

November 2016

Louisiana

Louisiana's effort to transform teacher preparation began with educators. Educators from across Louisiana told state officials that, because expectations for students were rising, the system for preparing teachers needed to change so that all teachers are ready to meet higher expectations for teaching and student learning.

And Louisiana officials listened. Unlike in some other states, where policies are usually formed in the capitol, Louisiana encourages local educators to come up with innovative ideas, then awards grants to fund pilot projects. If the pilots are effective, the state supports their growth through state policy.

In the case of teacher preparation, local educators proposed the formation of partnerships between teacher preparation programs and school districts to enable prospective teachers to spend a year working side by side with an expert teacher. In that way, the educators reasoned, new teachers will learn their craft and be prepared to teach effectively as soon as they complete their program and earn a license.

“What we heard from educators across the state was that aspiring teachers need to master knowledge and skills that are best learned in classrooms with students from highly effective teachers,” says Julie Stephenson, the executive director of educator preparation at the Louisiana Department of Education. “To meet those expectations, aspiring teachers need a full year of



supervised practice. This year of residency allows them to experience the full arc of an instructional year with students. Alongside effective mentor teachers, they design instruction to meet all students' learning needs, monitor their progress, and make adjustments to teaching in order to support all students' learning goals.”

About NTEP

The Network for Transforming Educator Preparation is a network of states that are using policy levers identified in **Our Responsibility, Our Promise**—specifically, licensure, program approval, and data collection, analysis, and reporting—to reinvent educator preparation.

These network states work with educators, preparation programs, institutions of higher education, non-profit and for-profit education providers, districts and schools to make substantive changes in the policy and practice of educator workforce preparation.

1 Elevating the Teaching Profession

[Believe and Prepare](#), the program to create year-long residencies, was the basis for statewide policy adopted in October 2016. These policies will take effect for students entering teacher preparation programs in 2018-19.

The state has been moving to make other significant changes to teacher preparation as well. Together, state officials believe, these policy changes will enable all Louisiana teachers to ensure that all students meet academic expectations. Louisiana is also shifting regulations on the design of preparation programs from counting the number of courses students take to determining whether prospective teachers have met competencies needed for effective teaching. In that way, state officials say, Louisiana will ensure that all teachers are prepared for teaching when they complete their programs, and providers will have more flexibility to design innovative, skills-based programs.

“Previous policies specified the number of hours a teacher candidate must complete and the course topics they have to

study,” says Stephenson. “They did not go further to specify the knowledge and skills that are most essential for teacher candidates to master to earn a license.”

To develop the plan, educators throughout the state have collaborated with the department over the last two years to identify the knowledge and skills all prospective teachers need to demonstrate. Under the new policies, each institution will partner with school leaders and mentor teachers to determine candidates’ mastery of those competencies and readiness for certification.

State officials are considering other changes to the program approval process as well. They are developing a quality rating system, which will include a set of indicators of the quality of preparation programs. They are also weighing what consequences would be appropriate for institutions that are highly effective, and for those that fall short on quality reviews.

Today, the Believe and Prepare program includes 41 school systems and 24 preparation providers and has reached more than 1,200 aspiring and mentor teachers and more than 26,000 students statewide.

The Role of the Network

In its efforts, Louisiana has benefitted from participation in the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation, says Stephenson. The states in the network worked closely together and formed a “community of practice,” she says.

For example, the state has worked with colleagues from Massachusetts, Georgia and Connecticut, which have developed data systems or updated parts of their teacher preparation and licensure policies. “Having these states in the network allowed us to learn about their work and understand how a state agency like ours can continue to strengthen teacher preparation and licensure here in Louisiana,” she says.

2 Holding All Providers to Equal, High Expectations

The Believe and Prepare initiative began as a pilot program in 2014, with five teacher-preparation providers and five school districts. The goal was not only to provide a longer period for aspiring teachers to spend in the classroom, but to provide them with more intensive mentoring and support. Today, the Believe and Prepare program includes 41 school systems and 24 preparation providers and has reached more than 1,200 aspiring and mentor teachers and more than 26,000 students statewide.

“Many residency programs ‘double student teach.’” says Amy Vessel, the director of the Clinical Residency Research Center at Louisiana Tech University, one of the institutions that took part in the pilot program. “We didn’t want that.”

Instead, Louisiana Tech and its partner districts train highly effective teachers to serve as mentors, and a university faculty member oversees the resident and her development. Residents spend five days a week in classrooms (residents pursuing secondary certification spend fewer in the first few months of the residency, in order to take content courses) and one day a month at the university, for professional development. The residents also take part in district-sponsored professional development activities.

Although the program is new, anecdotal reports suggest that it is yielding results. Residents have been hired even before they graduate, Vessel says. “Principals see their competency and their knowledge base.”

Teachers who serve as mentors also benefit, notes Serena White, director of curriculum and instruction for Monroe City Schools, which partners with Louisiana Tech on the pilot. Teachers consider the position to be prestigious. “One mentor was in her thirtieth year of teaching,” White says. “She commented to me, ‘If you allow me to invest in my profession like this, I’ll keep on teaching.’”

As the program moves statewide over the next three years, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has committed \$7.3 million in funding for stipends for residents and their mentor teachers, mentor teacher training, and transition staff salaries or stipends for universities. Further, the state department of education has committed \$2.2 million annually for mentor teacher stipends and training beyond the three-year transition period.

3 Using Data to Measure Success

Louisiana is developing tools to support preparation providers and their school district partners as they collaborate to increase the number of highly effective teachers in the state’s schools.

One example is the regional workforce report, which was developed based on guidance and feedback from preparation providers. The report provides detailed information about the teacher workforce, by region. It shows the number of certified teachers, by subject area, as well as demand for teachers. And it highlights schools that are typically difficult to staff, such as those in geographically remote areas and those that serve economically disadvantaged students.

Stephenson says this report, which was released for the first time in October 2016, aims to provide essential information to program providers and district partners to guide the development of recruitment strategies that encourage people to consider teaching careers in the fields and areas where they are most needed. And, she says, it will provide information to prospective teachers about job opportunities.

“The hope is, this report will spark conversations and recruitment efforts that encourage more individuals to come into the profession and go into areas where the shortage is greatest,” she says. “Louisiana can benefit if there are more effective instructors in every area.”