

Primary Partnership Agreement

UT Martin EPP and Weakley County Schools

Prompt 1

Identify goals for recruiting high-quality candidates, including candidates from a broad range of backgrounds and diverse populations, and how evidence will be collected, shared, and used to increase the educator pipeline.

Response

One of our current recruitment goals is to increase the number of completers to address the growing teacher shortage, especially completers prepared to access high-need endorsements such as special education and ESL. To increase our output of quality special education-endorsed and ESL-endorsed educators, the EPP has implemented the following recruitment measures: An approved Integrated Early Childhood program that allows students in this course of study to obtain endorsements in both PreK-3 and special education. Required ESL coursework in the K-5 program to prepare candidates for the ESL licensure endorsement should they choose to pursue the add-on. Collaboration with WCS career coaches at each middle and high school to recruit future teacher candidates. WCS indicated high school biology, chemistry, math, and Spanish as high-need areas experiencing shortages of available teachers in the district. The EPP and WCS will collaborate on recruitment efforts to target candidates for these content areas in particular through the measures referenced above and below.

Another shared goal is to increase the number of students from diverse backgrounds and populations admitted into the EPP. As a strategy, the Call Me Mister Program will graduate five candidates from diverse backgrounds each year with degrees in education. Originally designed to recruit minority male candidates, the program now includes candidates of all demographics and content areas. WCS notes that some of their most successful hires in terms of preparedness and professionalism have come from this program. WCS helps identify potential recruits from their district who meet the criteria and have interest in the Call Me Mister Program. WCS also has the opportunity to meet and recruit these graduates before other districts. Juniors and seniors from WCS visit the campus at UTM. For students interested in teaching or who are undecided, the EPP sponsors special events centered around education as a major and provides a campus tour.

The EPP faculty and staff will place renewed efforts into visiting Weakley County schools to speak to prospective students about our offerings and opportunities. These efforts include a "recruitment caravan" and a "signing day" to celebrate students' commitment to pursuing entrance to the EPP. WCS invites EPP faculty and staff into classes that teach high-need subjects throughout the district to stimulate student interest in careers in education. Faculty also invite WCS district leaders to speak in trainings, seminars, and classes to discuss professionalism and teacher completer expectations. WCS will commit to inviting EPP representatives to speak at career fairs within the district. WCS agrees to sponsor programming with the EPP to generate interest among students who plan to pursue education as a profession. This will provide time for students to observe and be active in district classrooms that match their desired content areas and participate in class sessions on the UT Martin campus.

WCS students interested in education will be invited for a tour of education departmental facilities and classes in the 25-26 school year. WCS invites UTM faculty and staff to speak to WCS high school students about entrance into the EPP, professionalism, and ethics. Faculty are invited to monthly literacy meetings and PLCs to collaborate and ensure candidates are taught the most recent state and local standards and strategies, with an added emphasis on foundational literacy skills and reading strategies for upper elementary. The EPP and its Recruitment/Retention Committee, through collaboration with WCS and the Advisory Board, will develop a strategy for identifying candidates of all backgrounds with specific teaching interests. WCS commits to collecting and sharing student data to help identify candidates. Another shared goal includes vetting candidates through a quality admissions process. The EPP commits to sharing and remaining transparent about its admissions and matriculation process for candidates. The EPP will share updates regarding the admissions and matriculation process in partnership meetings as they occur and seek WCS feedback.

Prompt 2

Describe the strategies and actions in place to co-select clinical educators and collaborate to prepare, evaluate, and support high-quality clinical educators, both provider and school-based, who demonstrate a positive impact on candidates' development and pre-k-12 students.

Response

UTM and WCS work closely during field placements to select, prepare, evaluate, support, and retain high-quality clinical educators, both provider and school-based, who positively impact candidates' prek-12 learning and development. UTM and WCS have reviewed and refined current clinical experience protocols. Teacher candidates' placement occurs as the placement coordinator collaborates with principals to select clinical mentors (CMS) who have an overall effectiveness score of 4 or 5 from the previous school year and a minimum of three years classroom teaching experience. From this group, principals choose teachers with the skills necessary to serve as CMs to support and evaluate candidates. Principals will ensure that CMs can apply TEAM rubric criteria to evaluations. The EPP reviews principal recommendations to verify nominees meet the criteria, with district administrators providing supporting evidence as needed. Both entities agree to consider the number of candidates any one CM has over time while ensuring students work with multiple mentors. WCS acknowledges that the CM experience helps veteran teachers build leadership capacity. The selected CMs offer support and expertise to candidates during their on-site experiences.

UTM will develop an application allowing teachers to indicate interest in serving as a CM, self-report qualifications, explain their interest, and secure principal recommendations. This creates a pool of prospective CMs, including newer teachers who may serve later in their careers. UTM recruits former educators with the experience and dispositions needed to support and evaluate candidates. It provides orientations and seminars for candidates in WCS schools and training for both university supervisors (US) and CMs, including online hubs. Trainings are revised based on feedback, with remediation offered if necessary. UTM has also developed handbooks for EPP, USs, and CMs, with WCS teachers and administrators contributing as reviewers. WCS commits to nominating quality candidates to serve as university supervisors. WCS CMs work one-on-one with candidates to inform, support, and guide them throughout their clinical experiences. USs frequently meet with candidates during student teaching to provide feedback and evaluate performance.

Both use the TEAM rubric, selected to provide consistent measurement and to familiarize candidates with Tennessee's evaluation system. The EPP ensures all supervising faculty maintain current TEAM evaluator certification. Candidates provide feedback regarding the quality of CM and US support. CMs and USs evaluate each other through electronic surveys and advisory board participation. UTM provides CM effectiveness data to principals and mentors to retain high-quality CMs and provide remediation when necessary. UTM and WCS commit to co-construction of training for CMs and USs that will improve transparency regarding issues in field experience placements early on. UTM and WCS are dedicated to training and preparing CMs and USs to take a more proactive role in intervening with candidate issues as they arise in field placements. UTM retains clinical educators and supervisors through stipends and training based on pedagogical best practices. CMs who complete the Cooperating Teacher Training Hub receive a certificate for four hours of professional development. The EPP and WCS will continue collaborating on methods to incentivize CM participation.

Prompt 3

Describe the design and implementation of clinical experiences, utilizing various modalities, of sufficient depth, breadth, diversity, coherence, and duration to ensure candidates demonstrate their developing effectiveness and positive impact on pre-k-12 students (For instructional leader programs, ensure how clinical experiences allow opportunities for candidates to practice applications of content knowledge and skills.).

Response

The Residency I and II field experience model has been implemented in Educational Studies programs and is regarded as a success. Furthermore, additional field experiences have been embedded in the UT Martin EPP curriculum to ensure literacy foundational skills and ESL strategies are taught alongside more robust opportunities for practical application. In Residency I (RI), candidates begin clinical experience when \$P-12\$ schools start as part of the "First Days of School" experience. This increases the duration, depth, and breadth of the clinical experience. Candidates engage in important aspects of the profession they might not otherwise see, including communicating course expectations, establishing classroom management systems, participating in emergency preparedness activities, addressing organizational concerns, and setting up parental contact methods. Clinical observation time also increases with RI, allowing candidates to transition gradually from pure observation to teaching multiple sections. This model gives them valuable teaching experience and familiarity with their students before student teaching.

In Residency II (RII), student teaching, candidates complete two placements. In Placement 1, students continue the work begun in RI by completing nine weeks of active teaching with the same students. Candidates participate in establishing routines, procedures, and classroom systems from the first day of school and see how these translate across the year. Placement 2 begins after Placement 1 and continues for seven weeks, allowing candidates to experience different grade levels, content areas, and student diversity in areas such as race, gender, and socio-economic status. WCS identified the need for additional methods activities for secondary majors as needing improvement. The EPP and faculty addressed this by increasing the number of clinical hours and hands-on activities for secondary majors, ensuring more rigor and alignment to the elementary and middle programs. Secondary majors also gain added field experience in their junior year for exposure to varied classroom settings and practices.

Additionally, WCS identified the need for more classroom and behavioral management training for EPP candidates. The EPP will explore and implement training opportunities to prepare candidates for the unique needs of modern \$P-12\$ students, including measures to train candidates on family and community engagement. UTM has fully implemented a Technology Integration plan across all programs. Candidates are trained on key technological frameworks and pedagogical strategies aligned with program assessments at critical points in their preparation. In response to stakeholder feedback, the EPP has also implemented a strategic Family and Community Engagement initiative to prepare candidates to better collaborate with stakeholders, improving both instruction and support of their students. WCS and the EPP will also collaborate on curriculum that emphasizes candidate readiness to reach students from adverse backgrounds and especially those from poverty or low socioeconomic conditions. This approach allows candidates to focus on teaching the whole child beyond academics.

WCS identified an increased emphasis and more intentional application of TEAM Rubric criteria at key junctures of UTM teacher candidate preparation. UTM faculty and supervisors are expected to integrate the TEAM rubric in fieldwork to prepare candidates for evaluation by this rubric during experiences and their careers. Faculty and supervisors must maintain current TEAM evaluator certification each academic year. UTM faculty will continue using their teaching experience, supervisory expertise, and TEAM training to strengthen candidate understanding of TEAM criteria. In alignment with this goal, WCS has implemented the NIET rubric and feedback model in their district and emphasized a focus on supporting teachers to prioritize student learning outcomes and growth rather than concentrating on scores. This perspective directly aligns with the EPP's goals for TEAM implementation. As UTM returns to full TEAM use throughout the program, WCS will serve as a collaborative partner in shaping messaging and implementation so that candidates consistently connect evaluation with reflection, growth, and improved student learning outcomes.

Prompt 4

Describe the process partners use in the program design, evaluation, and decision-making for continuous improvement.

Response

WCS representatives are invited to serve as collaborators and valuable resources for insights and feedback on program design, evaluation, and decision-making during the ongoing CAEP accreditation process. By serving in this capacity, WCS has direct involvement in course development, professional preparation, partnership processes, selection and training of clinical educators, design of clinical experiences, recruitment and retention efforts, evaluation of program impact, and quality assurance efforts for continuous improvement. The EPP and WCS district stakeholders will collaborate on the ongoing review and implementation of the Integrated Early Childhood program. The EPP will communicate with WCS district stakeholders to better understand current practices in the field in order to monitor and adjust the curriculum and field experiences to be mutually beneficial. WCS stakeholders are also invited to review and advise on the UTM EPP literacy graduate program, as well as help with training, review, and implementation of Math HQIM and STEM teacher preparation. In support of this partnership, WCS will provide EPP faculty access to their adopted HQIM and online materials so candidates can stay updated on current practices in the district. This strengthens alignment as candidates complete field experiences in WCS while still in preparation, supports their readiness to teach in WCS schools upon completion, and also creates opportunities for faculty and candidates to assist with HQIM implementation.

WCS representatives are invited to serve on the UT Martin EPP Advisory Board. The Advisory Board meets a minimum of two times per year to discuss opportunities for improvement or innovation and to share data for decision-making. WCS and the EPP will also commit to gathering and sharing anecdotal, qualitative insights from field experiences and feedback from cooperating teachers. These insights will triangulate with quantitative data to provide a fuller picture of candidate performance and inform continuous program design and improvement. As an example of this ongoing decision-making and commitment to continuous improvement, UTM and WCS recently identified the growing challenge of student readiness at the early grades, particularly in the areas of emotional and behavioral regulation. Teachers are adapting their practices to better support these developmental needs, such as reshaping morning routines to focus on student regulation before instruction begins. To address this, the EPP and WCS agreed to collaborate on faculty-led action research in PreK-2 classrooms. This joint initiative will examine student behavioral trends, strategies for management, and ways to meet the needs of the whole child, including consideration of adverse childhood experiences, poverty, and other socioeconomic factors. These efforts reflect the shared commitment to adjust preparation and field experiences in response to evolving district needs and to ensure candidates are prepared for the realities of modern classrooms.

The EPP will make a renewed effort to hold regular partner meetings at key points each academic year to ensure ongoing collaboration, co-creation, and feedback on program design, evaluation processes, and decision-making for continuous improvement. For the 25-26 academic year, we will place added emphasis on foundational skills, reading and literacy in upper elementary, math HQIM, and STEM. The EPP and WCS will communicate opportunities for WCS administrators and teachers to speak as guests on special topics in UTM EPP courses.

Prompt 5

Describe how partners will collaborate and make decisions to ensure candidate preparation is inclusive of LEA curricular content and materials.

Response

As part of the ongoing cycle of partner meetings and Advisory Board meetings, the EPP and WCS representatives will collaborate and make decisions regularly to ensure candidate preparation is inclusive of LEA curricular content and materials. The EPP and WCS will also commit to EPP representation and advisement on HQIM adoption and implementation teams in WCS. WCS also recently identified the need for additional classroom and behavioral management training for EPP candidates. The EPP will explore and implement training opportunities for candidates to be prepared to meet the unique needs of modern P-12 students. UTM has restructured the sequence of classroom and behavior management instruction so candidates now learn these strategies later in the program, allowing them to practice them during more intensive clinical experiences and after they have gained instructional strategies preparation. UTM and WCS will additionally co-construct targeted training to prepare candidates to persevere with challenging students by understanding underlying behavior issues and equipping them with strategies to help students navigate their challenges in order to learn.

In response to growing efforts to implement sounds-first foundational skills instruction and a renewed emphasis on disciplinary literacy across the state, multiple UTM faculty have participated as trainers of teachers in early reading and secondary literacy trainings. These efforts have equipped UTM EPP faculty and staff to help prepare candidates for the expectations of WCS curricular content and materials. The EPP has also integrated the Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment and the Early and Secondary Literacy trainings into coursework so students pursuing relevant endorsement areas will meet licensure requirements. WCS and the EPP will maintain close communication and collaboration to inform EPP faculty of necessary knowledge and skills, as well as training and licensure expectations, required of EPP teacher candidates.

In the 25-26 academic year, this will include renewed focus and collaboration on upper elementary reading Instruction, math HQIM, and STEM. WCS will also invite UTM EPP faculty to participate in PLCs, grade-level meetings, and content-area trainings. This collaboration will strengthen faculty knowledge of current district practices, provide alignment for candidate preparation, and enhance the transition of EPP completers into WCS classrooms. EPP faculty frequently meet with WCS district CTs and administration regarding curriculum and materials used by the district. WCS often shares resources so candidates can become familiar with LEA content and materials, especially HQIM and related supplemental resources. WCS will include the UT Martin EPP when ordering and distributing physical and online curricular content and materials.

Primary Partnership Outcomes

As partners work together to develop and implement the primary partnership agreement, describe the desired EPP and LEA short-term and long-term outcomes of the partnership agreement. Include a timeline if applicable.

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Short-Term (Fall 2025 semester and ongoing):

- Collaborate with WCS Career Coaches to identify opportunities to meet with and recruit future teacher candidates.
- Collaborate on process for verifying criteria for high-quality clinical mentors.
- Seek continuous feedback from clinical mentors on cooperating teacher training process and field experiences.
- Continue with recruitment events specific to Weakley County Schools: high school visits, Teacher Bowl, recruitment caravans, and " Signing Day."
- Recruitment efforts specific to high-need high school concentrations (biology, chemistry, math, Spanish).
- Increased recruitment focus on high-need endorsements such as special education and ESL.
- Expand recruitment pipeline through the Call Me Mister program, with WCS identifying and encouraging local candidates and UTM sustaining opportunities for graduates across demographics and content areas.
- Provide UTM EPP faculty access to WCS HQIM and online materials to ensure candidates are familiar with district curriculum and practices.

Long-Term (Revisit annually):

- Ongoing development and refinement of collaboration processes.
- Recruit and nominate highly effective educators and administrators for student teacher university supervision.
- Increased focus, implementation, and training in teacher preparation coursework regarding TEAM Rubric criteria, with emphasis on prioritizing candidate growth and student learning outcomes over scores.
- Development of a high-school-to-classroom educator pipeline between WCS and the EPP, including middle school recruitment initiatives, career coach partnerships, and on-campus experiences.
- Sustained emphasis on developing teacher perseverance in working with challenging students, with co-constructed WCS-EPP training that builds understanding of underlying behavioral issues, emotional regulation, and strategies to support the whole child.
- Collaboration on curriculum and training that prepares candidates to reach students from adverse backgrounds and low socioeconomic conditions.
- Sustained invitations for UTM faculty to participate in PLCs, grade-level, and content-area trainings to strengthen alignment of preparation with district needs.
- Collaboration on action research between the EPP and WCS, particularly in PreK-2 classrooms, to study and improve student engagement, behavioral readiness, and instructional practices.