

Lessons Learned from the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative

Published: May 2014

We launched the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative (TEI) in 2009, with the goal of preparing and placing 25,000 new, effective teachers within our service region by 2020. Four years into this 10-year, \$40 million initiative, we hired an independent evaluator, the Improve Group, to conduct a midterm evaluation to report on progress and challenges thus far. Their review was conducted through interviews and focus groups with individuals from our higher education partner institutions, their teacher candidates and K-12 partners, and initiative coaches from FHI360. This learning paper summarizes our learning from the report, and highlights implications for the initiative going forward. [Download the evaluation report.](#)

Background on TEI

In 2008, the Foundation established an education goal of *“increasing the percentage of students who are on track to earn a degree after high school and eliminate disparities among diverse student groups.”* Participants in a design lab recommended we approach this goal by focusing on teaching, citing research that teachers matter more to student achievement than any other school-based factor. We decided to invest in transforming how teachers were being prepared in our region, to ensure that new teachers would be prepared to meet K-12’s needs in raising the educational achievement of all students.

We launched TEI in 2009 in partnership with 14 higher education institutions and their Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs). Each partner has been improving practices in each of five pillar areas, including how they:

- Recruit teacher candidates.
- Prepare candidates to teach.
- Offer candidates employment readiness and connections.
- Support graduates as new teachers.
- Use measurement to inform all improvement strategies.

The 14 partners were later named the Network for Excellence in Teaching (NExT). They include a consortium of six private institutions from the Twin Cities (TC2), another consortium of three institutions in the Fargo/Moorhead area (Valley Partnership), and five other institutions (see map).

The Improve Group's report has helped us identify or affirm what has worked in TEI thus far, as well as several challenges that remain. This learning paper captures some of these successes and challenges, and includes some of the next steps we intend to take based on the report and other learning.

What has worked

Increased attention toward recruitment. Prior to this initiative, many of the TPPs had not intentionally recruited specific types of candidates to their programs. The focus and support has increased their capacity and ability to recruit in a strategic manner, and many are focusing on how to increase the quality and diversity of their candidates. Several have improved how they market their programs, and are beginning to tailor their efforts toward filling high-need teaching positions.

IMPROVED CURRICULA AND CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

All TPPs have taken strides in improving their program curricula and have found success in expanding their clinical (field practice) offerings. Revised curricula are now much more in line with teaching today's learners. Earlier and more comprehensive clinical experiences, such as a yearlong residency, have provide candidates with much more relevant student teaching experiences, resulting in smoother transitions into teaching. A specific highlight from this work is South Dakota's new requirement for all state universities to include yearlong residencies in their teacher training programs, which was sparked by USD's residency pilot in Sioux Falls Schools.

USING DATA TO INFORM CHANGE

The TPPs have made dramatic increases in their ability to collect, synthesize and learn from data. For example, they have developed a series of common metrics to assess the quality of their preparation programs. Four surveys (Entry, Exit, Transition to Teaching and Supervisor) were designed (or modified) and implemented across all TPPs, so the resulting data received by each institution can be compared to the aggregate of all TPPs. Now in their third year of implementation, the common metrics instruments are providing valuable data used to inform each TPP's improvement strategies.

STRATEGIC K-12 PARTNERSHIPS

The TPPs have formed and strengthened their relationships with K-12 districts to help inform all aspects of their program improvement strategies. These critical partnerships have continued to grow and solidify, and are offering reciprocal benefits to K-12, such as new professional development opportunities for teachers.

EXPERT COACHING

Pursuing this type of transformation with multiple TPPs required us to increase our capacity and expertise. A team of three consultants from [FHI360's National Institute on Work and Learning](#) were retained to offer on-the-ground expert coaching to each of the 14 TPPs, focused on improving practices within each of the pillar areas. The coaches have been an integral part of the initiative by helping TPPs focus and tailor their improvement strategies to reach maximum impact. TEI has also benefitted from an Advisory and Review Committee (ARC), a team of national education experts, who have helped inform strategy from the beginning.

FOSTERING CHANGE THROUGH COLLABORATION AND LEARNING

Each TPP has changed at a different pace, and we have seen those making the most progress have carried strong spirits of collaboration and learning (which can be rare in higher education), both on their campuses and across the partnership. We have tried to foster a collaborative environment in TEI through organizing the two consortia, as well as by organizing partnership-wide summits and working groups on specific pillars. One example of collaboration is illustrated in an [article](#) by Valley Partnership faculty that presents a model for collaboration among higher education institutions. Collaboration has also led to establishing a culture of learning and sharing across the initiative. For example, the TPPs have recently shared their learning by co-presenting at local and national conferences like the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) Annual Meetings.

Challenges

This level of transformational change has faced several challenges, many of which are common to some or all TPPs in the initiative.

REACHING OUR ORIGINAL GOAL

We learned from data collected after the first few years of TEI that our goal of placing 25,000 new, effective teachers was off the mark. One major contributor was the economic downturn in the late 2000s, which led to delays in baby boomer retirements, the key factor in calculating the number of teachers needed by 2020. Together with our partners, we have shifted the initiative's focus to be much more about filling high-need teaching positions and ensuring all candidates are prepared in high-quality programs rather than reaching the original quantitative target.

ENGAGING IN PROACTIVE RECRUITMENT

Though the TPPs have introduced improved recruitment practices within their institutions, there is much work yet to be done, particularly around recruiting and retaining candidates of color and

in high need subject or skill areas. Many TPPs report they do not have the capacity (or sometimes institutional support) to recruit in these areas proactively, despite knowing K-12's hiring needs.

FURTHER COORDINATING AND SUSTAINING CLINICAL CHANGES

One of the most significant successes in the initiative has been the expansion of clinical practice in K-12 settings. However, providing candidates with more and better clinical experiences requires more coordination time and can cost more than TPPs and K-12 have spent in the past. It could be challenging for TPPs to fully embed and sustain these efforts after their Foundation funding runs dry.

REACHING CLARITY ON EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT EXPECTATIONS

Noted in the evaluation report is the TPPs' relative lack of progress on the *employment* and *support* pillars. Preparing candidates with job seeking skills, working with K-12 on finding job placements and supporting graduates as new teachers have been mostly new activities for the TPPs. Supporting new teachers has traditionally been the domain of K-12 districts and some TPPs—and districts—believe this is a better approach.

INCREASING DATA CAPACITY

The TPPs are collecting more data than ever that can be used to inform strategies for continued improvement. Many are still working on *how* to use data to inform strategies, but some have made progress on embedding data into their culture and practices. We believe the more rigorous, outcomes-focused accreditation standards coming online for teacher preparation will help accelerate their efforts, and will create greater incentive to sustain practices such as the common metrics work.

UNDERSTANDING CONSORTIUM ROLES

The two consortia (Valley Partnership and TC2) were developed with hope of sparking collaboration and innovation between TPPs operating in similar systems (TC2 members are all private institutions) or within close proximity. These consortia were established by the Foundation and we asked each to share a single grant. The consortia began without clear objectives in place, which led to faculty spending much time in the beginning “figuring out” how to collaborate among partner TPPs who were in direct competition for students. Today, the consortia have reached some specific accomplishments like the Valley Partners' common

student teaching assessment and TC2's Urban Teacher Residency, but big questions remain on how—or whether—to sustain them.

QUANTIFYING OUTCOMES

Originally, the Foundation set out to measure the effectiveness of our partner institutions' graduates through value-added measurement (VAM) of student growth. Our initial goal was to link the students' growth to the teacher who enabled that growth and then link that teacher to the higher institution program where the teacher was prepared. This plan proved to be unrealistic due to several reasons, including the lack of access to and alignment between state and district-level data systems. Another challenge to assessing the overall impact of the initiative has the lack of baseline data captured in the beginning. We have since moved forward with exploring alternative ways of assessing teacher effectiveness and the overall impact of the initiative.

What's next?

As a foundation, we are committed to doing more good every year. Using the midterm evaluation and other learning, we are reassessing and refining original strategies to guide our approach in the second half of this initiative. Our next steps include:

REVIEWING AND REACHING CLARITY WITHIN EACH PILLAR

We have used learning throughout the initiative to review each pillar and adjust any strategies to ensure teachers are being prepared to meet K-12's needs. The Midterm Evaluation Report is a key piece of learning that will help focus the initiative in its remaining years. For example, learning from the TPPs' varying levels of progress thus far in *employment* and *support* will help clarify higher education's role in these areas as we move forward.

FOCUSING ON PREPARING MORE CANDIDATES OF COLOR

Though we have seen some progress in candidate recruitment, many TPPs have reported major roadblocks in meeting K-12's increasing demand for teachers of color. With more traditional methods not showing results, we believe this is an opportunity to seek out and support innovative ideas for addressing this important challenge in our region. As we focus on preparing more teachers of color, we will also emphasize the importance of preparing culturally competent teacher candidates of all backgrounds to be effective in all schools and communities.

ENSURING EXCELLENT AND SUSTAINABLE CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

As mentioned, the expansion of clinical experiences and spread of co-teaching practices have been a great success for the initiative. However, these more robust experiences require additional training and coordination in order for candidates and their mentor teachers to thrive together in the classroom. We intend to focus on refining, strengthening and sustaining the training and coordination systems that have been developed by our partners in order to ensure all candidates and mentor teachers have the best possible experiences going forward.

EMPHASIZING USE OF MARKET DATA

TPPs are using multiple data sources to drive improvement strategies, but the use of labor market data has been scattered across the partnership. We will increase focus on using market data to drive improvement practices around the recruitment, preparation and employment pillars. We have recently commissioned a labor market scan of the teaching profession in the Foundation's three-state region, and look forward to sharing this information in the near future.

SUSTAINING AND SHARING COMMON METRICS

The common metrics work has been one of the biggest successes of the initiative, though implementation of this complex effort currently requires additional technical consulting support. We will be working with the partners on a plan for sustaining the effort on their own. Our partners' efforts on the common metrics have drawn positive attention from teacher education programs from across the country, as well as the organization that accredits them (CAEP). We are also exploring ways to share the success of these instruments with programs outside of the initiative.

CONTINUING WORKING ON QUANTIFYING OUTCOMES

Recent conversations with state education leaders in our region around teacher evaluation and longitudinal data systems have signaled that we may be a few steps closer to assessing the effectiveness of partner TPP grads as teachers. Our partners are committed to working with us on engaging K-12 systems to understand how their data collection efforts can intersect with TPP needs.

SHARING LEARNING MORE INTENTIONALLY

With significant learning in place from TEI's first half, we will be making concerted efforts to share discoveries and best practices going forward. We realize this initiative has offered a

unique opportunity for 14 TPPs to get better together, and to discover what preparation practices are leading to producing great teachers. This learning paper and the midterm evaluation report are first steps to opening up our learning to an expanded audience.

Summary

We are proud of the many changes in teacher preparation that have resulted from TEI, and are committed to fostering continued improvement through the 10 year effort. We believe this work has made a positive impact in our region, and we are excited to see more benefits in years to come.