

# The Teacher Effectiveness Initiative

## Midterm Report, 2014

### *Executive Summary*

Prepared for the Bush Foundation



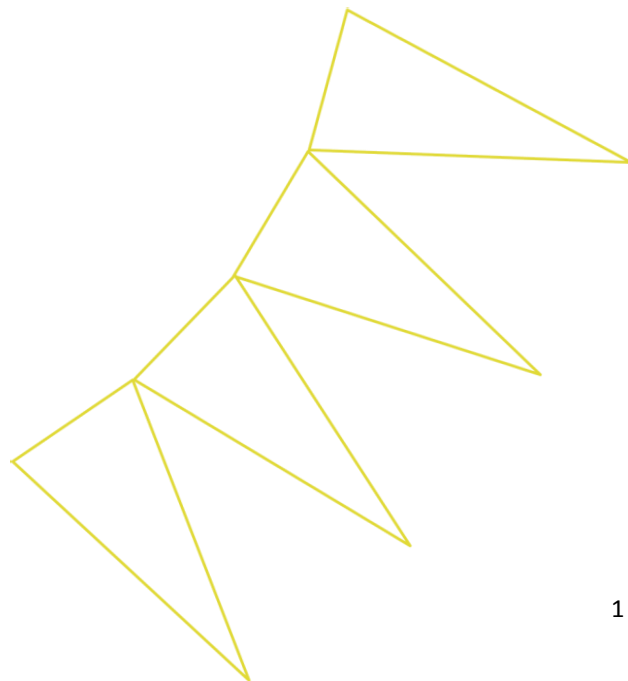
The Improve Group conducted the independent evaluation of the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative and prepared this executive summary as a complement to its full report.

In 2009 the Bush Foundation announced a 10-year Teacher Effectiveness Initiative (TEI) focused on transforming the ways in which teacher candidates are recruited, prepared, assisted with employment, and supported by teacher preparation programs (TPPs). This initiative is guided by the Bush Foundation's educational achievement goal to increase the percentage of students who are on track to earn a degree after high school and eliminate disparities among diverse groups.

The initiative aims to increase K-12 teachers' quality and effectiveness, and thereby improve students' educational achievement. The impetus for this initiative lies in a strong body of evidence suggesting that teacher quality is the most influential in-school variable affecting student performance.

Fourteen institutions of higher education (IHEs) in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota involved in the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative are:

- Augsburg College
- Bethel University
- Concordia University
- Hamline University
- Minnesota State University-Mankato
- Minnesota State University-Moorhead
- University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
- North Dakota State University
- St. Catherine University
- University of St. Thomas
- St. Cloud State University
- University of South Dakota
- Valley City State University
- Winona State University

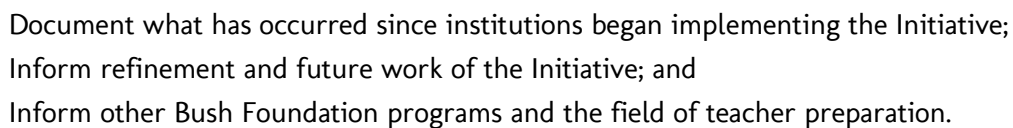


Nine of the 14 institutions organized themselves into two separate consortia and collectively applied for TEI funding. The two consortia are the Twin Cities Teacher Collaborative (TC2, comprised of Augsburg College, Bethel University, Concordia University, Hamline University, St. Catherine University, and the University of St. Thomas), and the Valley Partnership (comprised of Minnesota State University–Moorhead, North Dakota State University, and Valley City State University). Institutions belonging to these two consortia collaborated on TEI proposal development, formed inter-institution steering committees and working groups to collectively implement new teacher education strategies and monitor progress, while also addressing the unique circumstances of each TPP.

TPPs have agreed to organize improvement efforts around four key pillars (recruitment, preparation, employment, and support), using data to measure performance and inform change (a fifth pillar). Because partner institutions all had a long tradition of providing teacher education prior to adopting the goals of the TEI, each has set an individualized series of priorities and goals in the core pillar areas that account for historical strengths and identified areas for growth.

## Purpose of the Evaluation

In nearing the midterm point for the 10-year, \$40-million investment in the TEI, the Bush Foundation engaged an evaluation partner to help understand the progress toward TEI goals. The Bush Foundation contracted with the Improve Group to design and implement an evaluation to:

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- Document what has occurred since institutions began implementing the Initiative;
  - Inform refinement and future work of the Initiative; and
  - Inform other Bush Foundation programs and the field of teacher preparation.

## Evaluation Methodology

To document progress toward TEI goals and challenges, the evaluators used a variety of qualitative methods including:

**Semi-structured interviews with project leads** from each TPP, coordinators of the Twin Cities Teacher Collaborative (TC2) and Valley Partnership, and FHI 360 coaches;

**Focus groups with faculty and staff** at all TPPs, as well as with each of the initiative's pillar working groups; and

**Online focus groups with students currently enrolled in TPPs**, recent graduates of TPPs employed as teachers, cooperating teachers responsible for supervising student teachers, school district administrators tasked with supervising new teachers, and school district administrators involved in building partnerships with TPPs.

The interviews and focus groups addressed a number of topics, including progress and challenges associated with each pillar area, changes to TPP culture, and the sustainability of changes made as part of TEI. In the Findings section of this report, interview and focus group participants are typically referred to as “respondents.” Unless otherwise noted, themes described in this report were invoked by respondents at a majority of TEI institutions.

## Summary of Findings

This summary of findings is organized by the TEI pillars of recruitment, preparation, employment, support, and measurement. For each pillar, key achievements and challenges to implementation are identified. In addition, the summary of findings includes an overview of the types of culture change occurring at TPPs and a discussion of the TEI’s sustainability outlook.

It should be noted that much of this report focuses on the description of strategies for affecting change in each of the pillar areas and the implementation of these strategies. Because of the complexity of strategy implementation, the process of affecting change in the way that TPPs are structured required a significant investment of time and resources. At the time of data collection, IHEs did not yet feel that they could make conclusive claims about the impact of these strategies for most pillar areas. Thus, at this stage of the initiative, there is limited data available with which to quantify the impact of the changes described in this report. After several more rounds of common metrics data (defined on page 10 in “Measurement”) collection and further refinement of data management systems, TPPs should be able to make more conclusive statements about impact.



# Recruitment

Before the TEI, few TPPs had taken an intentional approach to the recruitment of teacher candidates. In most cases, few TPPs had the resources to devote to the development of a marketing strategy.

## Areas of Progress and Learning

### **TPPS have enhanced marketing practices.**

Nearly all TPPs have increased their capacity to promote themselves by forging stronger relationships with university marketing departments and/or adding education-specific marketing staff to apply branding techniques and redesign websites, informational brochures, and other materials. For example, both TC2 and Valley Partnership have designed websites that provide information about teaching careers for prospective students, licensure resources for current teacher candidates, and job listings and support materials for recent graduates. Marketing efforts have also been directed at raising the profile of teaching and forging a stronger identity for those enrolled in TPPs.

### **TPPS have strengthened admissions requirements.**

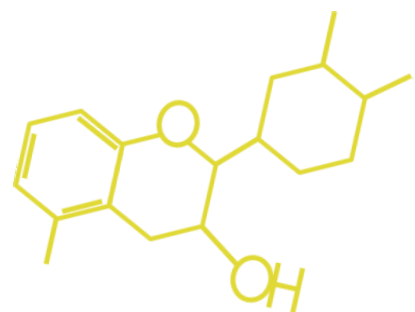
One change that many TPPs have made in order to increase the quality of incoming teacher candidates is to increase the minimum grade point average required for admission.

### **TPPS have sought to increase the number of teacher candidates of color that they enroll.**

TPPs have prioritized the recruitment of students of color and implemented a number of strategies to address this demand, including community outreach, scholarships, and the organization of future educator clubs.

### **TPPs have attempted to attract students interested in high-need areas.**

TPPs have sought to recruit talented students with interests in high-needs areas such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), special education, and ESL (English as a Second Language). TPPs have offered scholarships to students willing to pursue double majors in STEM fields and education and have created more opportunities for teacher candidates to earn certificates and credentials in high-need areas.



## **TPPs are beginning to focus on dispositional factors associated with effective teachers.**

As research sheds new light on the sorts of dispositions that are associated with teacher quality, TPPs are likely to integrate this knowledge into their recruiting practices in the coming years.

## **Remaining Challenges in Recruitment**

Many respondents directly tasked with recruiting students of color into TPPs feel under-supported within their own institutions, and believe that TPPs do not often understand the range of barriers facing students of color.

Recruitment of students interested in high-needs areas remains a challenge. STEM students have a number of career pathways available to them and teaching may not appear to offer an attractive value proposition.

## **Preparation**

Faculty and staff at TPPs were well-versed in the literature on best practices in teacher training prior to the TEI but faced a range of barriers to the implementation of changes to teacher education. TPP respondents felt that many of the changes that have been enacted using Bush Foundation resources would likely have been attempted at some stage, though not nearly as quickly or efficiently. TPP faculty and staff reported that prior to receiving Bush Foundation support, they simply did not have time to engage in the kind of collaborative planning and strategic decision-making necessary to rapidly transform the process of teacher preparation.

## **Areas of Progress and Learning**

### **TPPs made significant progress toward the implementation of redesigned curricula.**

TPPs have engaged in sweeping redesigns of their curricula based on research-derived best practices, feedback from school district partners, and alignment with shifting standards for TPP accreditation and teacher licensure. Linkages between theory and practice have been significantly addressed by embedding a variety of clinical/field experiences in coursework beginning with the earliest stages of teacher training.

## **TPPs have significantly restructured field and clinical experiences.**

TPPs have begun to increase the duration of student teaching experiences and have restructured these clinical experiences to include a greater emphasis on co-teaching and mentoring and have advocated for a change to the pedagogical approach characterizing such experiences. Longer placements afford candidates greater opportunities to apply pedagogical strategies to a variety of classroom situations under the tutelage of an experienced supervisor and demonstrate their ability to positively affect student learning before securing their first professional position. These restructured experiences better prepare students to meet changing licensure requirements and begin their careers with confidence.

## **Strategic partnerships with school districts have enabled successful expansion of clinical experiences.**

During the program redesign phase of the TEI, TPPs actively sought the advice of school district supervisors as they considered how to restructure practicum experiences, and these discussions have allowed partnerships to evolve in ways that are conducive to the goals of both TPPs and school districts. The increased presence of TPP faculty and staff has helped to build trust between TPPs and schools and provides more opportunities for professional development and collaboration.

## **Remaining Challenges in Preparation**

While TPPs have invested significant resources to train faculty, staff, teacher candidates, and partner district staff members in the co-teaching model, some worry that long-term support for the co-teaching model may not be sustainable. Both TPPs and their partner school districts incur significant costs in the provision of ongoing support, and few respondents could identify long-term funding sources for intensive, coordinated support activities.

Some TPPs have had difficulty finding enough adequate clinical experience placements for candidates in high-needs areas. In addition, some TPPs have found it difficult to find enough placements with what they consider to be quality teachers.

School districts that partner with more than one TEI institution feel that it would be more efficient for TPPs to work together and establish a uniform set of procedures for instances when a district is hosting students from multiple programs.

Partner school districts located in more remote regions may not receive enough support for co-teaching and other professional development to allow them to adequately support clinical experiences based on redesigned curricula.



# Employment

TPP faculty and staff did not typically see their teacher training role extending to employment and, in some cases, there was minimal systematic follow-up with graduates to learn about employment outcomes.

## Areas of Progress and Learning

### **TPPs have become more active in boosting candidate marketability/employability during the preparation phase.**

Courses include components that help candidates understand what employers are looking for in new teachers and how to market themselves for open positions. Respondents also suggested that closer ties with school districts have allowed for teacher candidates to gain greater visibility in districts that are potential places of employment. New teachers reported that lengthy clinical experiences gave them a range of experiences to draw on in job interviews and left them feeling confident in their ability to handle the rigors of early career teaching.

### **TPPs have increased coordination with career services offices.**

TPPs have begun to work more closely with their institutions' career services offices to help students cultivate the skills necessary to embark on a successful job search. Respondents are working to determine how IHE career centers can continue to better address the specific employment-related needs of teacher candidates from the earliest stages of their education.

### **TPPs have developed coordinated approaches to facilitate teacher candidate employment.**

TPPs have begun to make a greater effort to routinely communicate with school districts located in their region in order to learn more about hiring needs. Some TPPs have taken steps to organize events and establish systems that more easily facilitate direct interaction between job-seekers and school districts with position openings.



## TPPs support a culture of connectedness to facilitate employment.

The culture of connectedness involves sustaining relationships with and among students in order to monitor their progress toward employment. Attempts to cultivate this culture often rely on some combination of social media, face-to-face relationships, and informal networking events.

## Remaining Challenges in Employment

While some TPPs have developed education-specific placement centers and staff positions to track recent graduates' employment outcomes, many programs lack the resources to establish more robust employment units that focus solely on transitioning teacher candidates into full-time positions.

Many faculty respondents remain uncomfortable with the concept of more formally aligning supply of teacher candidates with the demand for high-needs areas when so many teacher candidates are still exhibiting an interest in or passion for licensure areas where competition for jobs is particularly fierce. Faculty feel responsible for informing students about the challenges they will likely face if they choose to compete for jobs in an oversaturated area, but are not convinced that it is their role to exert any greater influence over students' career decision-making.

Regional labor market analysis may be of limited use for those TPPs whose graduates often find employment in non-partner districts far from TPP campuses.







## Support

Prior to the TEI, many TPP faculty and staff viewed support as informal mentoring for graduates. This was and is particularly the case at smaller TPPs where faculty and staff may have more opportunities to get to know students. In some cases, large, well-resourced school districts had their own support and induction systems, while states like North Dakota have regional mentoring programs. Overall, few partnerships between TPPs and school districts existed for the purpose of delivering support and induction programming.

## Areas of Progress and Learning

### **TPPs have improved collaboration with partner districts to provide support and induction.**

TPPs and their partners have collaborated to pilot a range of support and induction models that are responsive to local and regional needs. The most well-developed models provide mentoring and other professional development opportunities for school district staff and make support services available to all new teachers, in addition to TEI graduates.

### **Some large school districts manage their own well-developed support and induction systems.**

TPPs have struggled to find an appropriate role under such circumstances.

## Remaining Challenges in Support

The wide geographic distribution of TPP graduates is a barrier to the provision of ongoing support. It raises the question of how far-flung graduates can access tools that will help with their professional development. Several TPPs have begun to experiment with online systems of support but viable solutions to this difficult challenge are yet to emerge. In addition, it can be difficult to maintain contact with graduates who work far from TPPs, thus making it more challenging to inform new teachers about support opportunities.

TPP respondents noted that as students transition into their new careers, they often tend to lose their sense of affiliation with the TPP and identify more strongly with their school employer. TPP respondents' impressions of change in graduates' sense of affiliation was corroborated by new teachers, who noted that the responsibilities and demands of early career teaching naturally made them feel more connected to and integrated with their place of employment. In such circumstances, TPPs struggle to define a support role that will not appear intrusive or burdensome for new teachers.



## Measurement

With several exceptions, most TPPs did not have systematic processes for measuring teacher candidate outcomes and using data to drive strategies for curricular and other forms of programmatic change in place. Most TPPs did not have the human resource capacity necessary for harmonizing disparate data management systems and extracting actionable data.

### Areas of Progress and Learning

**Common metrics instruments developed for TEI have been positively received by TPP faculty and are beginning to offer TPPs opportunities to adjust their practices to meet the needs of students and partner school districts.**

The four instruments that comprise the common metrics offer TPPs the opportunity to gather the same data about the backgrounds, dispositions, learning, and performance of teacher candidates from the beginning of their training program to the early stages of their professional careers. As more data is collected, faculty and staff expect to use insights from the common metrics instruments to design recruitment strategies targeting prospective students with characteristics associated with teacher quality and to shore up curricula in order to address skills areas where supervisors of new teachers are reporting deficiencies.

## **TPPs have increased capacity for data management, analysis, and reporting.**

Using data capacity grants and other TEI funding, TPPs have successfully upgraded data management systems and harmonized disparate data sources. TPPs lacking measurement and assessment experts (or the faculty release time to devote to analysis) created new positions for statisticians and data managers.

## **TPPs are attempting to devote more time to learning from data, as well as sharing findings with other TPPs and partner school districts.**

The practice of institutionalizing data days or data retreats where faculty and staff present actionable insights from data has become increasingly common, and some TPPs have formed assessment committees responsible for thinking about the role of data in TPP strategic planning. TPPs and school districts have also begun to share data and interpret findings collaboratively.

## **Remaining Challenges in Measurement**

TPPs have not historically shared data about graduate outcomes with one another, and it has taken time to build the trust necessary to do so more regularly. Opening the TPPs' willingness to share data among partners could drive opportunities to share data-driven best practices.

Continued financial support for the implementation of data management systems and creation/continuation of data analysis staff positions will be important: While many TPPs have created full-time measurement and assessment positions, more work needs to be done to broadly increase capacity to work with and use data for decision-making among TPP staff.



## Culture Change

**TPPs are collaborating:** One of the lasting legacies of the TEI initiative will be how it has fostered collaboration among TPPs and created a professional network that has allowed faculty and staff from different institutions to exchange ideas and form lasting relationships. Collaboration in support of teacher preparation across different units, colleges, and schools within IHEs has also increased significantly.

**TPP culture has embraced the use of data and evidence as integral pieces:** While the process of common metrics data collection may still be in its early stages, some TPPs have demonstrated that they are willing to begin to use data to think about how to adjust preparation strategies and to create opportunities for data to be shared, both with other TPPs and partner school districts. Several TPPs have instituted data sharing events with consortia members, some have begun to review common metrics data with school district partners, and others have attempted to use common metrics data to inform strategy meetings within their TPP.

**TPPs have built stronger partnerships with school districts:** TPP faculty and school district administrators alike cited strengthened, mutually beneficial relationships arising from the TEI Initiative and a planning process that incorporated the perspectives and needs of school districts from the outset. Greater knowledge of school district needs and challenges helps TPPs to adjust strategies associated with each of the pillars accordingly, and while approaches to employment and support remain unclear, those pillars have benefitted from increased dialogue and interaction between school districts and TPPs.



# Sustainability Outlook

**Evidence-based changes to the preparation pillar focused on increasing the number and length of clinical/field experiences have been received positively by school district partners and appear very sustainable:**

The shift toward providing students with more frequent opportunities for clinical/field experiences and restructuring student teaching experiences around a co-teaching model that, in many cases, lasts for an entire academic year has been enthusiastically embraced by partner school districts. In addition, TPPs have invested significant resources toward the training of cooperating teachers in the co-teaching model, which virtually all student teachers from TEI TPPs will experience going forward. Finally, the emphasis on clinical/field experiences meets the changing demands of teacher certification and TPP accreditation bodies.

**TEI TPPs are unlikely to be disrupted by leadership transitions:**

Faculty and staff involvement in TEI is now so widespread that the loss of key personnel would be unlikely to derail any of the work underway. TEI planning committees and decision-making structures have been well-established in most cases and no longer depend on a small group of individuals to ensure their functioning. In addition, most TPPs reported receiving strong support from high-level administrators, such as university presidents and provosts.

**Collaborative structures are unlikely to continue operating at the same level in the absence of financial support:**

The level of structured collaboration and engagement that has characterized the initiative to this point is likely to be diminished in the absence of resources; however, respondents do feel part of a professional network and will probably continue to seek advice and exchange ideas in a less formal fashion. An exception to this trend is likely to be partnerships between TPPs and school districts, which have grown to depend heavily on one another due to changes in the preparation pillar.

**While TPPs have seen a shift toward greater data-informed decision-making, it is uncertain to what the extent the capacity for data use can be increased:**

For those TPPs that have used Bush Foundation funding to create data management and analysis positions, the ability to leverage data in the future depends, particularly for smaller programs, on whether future budgets allow for such positions to be maintained. Data analysis and dissemination is an incredibly time-consuming activity that many faculty and staff members simply are not able to devote much time to, and if a TPP does not already have a faculty or staff member working on assessment, it is likely that fewer opportunities to learn from data will be available in the future. Many TPPs will also struggle with common metrics survey administration without technical assistance.

**For many TPPs, the implementation of support and induction systems in partnership with school districts remains a complicated and expensive endeavor:** In districts that do not already have well-defined systems in place, it is difficult to predict the feasibility of support and induction implementation due to the expenses associated with such a venture. Support and induction efforts require professional development events, mentor training, and a host of other potential costs that are difficult for districts and TPPs to fund at a high level. While TPPs continue to pilot a number of different support and induction strategies, a model that can be applied broadly has yet to emerge.

**A number of external factors have the potential to impact teacher preparation:** Shrinking government budget allocations for education pose the greatest external challenge to TEI sustainability. The TEI Initiative has provided TPPs with a solid foundation from which they can seek out other external funding sources. However, long-term strategic planning is difficult to do when institutions rely largely on grants to launch innovative projects. Shrinking budgets have also led to the discontinuation of tenure line faculty positions upon retirement, and some TPPs worry that the depletion of human resources—which are already over-extended in many cases—will impact the number of high-quality teachers that programs are able to graduate.



# Appendices

## Appendix A – Evaluation Questions

1. To what degree is the Foundation’s objective and theory of change clear and understood by all partners? What is and isn’t understood?
2. How well have the Foundation and higher education institutions executed on responsibilities? What factors contributed to the quality of implementation?
3. Focusing on the 4 pillars (Recruitment, Preparation, Employment, and Support) as well as measurement and culture, what has changed as a result of the initiative to date? What have we learned and what outcomes have occurred?
4. What roles have the Foundation and its staff, the TPPs, the K-12 partners, the advisory committee, and the coaches played in the outcomes?
5. How is the teacher preparation landscape changing across the three states?
6. Is the Foundation on track to meet its goals of 25,000 effective teachers? What impact might this have on the achievement gap in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota?

## Appendix B – Data Sources

Interviews	Number of interviews	Number of participants
Project Lead Interviews	16	16
Coach Interviews	3	3
Focus Groups	Number of groups	Number of participants
Staff and Faculty	14	82
Current Students	2	10
Recent Graduates	2	5
Cooperating Teachers	2	9
Supervisors of New Teachers	2	8
Partners	2	5
Common Metrics Working Group	1	6
Recruitment and Enrollment Working Group	1	12
Support and Induction Working Group	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>159</b>

## Appendix C – Photography credit

The photographs in this report are of University of Minnesota-Twin Cities’ teacher candidates at Earle Brown Elementary in 2014; Photos by Bruce Silcox.

Where to direct questions and conversations about this report:

Teacher Effectiveness Initiative: [education@bushfoundation.org](mailto:education@bushfoundation.org)  
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