

# Clinical Practices for Elementary Teacher Preparation Across South Carolina

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Policy documents have consistent recommendations regarding the clinical preparation of elementary teacher candidates and programmatic experiences; however, the extent to which these recommendations are enacted in South Carolina is relatively unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this working paper was to explore the enactment of promising clinical practices for elementary teacher preparation across the state. Using an interview protocol established from policy recommendations, data were collected from 12 of the 28 Institutes of Higher Education with elementary teacher preparation programs. Findings revealed many of the Institutes of Higher Education are engaged in practices consistent with guiding policy document recommendations, although there is room for growth across all IHEs. A series of implications and recommendations for various stakeholders are presented.

## + SOUTH CAROLINA

- **The quality of education elementary students gain in South Carolina has important societal and economic impacts. Stated succinctly, the better we educate our elementary students the greater our potential for a collective high quality of life. This begs the question, how do we create systems for elementary teacher preparation that ensure a high quality education for all elementary students in our state?**
- **This study revealed that guiding policy documents and stakeholders involved in elementary teacher preparation across South Carolina stress the importance of clinical placements that allow teacher candidates to be immersed in diverse learning environments and begin to notice and name the teaching pedagogies they learn about within their teacher education programs. Through a strategic focus on alignment of teaching practices learned within programs and enacted in school settings, we have the potential to transform elementary teacher preparation while simultaneously enhancing the quality of elementary teaching in South Carolina. Such approaches would begin to address some of our biggest education challenges while also providing the support needed to raise the quality of life for all South Carolinians.**

## + RECOMMENDATIONS

- **A commission, which includes teacher preparation faculty and leaders, be created and tasked with conducting a more complete examination of teacher preparation programs and practices in South Carolina.**  
Our analysis revealed patterns and wide variations in elementary teacher preparation practices across our state, as well as a trove of promising practices being enacted in isolation. However, our study was limited in participation and scope. A more complete and thorough examination, of all levels of teacher preparation, would provide a clearer understanding of the current state of teacher preparation and identify our initial strengths and most pressing issues. The teacher preparation commission should identify and examine exemplar strategic partnerships (IHE and local school district). Our analysis revealed strategic partnership examples where multiple stakeholder groups are pooling resources to address overlapping needs.
- **The creation (with ongoing support) of statewide teacher preparation symposiums.**  
These events would create the space for university-based and classroom-based teacher educators to share best practices, discuss common problems, brainstorm potential solutions, determine questions to investigate, and most importantly, elevate the collective state of teacher preparation in South Carolina. IHEs in the state have the necessary collective expertise, but it is restricted by current contexts and restraints.
- **Networks of “best practices in teacher preparation” be created.**  
Such networks would act as catalysts for the collective growth of teacher preparation. Regional groups could be formed to deal with more localized issues. Site visits across institutions could occur so that the most promising practices in teacher preparation could be observed, documented, researched, and shared.
- **An induction teacher professional growth and support initiative be created.**  
We know why new teachers are leaving the profession. Short of significant increases in teacher salary and reductions in typical teaching load, supporting teacher growth during induction in ways that are informed and likely to succeed is our most logical option.
- **Ongoing support for effective strategic partnerships must be provided.**  
Grant funding or direct allocation of resources supported the most effective partnerships we captured in this study. We urge stakeholders to also examine reward structures (i.e., tenure, salary, promotion) for teachers and university faculty so that participation in such partnerships does not negatively impact professional opportunities. Existing partnership agreements provide initial starting points and guidance for these discussions. A key feature of such agreements is that they create and support named positions/personnel who lead the work associated with the strategic partnership.

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