National Council
on Teacher Quality

March 2024

Clinical Practice Framework

Six Focus Areas for Effective Student Teaching

Clinical practice matters

Every student who is assigned to a first-year teacher could be in for a great year. Or they could be in for a lost year of learning, because first-year teachers tend to be less effective than their more experienced colleagues.

Much of new teachers' success depends on whether they had a strong clinical practice experience, including the opportunity to learn from a highly effective cooperating teacher. A strong experience can make a new teacher as effective as one in their second or third year in the classroom—a big gain for those teachers and, more importantly, for their students. Ensuring these strong clinical practice experiences is particularly critical because students of color and students living in poverty are assigned first-year teachers more often than their more affluent and white peers.

To provide all students with strong teachers, new teachers must be ready to make an impact on day one. Their clinical practice experience can make all the difference.

For more about the research on the importance of clinical practice, see the Research Rationale

Purpose of the framework

Creating a strong clinical practice experience for every teacher at scale requires that three core actors—prep programs, school districts, and states —work together. This framework sets out the **six focus areas of clinical practice** backed by research and supported by the field[1] as the most important to build a quality clinical practice experience. It further identifies the actions that these core actors can take in each area.

Based on survey responses of hundreds of practitioners from teacher prep programs and school districts, we learned that while their programs have much to be proud of, they also recognize that they are missing opportunities to deliver an exceptional clinical practice experience. (See Engagement with the field for more on NCTQ's engagement efforts).

This framework can help the core actors **identify the aspects** of their clinical practice programs that are already aligned with the evidence and illuminate opportunities to improve.

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[1] *This work is based on a literature review, engagement with a panel of experts from the field, and surveys of prep programs and school district leaders.*

Diversifying the teacher pipeline

When implemented intentionally, clinical practice opportunities can help diversify teacher talent pipelines. For actions states, districts, and teacher prep programs can take that will contribute to this goal, see:

Focus Area 2: Teacher selection and recruitment process →

Focus Area 2: Stipends for student teachers →

Focus Area 2: Support for student teachers of color →

Focus Area 3: Calibrating on observation instruments →

Six Clinical Practice Focus Areas

The Research Rationale aligns with the six focus areas in the Clinical Practice Framework. Please refer to it for a summary of the research that informs this Framework, including citations.

1 Strong district-prep program partnerships →

Governance structure

Shared and independent goals

Frequent check-ins

2 Student teacher - cooperating teacher matches →

Instructionally effective cooperating teachers

Teacher selection and recruitment process

Stipends for cooperating teachers

Stipends for student teachers

Support for student teachers of color

3 Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training →

Training for cooperating teachers and program supervisors on how to effectively mentor adults and give feedback

Calibrating on observation instrument

Clear expectations for program supervisors

4 Student teacher placement sites →

Identification of placement sites, considering future hiring needs

Alignment with future teaching position

School and class characteristics

Range of settings

5 Student teacher skill development →

Field experiences that increase in difficulty and specialization, culminating in full-time student teaching, and are accompanied by frequent feedback

Grade-level work and high quality curricula

Frequent observations with strong observation instruments

Clearly defined learning outcomes for student teachers

6 Data and outcomes →

Feedback from student teachers

Feedback from cooperating teachers and placement schools

Hiring Metrics

Classroom performance metrics

Future learning

Strong District–Prep Program Partnerships

Why this matters

Providing every aspiring teacher with a strong clinical practice experience requires collaboration from prep programs and districts, often supported by their state. Establishing a partnership with clear expectations provides an opportunity to define each entity's role and clarify terms. For example, while prep programs and districts may agree that cooperating teachers should be "effective instructors," they may have different criteria for what that means or may rely on a measure like teacher evaluations, which often identify nearly every educator as effective. This process can also ensure that prep programs and districts are aligned in terms of their goals, understanding of future hiring needs, and expected outcomes for student teachers.

What the field says

In an NCTQ survey, more than half of districts (60%) and prep programs (72%) identified partnerships between placement schools and teacher prep programs as "most important" or "very important," yet a third of districts think this sort of partnership is difficult or impossible, and 20% identified creating regular meetings and feedback loops as the area they most want to improve in their partnership.

KEY COMPONENTS

Governance structure →

Shared and independent goals →

Frequent check-ins →

■ **Strong district-prep program partnerships**

■ **Student teacher - cooperating teacher matches**

■ **Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training**

■ **Student teacher placement sites**

■ **Student teacher skill development**

■ **Data and outcomes**

Governance Structure

Establishing a clear understanding of who is responsible for which task, the timelines for work, and steps to take when challenges arise can lead to a smoother and more productive clinical practice experience.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Work with school districts to clarify through a memorandum of understanding or other documentation:	Work with prep programs to clarify through a memorandum of understanding or other documentation:	Provide models or examples of strong partnerships (e.g., MOU documents or case studies) within the state.
• Roles for each party (e.g., who identifies potential cooperating teachers)	• Roles for each party (e.g., who identifies potential cooperating teachers)	Leverage local workforce and pipeline data to identify prep programs and districts ripe for partnership (e.g., geographic proximity, match between licensure programs and hiring needs).
• Clear definitions and measures for key components like "effective cooperating teachers"	• Clear definitions and measures for key components like "effective cooperating teachers"	
• Timelines for when each piece of the process will be completed	• Timelines for when each piece of the process will be completed	
• Process to review teacher candidate outcomes	• Process to review teacher candidate outcomes	
• Steps to take when challenges arise	• Steps to take when challenges arise	

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

JUMP TO A
FOCUS AREA

🟥 **Strong district-prep program partnerships**   🟦 **Student teacher - cooperating teacher matches**   🟩 **Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training**   🟧 **Student teacher placement sites**   🟪 **Student teacher skill development**   🟫 **Data and outcomes**

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Shared and independent goals

Identify goals that prep programs and districts will work toward collaboratively (e.g., diversifying the teacher workforce, ensuring that student teachers are well prepared), as well as goals for each actor (e.g., for prep programs, securing enough high-quality placements; for districts, converting student teaching placements into new teacher hires). Shared and separate goals clarify expectations and keep all parties engaged in the clinical practice system.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts
Identify independent goals, considering what is necessary to meet the needs of the prep program and student teachers (e.g., upcoming hiring needs, opportunities for teachers to engage in mentoring as career advancement opportunities).	◀▶ Identify independent goals, considering what is necessary to meet the needs of the district (e.g., upcoming hiring needs, opportunities for teachers to engage in mentoring as career advancement opportunities).
Create shared goals that serve both the prep program and partner districts.	◀▶ Create shared goals that serve both the district and partner prep programs.
Identify metrics to evaluate success.	Identify metrics to evaluate success.
◀▶	

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

JUMP TO A FOCUS AREA

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Frequent check-ins

Districts and prep programs need regular and frequent opportunities to share feedback with each other. Feedback can inform course support for student teachers (e.g., identifying weak points of content knowledge or knowledge of forms of assessment that can be addressed in coursework), as well as additional guidance student teachers should receive from cooperating teachers, etc. These conversations can also build capacity to consider hiring needs when recruiting into prep programs and placing student teachers.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts
Identify the "point person" or people who will represent the prep program.	◀▶ Identify the "point person" or people who will represent the district.
Identify people within the prep program from whom to solicit feedback, and set up a system to do so (e.g., monthly touch-bases with student teachers, program supervisors).	Identify people from within the district from whom to solicit feedback, and set up a system to do so (e.g., monthly survey to cooperating teachers).
Set regular meetings.	◀▶ Set regular meetings.
Create an environment and culture in which feedback is welcomed.	◀▶ Create an environment and culture in which feedback is welcomed.
Identify specific changes to make based on district feedback, and share those changes back with districts.	◀▶ Identify specific changes to make based on prep program feedback, and share those changes back with prep programs.

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

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🔴 **Strong district-prep program partnerships** 🔵 **Student teacher - cooperating teacher matches** 🟢 **Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training** 🟠 **Student teacher placement sites** 🟣 **Student teacher skill development** 🟤 **Data and outcomes**

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Student Teacher–Cooperating Teacher Matches

Why this matters

Learning from a strong mentor teacher matters much more than any other aspect of a new teacher's student teaching experience[2] and can help new teachers be as effective as second- or third-year teachers.[3] While prep programs and school districts both find it challenging to identify and recruit instructionally effective cooperating teachers, having access to more data about the quality of potential cooperating teachers in a state or district leads to better recruiting outcomes. For example, one study used state data to develop an indicator of cooperating teacher quality based on several measures, ranked teachers, and provided that list back to districts, seeing higher-quality cooperating teachers identified as a result.[4]

What the field says

Hosting a student teacher—or being a student teacher oneself—requires a substantial investment of time. Prep programs and districts report that compensating student teachers and cooperating teachers would make this work more feasible for both groups of participants. Views about who should pay for cooperating teachers vary: prep programs think that the state should be responsible for paying cooperating teachers, while districts tend to think that either prep programs or state and regional workforce funds should cover the costs.

KEY COMPONENTS

Instructionally effective cooperating teachers →

Teacher selection and recruitment process →

Stipends for cooperating teachers →

Stipends for student teachers →

Support for student teachers of color →

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[2] Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J., Naito, N., & Theobald, R. (2020). Making the most of student teaching: The importance of mentors and scope for change. Education Finance and Policy, 15(3), 581–591.

[3] Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J., & Theobald, R. (2020). Effective like me? Does having a more productive mentor improve the productivity of mentees? Labour Economics, 63, 101792.

[4] Ronfeldt, M., Bardelli, E., Truwit, M., Mullman, H., Schaaf, K., & Baker, J. C. (2020). Improving preservice teachers' feelings of preparedness to teach through recruitment of instructionally effective and experienced cooperating teachers: A randomized experiment. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 42(4), 551–575.

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Instructionally effective cooperating teachers

Both a cooperating teacher's value-added score and observation ratings can predict their student teachers' future effectiveness. In fact, student teachers who learned under a highly effective cooperating teacher (based on VAM scores) can become as effective in their first year as second- or third-year teachers.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Require evidence that cooperating teachers are instructionally effective based on clearly defined criteria.	◄► Require evidence that cooperating teachers are instructionally effective based on clearly defined criteria.	Set minimum criteria for cooperating teachers based on value-added measures, observation ratings, or other evidence of instructional effectiveness.
If using evaluation ratings as a measure, ensure that ratings are based, at least in part, on contributions to student learning.	◄► If using evaluation ratings as a measure, ensure that ratings are based, at least in part, on contributions to student learning.	

◄► *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

■ **Strong district-prep program partnerships**
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Teacher selection and recruitment process

Collaborating on the selection process and managing that process centrally through the district, rather than individually between prep programs and schools, can help ensure that all student teachers work alongside great cooperating teachers so that they're more effective when they have classrooms of their own. While identifying instructionally effective cooperating teachers is consistently cited as a challenge, NCTQ surveys show two-thirds of districts report it would be at least moderately feasible to provide a list of available, high-quality cooperating teachers and to facilitate placements through the district's central office.

Actions for prep programs

Work with districts to develop a shared understanding of criteria for cooperating teachers. This may include:

- A definition and measure of "instructionally effective teachers" (e.g., if 95% of teachers in the district are rated "effective" on their evaluation, what other data does the district consider?)
- A measure of mentoring ability
- A check for past evidence of bias toward students, colleagues, or student teachers

Tap into program alumni who are willing to serve as cooperating teachers.

Keep a list of past cooperating teachers, with student teachers' feedback about them.

Track evidence of effective instruction, coaching, and mentoring of adults.

Actions for school districts

Maintain and recruit from a list of potential cooperating teachers based on evidence of increasing student learning and effective mentoring of adults; if possible, provide the list to partner prep programs.

Explain the criteria used to identify cooperating teachers, including how criteria like "instructionally effective" and "mentoring ability" are measured.

Centralize the identification process through the district rather than allowing programs to coordinate with individual schools or teachers.

Invite principals to nominate cooperating teachers (to be vetted by the district).

◀▶ Keep a list of past cooperating teachers, with student teachers' feedback about them.

Actions for states

Develop a state longitudinal data system that incorporates relevant measures of teacher quality (e.g., certification area, effectiveness measures) and facilitates the process of identifying potential cooperating teachers. While states should be mindful of teacher privacy, they are likely able to provide data to districts (who should already have access to all relevant teacher data).

Create an "eligibility" list that identifies teachers who meet the state's criteria for cooperating teachers, or calculate an indicator based on multiple measures to identify teachers in, for example, the top quartile.

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

■ **Strong district-prep program partnerships**

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Stipends for cooperating teachers

Serving as a cooperating teacher requires time and effort; paying teachers for this work may attract more people to serve in the role. However, current compensation for cooperating teachers is well below the estimated value they add to their student teachers and has not increased in decades. Compensation could include both a pay increase or bonus as well as release time.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Provide stipends for cooperating teachers. Consider folding this cost into candidates' tuition and fees, so that financial aid can apply. Provide other incentives (e.g., free access to professional learning that can satisfy district requirements, course vouchers for the university [not just the teacher prep program]).	Provide a stipend, bonus, or other incentive for cooperating teachers (e.g., move cooperating teachers up a step on the salary schedule for mentoring a certain number of student teachers). Consider non-monetary incentives such as a change in title or release time to support teachers with this added responsibility.	Provide funding for stipends for cooperating teachers. Provide guidance to districts about how they can use available federal funding (e.g., Title I, Title II, or other funds) to pay for cooperating teachers or other aspects of clinical preparation.

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Stipends for student teachers

Student teachers may not have time to hold other jobs, so building in financial support makes student teaching more feasible for many candidates, which can help to both increase and diversify the teacher pipeline.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Explore options for funding for student teachers, including applying federal work-study dollars, opening a registered apprenticeship, or working with districts to allow student teachers to work in the district (e.g., as a substitute or paraprofessional for part of the week).	Provide a stipend to student teachers. Provide opportunities for student teachers to earn an income without detracting from their core student teaching responsibilities (e.g., allowing student teachers to substitute or work as a paraprofessional for part of the week).	Provide funding for stipends for student teachers.

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Support for student teachers of color

All students, and especially students of color, benefit from having teachers of color. Ensuring student teachers of color feel supported during clinical practice is a key step in building a more diverse teacher workforce. Additionally, teachers of color are disproportionately burdened by student loan debt, so financial support during clinical practice can also help more people of color become teachers.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Encourage districts to recruit a diverse corps of cooperating teachers so that a large share of student teachers work with cooperating teachers who share their race, gender, or other important demographic characteristics.	Recruit a diverse corps of cooperating teachers. Share aggregate data about the characteristics of the pool of cooperating teachers with prep programs and facilitate the placement of student teachers with cooperating teachers who share their race, gender, or other important demographic characteristics.	Provide incentives to recruit a diverse corps of teachers to serve as cooperating teachers. Provide funding for loan forgiveness or stipends for student teachers.
Disaggregate student teacher survey data by demographics to identify whether different groups of student teachers have different experiences or needs.	Invite principals to nominate cooperating teachers (to be vetted by the district), with a clear priority on identifying teachers of color.	
Identify funding sources for financial support for student teachers.	Consider climate survey data and other information on potential placement schools to ensure that student teachers of color are placed in schools that are likely to be welcoming environments.	
Establish a process to help student teachers navigate instances of bias and communicate that process to student teachers, cooperating teachers, and the district.	Identify funding sources for financial support for student teachers.	

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Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training

Why this matters

Effectively mentoring adults requires a different set of skills from teaching children. Even experienced and effective teachers may need support on how to observe student teachers and provide them with meaningful feedback. Yet cooperating teachers receive little training on how to mentor student teachers effectively. One study found that only one in 20 student teachers reported receiving high-quality feedback.[5] Additionally, research has found that cooperating teachers provide very specific and situation-focused feedback,[6] whereas feedback from supervisors tends to be more general. Candidates preferred a mix of both types of feedback, further illustrating the need for both sets of practitioners to receive training on how to effectively foster aspiring teachers.

What the field says

In surveys, half of districts would love prep programs to provide training for school and district staff alongside teacher prep program faculty to build shared capacity and understanding.

KEY COMPONENTS

Training for cooperating teachers and program supervisors on how to effectively mentor adults and give feedback →

Calibrating on observation instruments →

Clear expectations for program supervisors →

[5] *Kang, H. (2021). The role of mentor teacher–mediated experiences for preservice teachers. Journal of Teacher Education, 72(2), 251–263.*

[6] *Akcan, S., & Tatar, S. (2010). An investigation of the nature of feedback given to pre-service English teachers during their practice teaching experience. Teacher Development, 14(2), 153–172.*

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Training for cooperating teachers and program supervisors on how to effectively mentor adults and give feedback

Student teachers who receive helpful feedback from cooperating teachers and program supervisors feel better-prepared and are more knowledgeable about the content they're teaching. In fact, NCTQ surveys show more than two-thirds of prep programs identify cooperating teachers' ability to mentor adults as one of the most important aspects of clinical practice.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Require cooperating teachers and program supervisors to complete training on effective adult mentoring practices or provide evidence of past mentoring ability and complete an assessment of mentoring skill.	Require cooperating teachers to complete training on effective adult mentoring practices or provide evidence of past mentoring ability and complete an assessment of mentoring skill.	Require training for cooperating teachers and program supervisors on how to mentor adults.
Provide frequent high-quality training opportunities for cooperating teachers and program supervisors to learn and practice mentoring skills.	Provide professional learning in which cooperating teachers and program supervisors norm together on effective teaching practices and providing feedback.	Vet and streamline procurement of training providers. Provide funding for training or host the training.
Consider a joint observation with the cooperating teacher and program supervisor, followed by a conversation with the student teacher as a means of aligning expectations.	Consider a joint observation with both the cooperating teacher and program supervisor, followed by a conversation with the student teacher as a means of aligning expectations.	
Provide explicit guidance on how to provide feedback on critical topics (e.g., classroom management, reading, scaffolding instruction) and at different points (e.g., feedback on lesson plans, in-the-moment coaching, post-lesson feedback).	Provide guidance to principals on how to work with student teachers (e.g., inviting them to professional learning and other school events, observing, hiring).	

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

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Calibrating on observation instruments

Student teachers often receive artificially positive feedback, which may do little to help them improve. Falsely positive feedback also makes it harder for districts to identify strong candidates to hire. Calibrating on observation instruments (to ensure raters use them accurately and consistently) can help cooperating teachers and program supervisors provide more accurate, reliable assessments of candidates' ability and mitigate potential bias.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Require and provide training on use of observation instruments for all cooperating teachers and program supervisors and assess the accuracy and consistency of ratings using calibration exercises (e.g., a protocol involving collectively watching a video of a teacher teaching a lesson, individually scoring using the observation instrument, comparing scores, and discussing).	Provide teachers with leave time to conduct calibration activities. Work with prep programs to provide class videos or other resources on which to base observation calibration.	Provide training on observing student teachers and providing feedback using the state's observation instrument and access to resources to support calibration exercises (e.g., instructional practice video libraries, online calibration platforms for applying observation rubrics).

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Clear expectations for program supervisors

Student teachers become more effective teachers when they have at least five observations by program supervisors. Program supervisors and their student teachers will benefit from clear criteria about how often to observe student teachers, how to provide them feedback and on what topics, and how to build connections with cooperating teachers and placement sites.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Set clear expectations for program supervisors regarding: • How many times to observe student teachers and with what frequency, how to provide feedback (e.g., in writing), and how to structure coaching conversations (e.g., including pre-observation conferences) • How to build relationships with schools and districts (e.g., how often to meet with school administrators and on what topics)	Set clear expectations for program supervisors regarding how to build relationships with schools and the district and facilitate these connections (e.g., by providing specific topics on which to meet). Invite program supervisors to attend district-wide professional development for teachers, especially related to teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum, intervention).	Set minimum criteria for the number of observations by program supervisors.

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Student teacher placement sites

Why this matters

Student teaching in a high-functioning school (e.g., one with a strong school climate or low teacher turnover) can set student teachers up for greater success when they enter the classroom,[7] but there is also value in having a variety of experiences in different school settings, classroom structures, and grade levels. When the characteristics of a student teacher's clinical practice classroom aligns with their first teaching job (considering factors like students' socioeconomic status),[8] or when they are hired into the schools in which they did their student teaching,[9] novice teachers are more effective. When districts host student teachers, those teachers are more likely to get jobs in the district,[10] and those districts are less likely to have teacher shortages.[11]

What the field says

While student teaching can serve as a ripe opportunity to build a hiring pipeline where candidates are better prepared to work with that specific student population, only 23% of prep programs consider which districts are likely to hire in the coming year when determining clinical practice placements. Similarly, less than a third of districts consider anticipated job openings by grade, subject, or school when making placements. However, many prep programs do seek to give candidates experiences that reflect where they may teach. A third of programs report that they place student teachers in multiple placement settings, and nearly half consider alignment with the socioeconomic status of the schools in which student teachers are likely to get their first job.

KEY COMPONENTS

Identification of placement sites, considering future hiring needs →

Alignment with future teaching position →

School and class characteristics →

Range of settings →

7 Ronfeldt, M. (2015). Field placement schools and instructional effectiveness. Journal of Teacher Education, 66(4), 304–320. One study found that this held true for novice teachers whose GPAs had been in the bottom quartile: Bastian, K. C., Patterson, K. M., & Carpenter, D. (2022). Placed for success: Which teachers benefit from high-quality student teaching placements? Educational Policy, 36(7), 1583–1611.

8 Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J. M., & Theobald, R. (2017). Does the match matter? Exploring whether student teaching experiences affect teacher effectiveness. American Educational Research Journal, 54(2), 325–359; Krieg, J. M., Goldhaber, D., & Theobald, R. (2022). Disconnected development? The importance of specific human capital in the transition from student teaching to the classroom. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 44(1), 29–49.

9 Ronfeldt, M., Matsko, K.K., Greene Nolan, H., & Reininger, M. (2021). Three different measures of graduates' instructional readiness and the features of preservice preparation that predict them. Journal of Teacher Education, 72(1), 56–71.

10 Krieg, J. M., Theobald, R., & Goldhaber, D. (2016). A foot in the door: Exploring the role of student teaching assignments in teachers' initial job placements. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 38(2), 364–388.

11 Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J., Naito, N., & Theobald, R. (2021). Student teaching and the geography of teacher shortages. Educational Researcher, 50(3), 165–175.

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Identification of placement sites, considering future hiring needs

Student teachers are very likely to get jobs near where they student teach, and school districts that host student teachers are less likely to have shortages or need to hire emergency-licensed teachers. Coordination between prep programs and districts' central offices to identify placements can ensure that sites are aligned with future hiring needs and that cooperating teachers have been vetted.

Actions for prep programs

Consider several factors when placing student teachers:

- Districts likely to be hiring in the coming year and for what subjects, grades, or schools
- Districts with which your program has or can establish a partnership

Coordinate placements with the district central office, rather than with individual schools or teachers.

Work with the state and districts to track teacher demand data and use it to cultivate district partnerships where they are most needed.

Actions for school districts

Coordinate upcoming placements through the central office:

- Identify schools, subjects, and grades that will likely have job openings in the coming year
- Compile a list of high-priority schools (with capacity to host student teachers) and subjects for clinical practice
- Coordinate with teacher prep programs to make placements, prioritizing hiring needs

Track all placements in the district, including who is student teaching and which schools and cooperating teachers are hosting student teachers.

Track performance of student teachers (e.g., observation ratings) and consider making early job offers to strong performers.

Devote staff time to facilitating clinical practice placements.

Actions for states

Provide data to prep programs about the regions, subjects, and gradespans likely to have more job openings in the coming years (or that historically have higher rates of vacancies).

Provide guidance as to the target or proportion of the types of schools where student teachers should be placed.

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Alignment with future teaching position

Novice teachers are more likely to work in low-income schools and with students of color. If they student teach in schools and classrooms with similar demographics, they are more likely to be effective in the classroom.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Review the data on where past program completers were hired. Use the data to place student teachers in schools that are more likely to reflect those where they will get their first teaching jobs.	Review data on forecasted vacancies. Prioritize placements in schools that match the demographics of schools that are most likely to have openings in the coming year (considering students' socioeconomic status and racial demographics), while also considering which schools have a more positive climate. Provide prep programs with information about school characteristics.	Provide teacher demand data to prep programs and districts about the characteristics of schools likely to have more job openings in the coming years (or that historically have higher rates of vacancies).

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School and class characteristics

Teachers who student taught in schools with greater contributions to student learning, lower teacher turnover, more diversity, and more positive school climates tend to have better outcomes (e.g., effectiveness, retention) once they reach the classroom.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Place student teachers in schools that: • Offer collaborative environments and have low rates of teacher turnover • Are diverse along a range of dimensions (e.g., racial diversity, socioeconomic diversity, presence of English learners) • Show strong student learning gains	Place student teachers in schools that: • Offer collaborative environments and have low rates of teacher turnover • Are diverse along a range of dimensions (e.g., racial diversity, socioeconomic diversity, presence of English learners) • Show strong student learning gains Provide prep programs with information about school characteristics.	Support district data collection by offering resources for climate surveys and tracking of teacher retention rates by schools.

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

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Range of settings

New teachers are more effective if they have student taught in a classroom with similar student demographics as their first job--but they may not yet know what that will be. Clinical practice experiences in several different settings familiarize candidates with more groups of students, different levels and uses of school resources, and different approaches to teaching. As virtual instruction becomes more prevalent, candidates may benefit from a limited field experience in a virtual setting as well.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Identify the types of schools and districts in which candidates are most likely to get their first jobs, and look to similar schools for student teaching placements. Identify opportunities to give candidates experience with several settings throughout the progression of the program (e.g., through two different clinical practice placements in separate settings prior to full-time student teaching).	Provide prep programs with information about school characteristics. Identify potential cooperating teachers in placement schools across a range of settings, prioritizing those that are more diverse and have a more positive school climate. Work with programs to facilitate early field experiences across a range of school settings.	Provide prep programs with aggregate hiring information about recent program completers so prep programs understand the settings in which their candidates are most likely to be employed.

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Strong district-prep program partnerships

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Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training

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Student teacher skill development

Why this matters

Teaching is a complex job that requires practitioners to plan carefully for instruction and also to respond to students on-the-spot at every moment. To prepare for this career, aspiring teachers need field experiences that grow in difficulty, focused on using high-quality curricula and supplemented by opportunities to engage in additional activities like parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings. All of these experiences should be coupled with feedback and coaching to help candidates improve, which can make them more effective when they have a class of their own.[12]

What the field says

In NCTQ surveys, two-thirds of school districts and 94% of prep programs agreed that clinical opportunities should be woven throughout a candidate's preparation, and 70% of prep programs report currently embedding clinical experiences prior to full-time student teaching.

KEY COMPONENTS

Field experiences that increase in difficulty and specialization, culminating in full-time student teaching, and are accompanied by frequent feedback →

Grade-level work and high-quality curricula →

Frequent observations with strong observation instruments →

Clearly defined learning outcomes for student teachers →

[12] *Boyd, D. J., Grossman, P. L., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2009). Teacher preparation and student achievement. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 31(4), 416–440.*

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Field experiences that increase in difficulty and specialization, culminating in full-time student teaching, and are accompanied by frequent feedback

Aspiring teachers need ample time in the classroom to observe effective teachers at work, teach practice lessons aligned with their content coursework, and evaluate and give feedback on student work. Allowing student teachers to take on greater responsibility, working toward teaching the entire school day, helps them to become more adept at the complexities of teaching. This process can take many forms (e.g., co-teaching), but at no point should the student teacher serve as the teacher of record.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Embed field experiences in methods courses throughout the teacher prep program.	Communicate curricula and pacing for students (i.e., scope and sequence) to partner prep programs so they are familiar with what teachers are teaching and when.	Create a streamlined, statewide system for candidates to complete background checks needed to work with students.
Gradually increase the scope of field experiences (e.g., from observing to tutoring to small-group instruction to whole-group instruction).	Facilitate prep program efforts to find field experience opportunities that align with the content and methods candidates are learning.	Provide guidance or a model on the types of field experiences candidates should engage in prior to full-time student teaching.
Align field experiences to coursework in terms of content and methods used.	With prep programs and cooperating teachers, clarify expectations for student teachers to take on increasing responsibility.	Set minimum expectations for a gradual release of responsibility, considering different structures or approaches to clinical practice.
Provide specific guidance to student teachers and cooperating teachers that the student teachers should take on increasing responsibility, extending to grading student work, teaching full lessons, and potentially teaching full days. Specific structures may vary based on approach (e.g., allowing for co-teaching).		

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Grade-level work and high-quality curricula

Teachers often fail to assign students grade-level work and may grant grades that are too high, providing a false impression of students' academic ability. In fact, research suggests that higher grading standards improve student learning. Student teachers need to develop an understanding of what grade-level appropriate work looks like and of how to grade in a way that accurately reflects students' knowledge and skills. Additionally, more districts are implementing high-quality curricula, which student teachers need to understand how to teach.

Actions for prep programs

Provide student work samples for a specific grade and assignment to help student teachers calibrate what grade-level work looks like and how it should be evaluated.

Align coursework for candidates with the student skills and knowledge expectations outlined in the state learning standards.

Place candidates in districts that use high-quality, research-aligned curricula.

Assign and assess student teachers on their ability to analyze, prepare, or implement lessons from existing high-quality curricula used by partner districts, rather than requiring candidates to design lessons from scratch.

Provide guidance to student teachers on how to participate in common planning meetings, data team meetings, IEP meetings, and professional development sessions.

Actions for school districts

Provide student work samples / provide opportunities for student teachers to review samples of student work (e.g., ask cooperating teachers to share sets of student work on a specific assignment).

Provide partner prep programs with information about curricula in use across the district.

Provide student teachers with "teacher copies" or other necessary information about curricula used in their placement site.

Invite student teachers to attend common planning meetings, data team meetings, IEP meetings, and professional development sessions with their cooperating teachers.

Actions for states

Create a bank of anonymous student work and assignments aligned with the curricula most commonly in use across the state.

Provide funding to purchase "teacher copy" curriculum materials for student teachers.

Set standards for teacher prep programs to support candidates to identify high-quality curriculum materials.

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

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Frequent observations with strong observation instruments

Student teachers are more likely to be effective as new teachers when they receive at least five observations from their program supervisor. Regular observations with written feedback at regular intervals throughout the placement, from both the program supervisor and the cooperating teacher, give student teachers more opportunities to improve their teaching. Observation rubrics may focus on the student teachers' actions as well as the work students are doing in class (e.g., level of cognitive demand). The field agrees: Recent surveys show more than half of districts and roughly nine in 10 prep programs think that the number of observations and the categories of feedback used are the "most important" or "very important" aspects of clinical practice.

Actions for prep programs

Require program supervisors to observe and provide written feedback to student teachers at least five times during the student teaching experience, spaced out so that student teachers have time to implement suggested changes.

Ensure that the observation instrument is aligned to state, district, and prep program expectations for effective practice.

Differentiate observation instruments by stage and intensity of clinical experience (e.g., observation instruments for tutoring will look different from those for full-class teaching) and by whether the instrument is designed for formative or summative evaluation.

Consider using the observation instrument used by the state or district for in-service teachers for at least some observations.

Actions for school districts

Support cooperating teachers to conduct formal observations (with written feedback) and informal observations of student teachers throughout the placement.

Support cooperating teachers to use the district's observation instrument (or a modified version of it) so that student teachers receive feedback reflective of expectations for effective practice once they begin teaching.

Actions for states

In states with a statewide observation instrument (or recommended instrument), provide training to program supervisors and cooperating teachers on using the instrument.

Create observation instruments that align with existing in-service observation instruments and focus on skills pre-service teachers need to demonstrate.

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Clearly defined learning outcomes for student teachers

Prep programs, states, and school districts should jointly determine the knowledge and skills that candidates need to attain prior to and during clinical practice (e.g., content knowledge, pedagogy, classroom management, dispositions, understanding of state standards). These outcomes can inform coursework candidates take prior to and concurrently with student teaching.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Work with the state and partner districts to identify the specific knowledge and skills candidates will need to be successful during student teaching and align coursework accordingly.	Work with the state and prep program partners to identify the specific knowledge and skills candidates will need to be successful during student teaching.	Work with district and prep program partners to identify the specific knowledge and skills candidates will need to be successful during student teaching.
Incorporate feedback from student teachers, cooperating teachers, and district partnership meetings.	Provide specific feedback to prep programs about areas in which student teachers need additional instruction and support.	

◄► Denotes shared action between stakeholders

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What about longer placements?

Longer student teaching placements are associated with greater teacher retention, but not necessarily greater teacher effectiveness.

Preparation programs have found success with a range of durations for their student teaching placements. The duration of a student teaching placement should be determined by the extent to which the experience provides student teachers with hallmarks of quality, including:

- An instructionally effective cooperating teacher

- A range of placements in diverse schools with positive school climates

- Frequent observations with feedback from the program supervisor

Candidates need a long enough student teaching experience to take on increasingly complex roles, receive feedback, and make improvements to their teaching. But after a point, *more* is not always *better*.

Be sure that any move toward a longer placement does not reduce the quality of the experience in other ways, such as lowering the quality of cooperating teachers available to mentor student teachers or dissuading aspiring teachers who cannot afford to go so long without paid work.

Data and outcomes

Why this matters

Preparing teachers to be ready for the classroom on day one should be a process of continuous improvement. Gathering feedback from student teachers, cooperating teachers, and placement schools and districts is essential to identify what's working well and what needs to be done differently. Longer-term outcome data can provide evidence of success, and it can also be used to identify challenges (e.g., a high proportion of candidates who do not ultimately get jobs in teaching) and help point toward solutions.

What the field says

Generally, prep programs report that they do track data on clinical practice, but their emphasis is on data collected *during* clinical practice (e.g., survey data from student teachers) and less so on outcomes after student teachers have finished preparation, such as whether they are hired into teaching positions and how they fare in their new roles.

KEY COMPONENTS

Feedback from student teachers →

Feedback from cooperating teachers and placement schools →

Hiring metrics →

Classroom performance metrics →

Future learning →

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Feedback from student teachers

Student teachers can share what worked well about their experience and offer suggestions for how to improve the experience for future cohorts.
Prep programs deserve recognition as almost all (93% of those surveyed) report that they gather data from student teachers, most often via surveys.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Gather feedback from student teachers via surveys, focus groups, and informal means.	Gather feedback from student teachers via surveys, focus groups, and informal means.	Collect survey data from prep programs and incorporate into the prep program review process.
Share feedback with program supervisors and use feedback to identify specific changes to improve the quality of coursework and the clinical practice experience.	Share feedback with cooperating teachers and use feedback to identify specific changes to improve the quality of the clinical practice experience, including whether to invite teachers to serve as cooperating teachers again.	

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

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Feedback from cooperating teachers and placement schools

Feedback from cooperating teachers and their schools can illuminate where student teachers tend to struggle, which can inform preparation for future cohorts. In a recent survey, many programs reported gathering this data (89% collect observation ratings from cooperating teachers and 70% gather other feedback from cooperating teachers). Notably, among districts that rarely host student teachers, the opportunity to provide feedback to prep programs about student teachers' strengths and weaknesses was cited as something that would make them more likely to host student teachers.

Actions for prep programs	**Actions for school districts**	**Actions for states**
Gather feedback from cooperating teachers and host sites about specific student teachers and the broader clinical practice experience.	Facilitate a process with prep programs to collect feedback from cooperating teachers and host sites to inform future preparation provided to student teachers and to improve the quality of the clinical practice experience.	Incorporate survey data or feedback from cooperating teachers, school leaders, and district staff who facilitate clinical practice into the prep program review process.
Use feedback to identify specific changes to improve the quality of the clinical practice experience.		
Develop an agreement with districts about how cooperating teachers' feedback on student teachers will be used to inform evaluation of student teachers.	Develop an agreement with prep programs about how cooperating teachers' feedback on student teachers will be used to inform evaluation of student teachers.	
Share feedback with program supervisors for evaluation of student teachers and inform cooperating teachers about how their feedback is used.		

◀▶ *Denotes shared action between stakeholders*

🟥 **Strong district-prep program partnerships**   🟦 **Student teacher - cooperating teacher matches**   🟩 **Cooperating teacher and program supervisor training**   🟧 **Student teacher placement sites**   🟪 **Student teacher skill development**   🟨 **Data and outcomes**

Hiring metrics

Having a clear picture of whether student teachers are hired into the districts where they student teach, and whether they were hired into teaching positions at all, can help inform future placement decisions. However, NCTQ surveys show only 54% of prep programs collect data about whether student teachers are hired at all, and only 30% of prep programs collect information about whether student teachers were hired into their placement districts.

Actions for prep programs

Track data on student teaching completion.

Track data or use data from the district or state on:

- The proportion of student teachers who get hired into teaching positions

- Whether student teachers are hired into the school or district where they student taught

- If student teachers are not hired into teaching positions, what they're doing instead

Adjust program preparation and student teaching placements based on outcomes (e.g., placing more candidates in districts that tend to hire more).

Actions for school districts

Share data with prep programs about which student teachers are hired into the district.

Actions for states

Develop an instrument for program supervisors to assess student teacher readiness.

Develop or use a state longitudinal data system that can facilitate tracking teacher candidates from prep programs into the workforce; share data back with prep programs on the outcomes of their graduates.

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Classroom performance metrics

The overarching goal of clinical practice is to help aspiring teachers be effective from their first day in charge of a classroom. Understanding how effective teachers are when they reach the classroom can help identify areas in which to strengthen future clinical practice experiences. In an NCTQ survey, 42% of prep programs reported collecting data on teachers' effectiveness in their first year in the classroom, meaning there is opportunity for many more to do so.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Use data from the state and partner districts about novice teachers (e.g., aggregate feedback from principals, aggregate evaluation ratings, and aggregate performance on measures of student learning growth) to adjust programs (e.g., course content, areas of feedback in observation instruments).	Share data with prep programs about how well novice teachers are performing in the classroom in specific areas (e.g., raising student achievement, classroom management).	Develop a state longitudinal data system that can facilitate tracking teacher candidates from prep programs into the workforce, including their performance data once they begin teaching.

Future learning

While much is known about what makes for an effective clinical practice experience, there's much still to be learned. How do we measure a teacher's mentoring ability? What other factors make a mentor teacher effective? What are the optimal activities in which student teachers should engage while in clinical practice, and in what sequence? Collecting more information and sharing it with the field can help answer these questions and further improve the preparation that aspiring teachers receive.

Actions for prep programs	Actions for school districts	Actions for states
Collect data on specific aspects of preparation (e.g., the specific field experiences required, the number of observations and student teachers' observation ratings) connected to individual candidates.	Collect data on hiring, retention, and outcomes for individual teacher candidates linked back to teacher prep programs.	Establish a state longitudinal data system with unique identifiers that can track candidates from teacher prep into the classroom. Include hiring, retention, and student outcomes. Make data available to prep programs and researchers for further study.
Use data to investigate the outcomes associated with specific aspects of teacher prep or make data available to researchers.	Use data to investigate the outcomes associated with teacher prep programs or make data available to researchers.	

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Coming soon

In Summer 2024, NCTQ will release the Clinical Practice Action Guide spotlighting prep programs, districts, and states across the country that exemplify the focus areas and are seeing success.

Engagement with the field

This framework was developed based on available research on clinical practice (for more, see the research rationale) and the views of the field drawn from surveys; and it was informed by the work and insights of experts from across the education field, including teacher prep program leaders, school district leaders, state education agency leaders, teachers, researchers, advocates, and others. (See below for a full list of advisory panel members.)

NCTQ also conducted surveys of teacher prep programs and school district leaders. The prep program survey was sent to contacts at 1,316 programs (including both traditional and alternative route programs) and received 144 responses. The district survey was sent to 1,221 district contacts (including traditional public districts and charter districts) and shared by the American Association of School Personnel Administrators, and it garnered 721 responses.

For a summary of the survey findings, see NCTQ's February 2024 *District Trendline*: Building a strong student teaching model: Districts and teacher prep programs share successes and challenges.

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The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the advisory panel.

Key Terms

Clinical practice encompasses student teaching, residencies, apprenticeships, and other similar programs, as well as field experiences in which candidates participate prior to their culminating experience (e.g., observing a classroom or conducting a tutoring session).

Student teacher encompasses residents, interns, apprentices, and other related terms.

Cooperating teacher refers to the K–12 teacher who hosts a student teacher in their classroom while providing mentoring, guidance, and documented feedback to the student teacher. This term encompasses mentor teachers and other related terms.

Program supervisor refers to the supervisor from the teacher prep program who oversees student teachers, also referred to as university supervisor, clinical educator, and other related terms.

Placement site refers to the school and classroom in which teacher candidates conduct field work or student teaching activities.

For more about the definitions of different types of clinical practice, see: Defining Types Clinical Practice

National Council on Teacher Quality

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