([CCSSO, 2017](#)).

- **Georgia** is considered a "model state for effective stakeholder engagement strategies to support NTEP-related work." The Georgia Department of Education collaborated with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and the University System to create regional P-20 collaboratives. Collaboratives "were charged with helping promote continuous program improvement and student achievement through the preparation of teacher candidates and the professional development of P-20 educators. The collaboratives were essential to facilitating improvements statewide in clinical experiences and residencies in teacher preparation. They also helped build understanding and support for major policy changes, such as a new performance assessment required for licensure" ([CCSSO, 2017](#)).
- **Missouri** sought "input from teachers in the field to help inform and guide changes in preparation policies and practices. Representatives of university teacher preparation programs and staff from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education held a series of half-day forums across the state last year as part of a state effort to change how teachers are prepared for the classroom and supported once they get there. Veteran teachers as well as new teachers advised the department on issues ranging from the soft skills teacher candidates need, to keeping professional development useful and relevant once they're on the job. Of particular interest during the forums was getting input from those who mentor new teachers, to help the state education department improve training for preservice teachers" ([CCSSO, 2017](#)).
- **Ensure a continuum of teacher development, starting with field experiences and student teaching, and supported by robust mentoring, for aspiring through early career teachers**
 - Aspiring teachers need to learn alongside skilled teachers (consider [master/developing master teachers](#) who may serve as their mentor) who demonstrate effective teaching ([SREB, 2018](#))
 - Research that indicates first-year teachers can be as effective as typical third-year teachers if their student teaching experience was with a highly effective teacher (NCTQ, 2020). Additional findings suggest that improving clinical placement procedures can improve the teaching quality of candidates ([Calder/AIR, 2020](#)).
 - Aspiring teachers and early career teachers can bridge their experience along a continuum of development with the support of mentors and EPP faculty
 - Work with districts/schools to innovate what [Educator Career Continuum \(ECC\)](#) might look like within districts and across the state.

- The US PREP model “shows that close partnerships are possible when they are grounded in trust and consistent communication. An essential ingredient: site coordinators, faculty member coaches from the university college of education who oversee candidate performance and cultivate close relationships with principals, mentor-teachers and central office officials. The site coordinators create a sense of joint accountability through frequent feedback loops ([SREB, 2018](#)).”
- **Build on the momentum of tech-enabled learning from the past school year (2020-2021)**
 - Require engaging and effective tech-enabled, student-focused learning to be modeled ubiquitously throughout the system--from state supported professional learning to learning happening in districts and EPPs
 - Expand the reach of innovative schools, EPPs, master and lead professional teachers, and support organizations through technology
 - Leverage technology tools to continue reaching stakeholders in co-design efforts
- **Continue and expand related levers such as**
 - Teacher pipeline improvements with an emphasis on increasing workforce diversity and include TNTP recommendations ([TNTP, 2020](#))
 - Design a supportive pathway to standard licensure for paraprofessionals, long-term substitutes, and classroom aides.
 - Raise the average teacher salary statewide and reduce salary inequities across districts
 - Design a website that clearly illustrates the state’s pathways to teaching and related financial incentives
 - Multi-tiered licensure to support educator career continua
 - Support for early career professionals, from cooperatives to schools/districts, that is a continuation of teacher preparation and may include mentoring, coaching, and job-embedded supports
 - Recruitment and retention efforts
 - Consider updates to professional learning that will support all teachers
 - Micro-credentialing
 - Rules governing professional development
 - Robust mentoring to support aspiring into early career teachers
- **Create and fund statewide networks of teachers** in aspiring through early career stages of the profession who hone their craft together
 - Collaborative networks could be led by lead and master professionals and lead EPP faculty
 - Encourage networking across districts, regions, and support organizations

IHE Educator Preparation Program-Survey Highlights

As an extension of the original focus groups held from December 2020-March 2021, faculty and staff of educator preparation programs at 19 IHEs were invited to complete a survey to offer additional feedback and were also invited to participate in follow-up focus groups, held in March 2021. Some of the highlights of the survey results, especially results tied to themes from the focus groups and recommendations, are offered below. To design and share the survey, DESE staff worked with several Dean's of Colleges of Education, and included as options many of the programs and experiences stakeholders had shared in previous focus groups. While the number of faculty and staff each dean shared the survey with is unknown, there were a total of 49 IHE faculty and staff who participated.

Successful Supports

IHE faculty and staff's perceptions "for ways programs and experiences are successfully supporting teachers in being day one ready," and "for ways K-12 districts and Educator Preparation programs are successfully supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready?" generally matched the themes of the focus groups, which included IHE faculty and staff and many other stakeholder groups.

Ways educator preparation programs and experiences are successfully supporting teachers

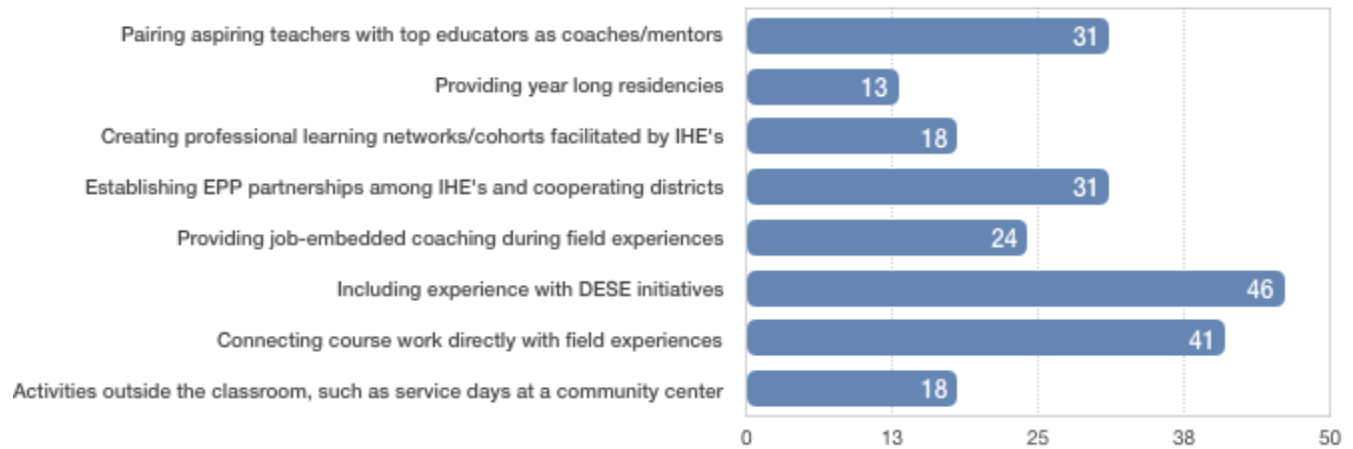
Of the perceptions shared in Figure 3, two are highlighted here. The first is connected to the theme of field experiences, most EPP faculty and staff (41 of 47) felt that their programs were successful at "connecting course work directly with field experiences." One EPP stakeholder offered as follow up in the survey, an idea to further strengthen course work connections, "Colleges and Universities with teacher training programs need to review assignments in all courses with a view toward making them reflect (whenever possible) the kinds of "real life" challenges teachers face. At the graduate level, we recently reviewed all assignments in our EDLD program to make them as "job embedded" as possible. Doing something similar at the undergrad level would go a long way toward providing a more meaningful, practical foundation for future growth" and another offered, "We are already doing many of these activities [options provided as choices in the survey] and have established partnerships with LEAs. Day-One Ready needs to build on the innovations that are in place and include an evaluation component in which we work together (IHEs, EPPs, DESE) to document experiences and successes to share during educator professional development."

The second highlight is connected to the theme of field placements and emphasizing cooperating teacher placements. Of the 47 faculty and staff who responded to this question, 31 felt that educator preparation programs were supporting teacher candidates by pairing them with top educators. This finding supports what was heard in the focus group regarding candidate placement in internship experiences. Stakeholders were mixed on their perceptions here, some felt it depended on the educator preparation program and their criteria and relationship with the school and/or district, others felt that it was something schools and districts could do more to ensure. Some shared that a barrier to placement could be funding and the amount of work required by cooperating teachers and field supervisors. Many felt it was an area that

greater consistency across programs in placement practices and deeper partnership between EPPs and K-12 districts could build on current practices, which for the most part, were seen as successful.

Figure 3: Educator Preparation Program Staff Perceptions on Successful Program Supports

What are some of the ways programs and experiences (both traditional and non-traditional) are successfully supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready?*



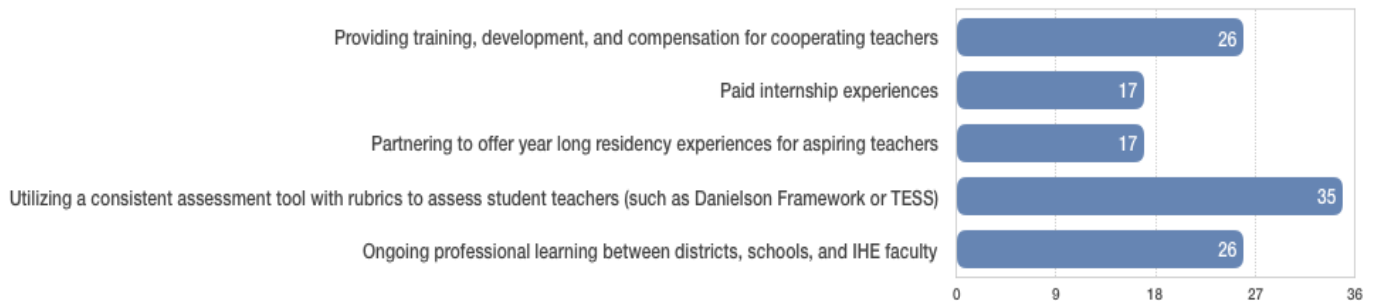
*47 participants responded and were instructed to select all that apply

Ways K-12 Districts and educator preparation programs and experiences are supporting teachers

Of the perceptions shared in Figure 4, one related to utilizing a consistent assessment tool with rubrics to assess student teachers (such as Danielson Framework or TESS), is highlighted here. Of the 44 stakeholders who responded to this question, 35 felt that the use of a consistent assessment tool was a strength. This perception generally matched the themes of the focus groups, which included IHE faculty and staff and many other stakeholder groups. While stakeholders discussed greater alignment of K-12 districts and EPPs in programs and experiences, it was generally more related to placement, state initiatives such as RISE and PLCs, and district/school needs.

Figure 4: Educator Preparation Program Staff Perceptions on Successful Partnership Supports

What are some of the ways K-12 districts and Educator Preparation programs are successfully supporting teachers in being Day-One Ready?*



*44 participants responded and were instructed to select all that apply

Areas to Improve

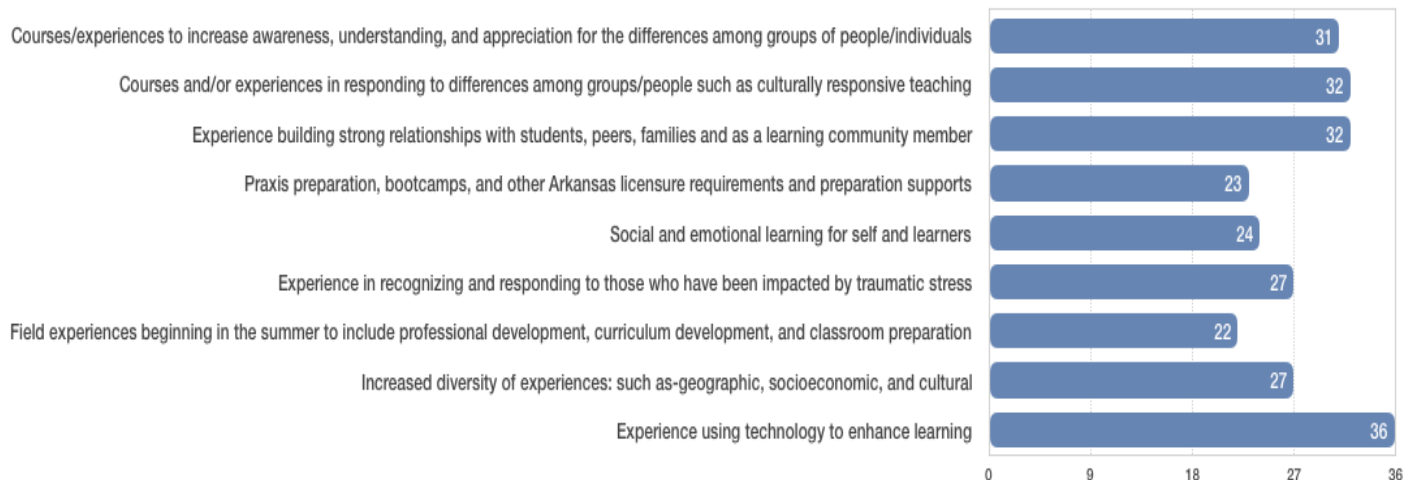
IHE faculty and staff’s perceptions “What might educator preparation programs and experiences might include to improve teacher preparedness?” matched the themes of the focus groups, which included IHE faculty and staff and many other stakeholder groups.

What might educator preparation programs and experiences might include to improve teacher preparedness?

As can be seen in Figure 5, of the 48 stakeholders who responded to this question, 36 felt programs and experiences could include more opportunities for aspiring teachers to “experience using technology to enhance learning,” 32 felt that “courses and/or experiences in responding to differences among groups/people such as culturally responsive teaching” would improve teacher preparation, and 32 felt that more experiences “building strong relationships with students, peers, families and as a learning community member” could improve teacher preparedness. All three of these recommendations of areas to improve match the focus group themes. Two highly visible themes across all focus groups for what day-one teachers need to know and be able to do, for example, were building relationships and cultural competence.

Figure 5: Educator Preparation Program Staff Perceptions on Ways Existing Programs might improve

What might existing programs (both traditional and non-traditional) include to improve teacher preparedness?



*48 participants responded and were instructed to select all that apply

Partnerships and On-going Supports

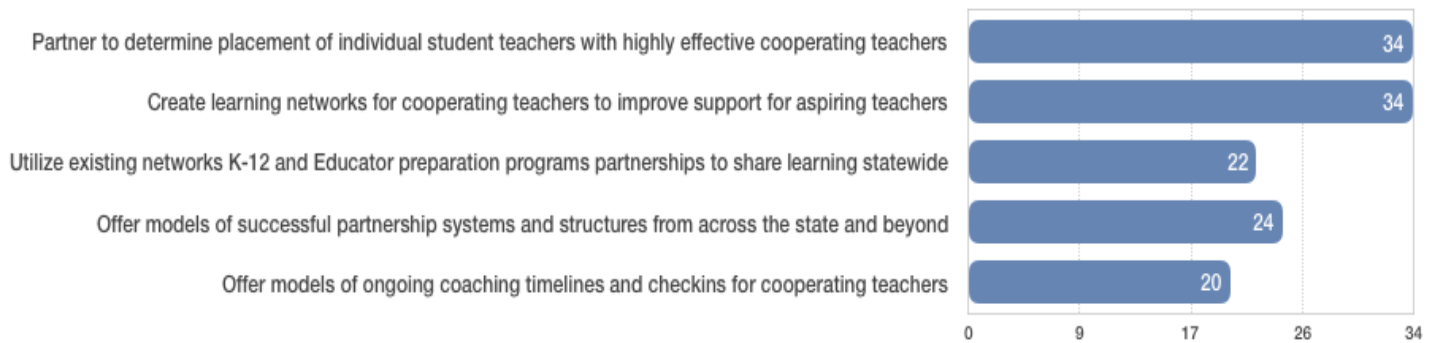
IHE faculty and staff’s perceptions of two survey questions regarding partnerships and on-going support matched the themes of the focus groups, which included IHE faculty and staff and many other stakeholder groups.

What are ways LEA's, EPP's and DESE could work together to ensure Day-One Ready candidates?

As can be seen in Figure 6, of the 48 stakeholders who responded to this question, 34 felt that LEA’s, EPP’s, and DESE could partner to “determine placement of individual student teachers with highly effective cooperating teachers,” and “create learning networks for cooperating teachers to improve support for aspiring teachers.” Both of these recommendations of areas to partner match the focus group themes.

Figure 6: Educator Preparation Program Staff Perceptions on Partnerships

What are ways LEA's, EPP's and DESE could work together to ensure Day-One Ready candidates?*



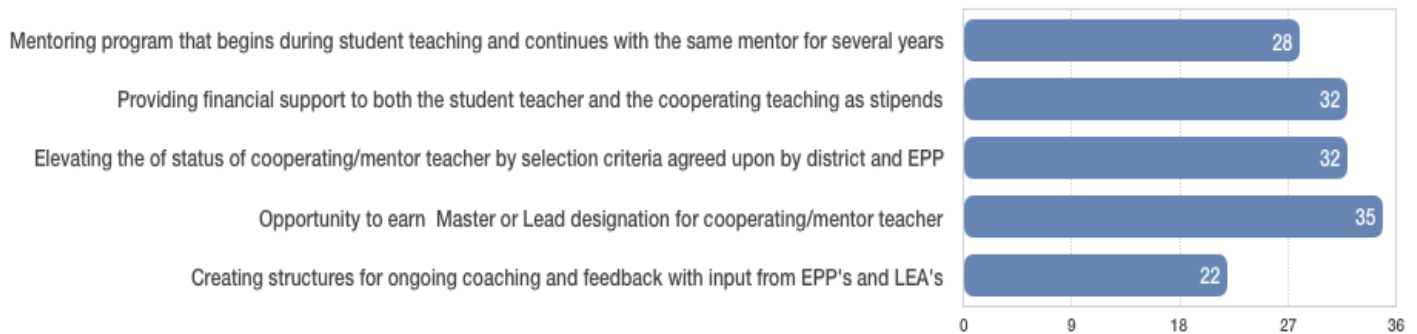
*48 participants responded and were instructed to select all that apply

What are ways LEA's, EPP's and DESE could provide on-going support beyond student teaching experience?

As can be seen in Figure 7, of the 48 stakeholders who responded to this question, 35 felt that the “opportunity to earn Master or Lead designation for cooperating/mentor teacher” was an important part of on-going support for teachers and 32 felt that “providing financial support to both the student teacher and cooperating teacher” and “elevating the status of the cooperating teacher” could provide on-going support beyond the student teaching experience. All three of these recommendations of areas to partner and provide on-giong support the focus group themes.

Figure 7: Educator Preparation Program Staff Perceptions on On-going Support

What are ways LEA's, EPP's and DESE could provide on-going support beyond student teaching experience?*



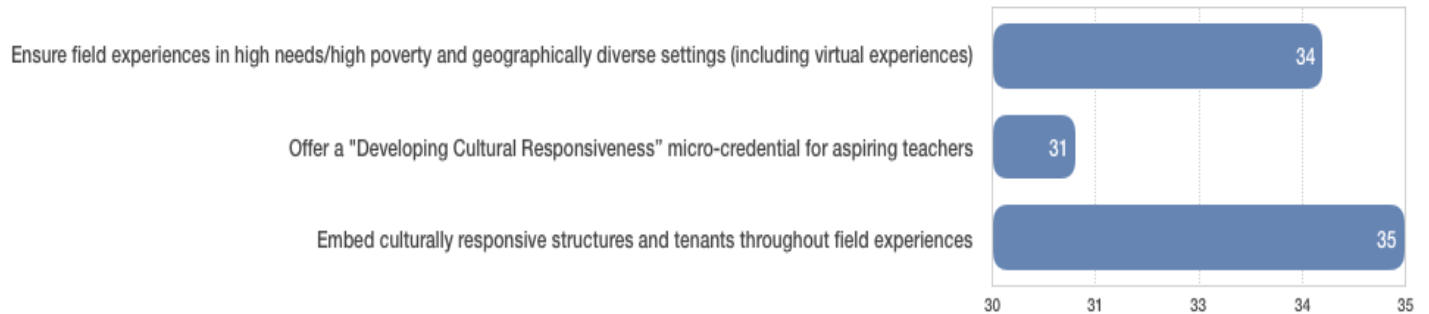
*48 participants responded and were instructed to select all that apply

What are some ways LEA's, EPP's and DESE might prepare Day-One Ready teachers for teaching in diverse classrooms and communities?

IHE faculty and staff felt that LEA's, EPP's and DESE might also partner to prepare teachers for teaching in diverse classrooms and communities in several ways. As can be seen in Figure 8, of the 48 stakeholders who responded to this question, 35 felt that the embedding “culturally responsive structures and tenants throughout field experiences” was an important part preparing teachers for teaching in diverse classroom and communities and 34 felt that ensuring” field experiences in high needs/high poverty and geographically diverse settings (including virtual experiences) was important..

Figure 8: Educator Preparation Program Staff Perceptions on Partnerships for Preparation

What are some ways LEA's, EPP's and DESE might prepare Day-One Ready teachers for teaching in diverse classrooms and communities?*



*48 participants responded and were instructed to select all that apply



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