



BranchED

BUILDING INNOVATIVE PATHWAYS INTO TEACHING



Stages of Work and Critical Moves



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction to Branched	6
Overview of the Handbook	7
STAGE 1: Laying the Groundwork	8
ACTION NEEDED: Forming a Team	8
<i>Critical Moves</i>	9
ACTION NEEDED: Creating a Vision and Discussing Focus Areas	9
<i>Critical Moves</i>	9
STAGE 2: Design	10
Successful innovative pathways programs have	10
ACTION NEEDED: Aligning Coursework and Clinical Experience	11
<i>Critical Moves</i>	11
ACTION NEEDED: Structuring Innovative Pathways that Fit the Context	11
<i>Critical Moves</i>	12
ACTION NEEDED: Designing Work Roles for Pathway Candidates and Mentors	12
<i>Critical Moves</i>	13
STAGE 3: Implementation	14
ACTION NEEDED: Recruiting Pathway Candidates	14
<i>Critical Moves</i>	14
ACTION NEEDED: Recruiting and Developing Mentor Teachers	15
<i>Critical Moves</i>	15
ACTION NEEDED: Onboarding and Supporting Mentor Teacher and Candidates	15
<i>Critical Moves</i>	15
STAGE 4: Continuous Improvement	16
ACTION NEEDED: Monitoring Effectiveness of Innovative Pathways	17
<i>Critical Moves</i>	17
ACTION NEEDED: Measuring Program Impact	17
<i>Critical Moves</i>	17
Moving Forward	18
Endnotes	19



Executive Summary

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and PK-12 schools across the country are grappling with teacher shortages and working toward effective, long-term solutions to address this problem. Unfortunately, the teacher shortage was a predictable phenomenon. In the years before 2023, there have been consistent shortages in certain subject areas like math and science and in areas that serve students in special education and bilingual programs. Furthermore, shortage areas have been disproportionately present in low-income communities and communities of color.¹ While the teacher shortage has been growing over the years, the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with issues of pay, workload, and outside pressures have exacerbated the problem and brought renewed concern and national attention.

In response to what some have described as a crisis, EPP and district partnerships have begun to strengthen the teacher pipeline to ensure all students have access to a well-prepared teacher. States across the country have begun to incentivize future teacher candidates through scholarships, grants, and innovative programs. Federal and state support and guidance have also spurred the development of these programs. Teacher residencies and teacher apprenticeships are two innovative models that have gained traction in the field of teacher preparation as they seek to both address the teacher shortage while simultaneously enhancing quality teacher preparation. In 2022, U.S. Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, issued a call to action to EPPs, school district leaders, and state officials to increase their investment in and support of teacher residency and apprenticeship programs.²

Innovative Pathways align well with the components of high-quality teacher preparation. They increase opportunities for teacher candidates to engage in practice-based learning and bridge knowledge and practice through regular student interaction. Innovative Pathways also provide teacher candidates with ongoing support and feedback from experienced mentors and other teacher educators. Furthermore, they embed teacher candidates in a specific school, enhancing their understanding of a unique community and providing opportunities to practice instructional skills that best fit the needs of those students. Moreover, innovative pathways provide benefits to the school community, particularly in low-income areas and in communities of color. Research has found that innovative pathways have positive impacts on new teacher retention and contribute to the diversification of the teacher workforce by attracting more teacher candidates of color, and other tangential benefits include positive impacts on student learning as well as expanded professional growth opportunities for in-service teachers.³

As EPPs and PK-12 partners work together to build a pipeline of quality teachers for their communities through innovative pathways, BranchED stands ready to assist. This handbook serves as a resource for EPPs and PK-12 district partners to guide their planning and implementation of new teacher pipelines through innovative pathways.



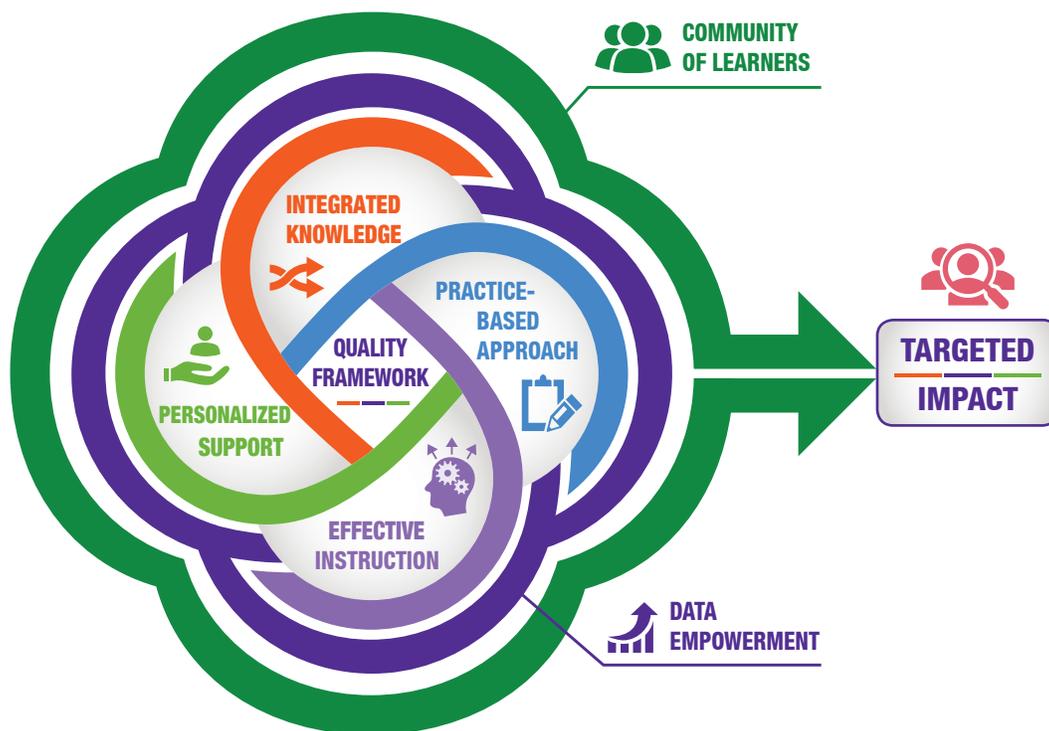


Introduction to BranchED

BranchED is pioneering a higher standard of educational excellence. We are a professional services organization and a collective of university faculty and leaders advancing educational excellence by expanding individual capacity, enabling supportive relationships, boosting institutional effectiveness, and collaborating with communities. We believe that every student deserves access to caring, adaptive, and well-prepared teachers and that every teacher deserves high-quality preparation. This vision is accomplished through the application of our Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators. The Framework outlines a roadmap to create teacher preparation programs that meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student body.

The Framework identifies six critical focus areas that teacher preparation providers can leverage to redesign their programs. Two of these focus areas (Community of Learners and Data Empowerment) provide the foundation for the remaining focus areas. This handbook focuses on a Community of Learners working together to create teacher pipelines that are mutually beneficial for their communities.

Teacher pipelines are top of mind for the communities we serve as they work to provide every student with a well-prepared teacher. As a Community of Learners, EPP and school district partnerships are working together to develop residencies as an innovative strategy to enhance their teacher pipeline. BranchED aims to support these partnerships in these endeavors.





Overview of the Handbook

This handbook is intended for use within an EPP and school district partnership working together to build and sustain innovative pathways into teaching. It outlines the steps for designing and implementing innovative pathways that centers the needs of the partnership and lays the groundwork for long-term sustainability of the program.

A sustainable pathway program reimagines a clinical experience for teacher candidates through close collaboration within an EPP and school district partnership. The definition of innovative pathways can vary from state to state and from program to program. For our purposes, BranchED defines innovative pathways as a program in which a year-long clinical experience is embedded as ***a year-long clinical experience embedded in a school community that tightly integrates coursework and practice opportunities with support from a mentor teacher.*** Furthermore, while federal or state grant funds may be utilized to implement innovative pathway, BranchED centers sustainability in this handbook to ensure innovative pathways will live on past any outside funding. A sustainable innovative pathway program meets the needs of the community's teacher pipeline and considers the needs of the teacher candidates, financial and otherwise, to participate in the program.

This resource organizes the work of designing and implementing an innovative pathway into various stages and includes critical moves to help the partnership plan for the work that needs to be done. Additionally, suggested **BranchED tools and resources** that can assist in execution of the critical moves are highlighted throughout the handbook. Please note that just like many endeavors in education, the path is not always linear. We encourage partnerships to use the different stages and critical moves as a guide to the work rather than a prescription, knowing that the partnership will delve into different stages at different times and cycle through the critical moves as needed. We also understand that an EPP might be working with various school district partners to implement innovative pathways. In these cases, some of the critical moves can be applied to all district partnerships, while other critical moves are dependent on the context of each unique partnership.



**TOOLS and
RESOURCES**

are available at
**BranchED
RESOURCE PORTAL**



STAGE 1

Laying the Groundwork

The development of an innovative pathway is a major project that relies on a strong, productive EPP and school district partnership. Laying the groundwork at the beginning of this process can help strengthen the partnership and increase the probability of a sustainable program with successful outcomes.



ACTION NEEDED: Forming a Team

An innovative pathway program is only as strong as the team leading the work. A strong team includes representation from various stakeholders within the EPP and the partner school district such as leadership, faculty, clinical supervisors, district administration, school principals, and others. The team should include members with decision-making powers to ensure the work moves forward at an appropriate pace. Moreover, a strong team represents a cadre of supporters who believe in the power of innovative pathways to create a positive impact for all those involved. A **Shared Governance tool** can provide guidance for the development and documentation of the innovative pathway team's roles and responsibilities.

**SHARED
GOVERNANCE
TOOL**

is available at
**Branched
RESOURCE PORTAL**

➤ Critical Moves

- Determine the areas of expertise, experience, and decision-making powers that need to be represented among team members.
- Identify and invite team members to be a part of the development and implementation of innovative pathways.
- Initiate MOUs and data-sharing agreements.
- Develop a calendar for initial planning sessions.



ACTION NEEDED:

Creating a Vision and Discussing Focus Areas

Quality sustainable innovative pathways rely on strong working partnerships between EPPs and school districts. To best position partnerships to take on this work, creating a shared vision is an important starting point. Co-creating a vision allows for reflection, collaboration, and honest discussions that help prepare the partnership to design a program aligned with the needs of the whole school community. The BranchED Innovative Pathways readiness tool is a guided self-assessment that can be used to build understanding among the team of the scope of work needed to develop innovative pathways and inform the vision casting process.

After a vision is established, the team can turn their attention to determining focus areas of pathway aligned with the vision. What needs within the teacher pipeline will this pathway address? What current teacher shortages exist? What shortages will exist in the future? Teams might consider focus areas on the quantity of candidate certification areas, student achievement, retention, and more. Data regarding teacher shortages, attrition, and retention rates, and more will be helpful in guiding these initial discussions. These focus areas will be refined in the design stage.



➤ Critical Moves

- Co-create and codify a vision statement.
- Reflect on past work and health of the partnership in the areas of communication, data sharing, governance, and flexibility.
- Engage in discussion and data review to reflect on the effectiveness of the current teacher pipeline from the EPP to partner district and to determine focus areas of the innovative pathway.



STAGE 2

Design

The design stage is where many critical decisions will be made about the innovative pathway. Understanding school district partner priorities, such as teaching and learning initiatives, trends in teacher vacancies, subject area and/or grade level shortages, and areas of need at specific school sites, is essential to provide parameters for the program design and to establish shared governance of a sustainable program. Once the groundwork from Stage 1 is firmly in place, it is time to design a sustainable pathway model that provides a high-quality experience to the candidates, mentor teachers, and the PK-12 students they will serve.

Successful pathway programs have:

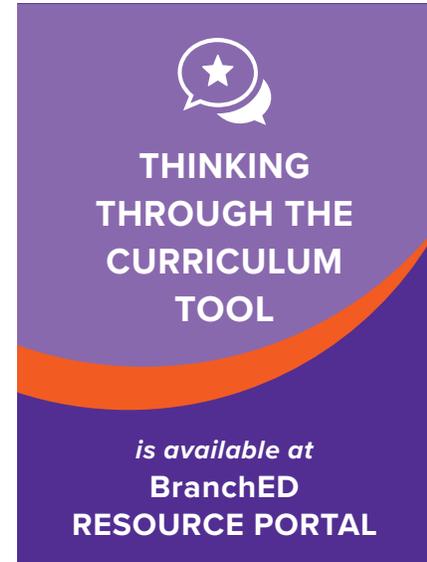
- Mutually beneficial EPP/school district partnerships
- Coursework integrated with clinical practice
- Recruitment initiatives to attract diverse candidates that meet the district's hiring needs
- Financial support for candidates in exchange for a three- to five-year teaching commitment
- Cohorts of candidates placed in “teaching schools” that model good practices with diverse learners
- Expert mentor teachers who co-teach with candidates
- Ongoing mentoring and support for graduates working as teachers of record within the district or school where they served as candidates⁴



ACTION NEEDED: Aligning Coursework and Clinical Experience

Fundamentally, innovative pathways are about the meaningful integration of coursework and clinical experiences in preparation of becoming a day one profession-ready teacher of record.⁵ The arc of the experience connects theoretical principles to the realities of the classroom by providing opportunities to practice effective teaching. Incorporating the characteristics of successful innovative pathways preparation programs requires reviewing and revising what has historically occurred in many programs. Juxtapose the historical perspective with the newly created vision and consider what gaps, misalignments, and/or supports need to be addressed in aligning coursework.

This intentional review of coursework can be aided with the **Thinking through the Curriculum tool** which guides discussions on how to integrate coursework with the clinical experience.



Critical Moves

- Collaboratively review and revise the curriculum to ensure coursework is integrated with the clinical experience and that the district partner's context is represented.
- Design opportunities for candidates to analyze and reflect on their practice independently and alongside mentors and peers.
- Consider the workload of the candidate and identify areas of work that can collapse or be integrated into the clinical experience.
- Identify or develop an assessment cycle that provides feedback and support for candidates.



ACTION NEEDED: Structuring Innovative Pathways that Fits the Context

The EPP and school district partner contexts should determine the overall structure of any innovative pathway. These contextual factors likely emerged as the partnership set about Creating a Vision and Focus Areas during Stage 1. Therefore, to initiate the design process, revisit the agreed-upon vision and focus areas alongside any data points gathered to inform the development of program curriculum. The structure of the model will determine many of the details that will impact the lived experience of candidates and mentor teachers. How many



days a week will candidates be in a classroom? What does the full calendar year look like for candidates and mentors? What other responsibilities will candidates have? Are there opportunities for candidates to earn money during the clinical year? How often will candidates co-plan and co-teach with their mentor teacher? Will candidates be required to serve as teachers in the district after completion of the program? These are just some of the questions that will be addressed as you structure innovative pathways that align with the context of the EPP and district partnership.

Additionally, partnerships should consult state-wide definitions of innovative pathways that detail the parameters for models in their state. For example, in Texas, the Texas Education Agency defines residencies as “...where a teacher candidate is paired with an experienced, highly effective mentor teacher for a full year of clinical training/co-teaching in a K-12 classroom (a minimum of three days per week for a full year)”.⁶ Based on the state-wide definition, the residency program structure can begin with those parameters and be developed into finer detail through consideration of the financial sustainability of the program. **Strategies for Financial Sustainability** is a useful tool designed to shift focus to the context specific resources and funding available which will determine the final innovative pathway structure.

➤ Critical Moves

- Investigate state-specific parameters for innovative pathways.
- Consider mutually beneficial reallocation of roles and finances to support stipends or salaries for candidates and mentor teachers.
- Consider other cost-savings measures at the university level that can be provided to candidates (i.e., scholarships, work study funds, etc.)
- Determine the weekly schedule of a candidate and mentor teacher.



ACTION NEEDED:

Designing Work Roles for Candidates and Mentors

Clearly defining roles and expectations of the candidates and mentor teachers is critical. A clear outline of these roles lays the groundwork for an effective candidate/mentor relationship and allows for easy communication of expectations to other stakeholders. Furthermore, done collaboratively, this process deepens understandings within the EPP and school district partnership of each of these roles and assists in the selection process for candidates and mentors.



Mentor teachers deeply engage with candidates working side by side with them as they develop their skills as teachers. They are steeped in the culture of their school and help candidates acclimate to the school community. Considerable research on mentor teachers' impact on teacher candidates has revealed three conceptions of mentor teacher roles and responsibilities including mentor teacher as an instructional coach, emotional support system, and socializing agent.⁷ Mentors guide candidates who are working to balance a yearlong intensive experience that requires them to be effective learners and effective teachers; a juxtaposition that requires openness to constructive feedback and to making necessary adjustments in their practice.⁸

Alongside their mentor teacher, candidates will make contributions to the school culture and student achievement during their year-long teaching and learning experience. Therefore, it is critical during the design process to thoughtfully align the expectations for candidates with selection criteria and explicitly define roles and responsibilities that will be clearly communicated during the selection and onboarding activities.

➤ Critical Moves

- Outline the desired characteristics, responsibilities, and compensation for a mentor teacher and candidate.
- Establish eligibility and selection criteria for candidates and mentor teachers.
- Plan for professional development, support, and feedback opportunities for mentor teachers.



STAGE 3

Implementation

The implementation stage of a innovative pathways is where the partnership begins to act on all their planning. The team will need to identify a comprehensive and detailed plan for the recruitment of candidates and mentor teachers in adherence with the application criteria and selection processes outlined in the design stage. Partnerships should seek ways to actively gather input from target populations with the aim of directly recruiting from local populations of staff and students that are predisposed to work in the district. However, there will likely still be a need to market and recruit potential candidates beyond the district.



ACTION NEEDED:

Recruiting Teacher Residents



**RECRUITMENT
TIMELINE
TOOL**

is available at
**BranchED
RESOURCE PORTAL**

Selecting teacher candidates to participate in the program is a critical step in moving toward implementation. Recruitment and selection of candidates should be tightly aligned to the goals of the program and the district’s pipeline needs. To stay on track with the program goals and recruitment process the team can use the **Recruitment Timeline** sample as a resource to develop a similar tool that meets the needs of the program. Additionally, during the recruitment process, teacher candidates need to learn about the expectations, benefits, and compensation of the program so they can determine if it is a good fit. The selection process should be rigorous and intentional but should also go beyond a simple review of academic background and assess for dispositions and dedication toward teaching and learning.

➤ Critical Moves

- Identify strategies for disseminating program information for targeted recruitment.
- Create an application process for teacher candidates interested in the program.
- Develop a process to review applications, interview potential candidates and make selections.
- Notify applicants of decisions and outline a way for future candidates to “accept” the offer.



ACTION NEEDED:

Recruiting and Developing Mentor Teachers

Given the importance of the mentor teacher role, the recruitment of mentor teachers needs to be strategic. Utilizing the defined characteristics of quality mentor teachers defined by the EPP and district partnership, recruitment can be a shared task that is supportive of the established goals of the program. Aside from recruitment, partnerships need to dedicate time to creating professional development for selected mentors in the areas of co-teaching, providing quality feedback, and other topics decided upon by the partnership. Partnerships should not work from the assumption that their mentor teachers inherently possess these skills simply because they are high-quality classroom teachers. The recruitment timeline protocol developed and used to guide the recruitment of teacher candidates can also be leveraged for the recruitment and development of mentor teachers.

➤ Critical Moves

- Identify strategies for disseminating program information for targeted recruitment to develop a large pool of qualified mentor teachers.
- Recruit and select mentor teachers.
- Implement professional development and other support for mentor teachers.



ACTION NEEDED:

Onboarding and Supporting Mentor Teacher and Candidates

Strategic onboarding can promote early relationship building between candidates and mentors and foster the development of an active community of learners. Onboarding candidates and mentors can also cultivate a sense of inclusion and openness to collaboration promoting candidates' persistence in an intensive teaching and learning experience indicative of a yearlong clinical experience. How can you build the candidate/mentor relationship at the very beginning of the experience? Participants should engage in onboarding to become oriented to the processes, expectations, and communication structures that will be used to successfully engage in the program and to connect incoming candidates with the school community they will serve.⁹ How can candidates be connected to the community at the very beginning of the program?

➤ Critical Moves

- Design and implement orientation activities for onboarding candidates and mentors within the setting of the school community.
- Create a calendar to onboard candidates into the school where they will be completing their program.
- Disseminate information about roles, responsibilities, and program outcomes.



STAGE 4

Continuous Improvement

A focus on continuous improvement is critical for a sustainable teacher innovative pathways program. Teams will need to monitor the implementation of the pathway program; ensuring what was designed is what is being implemented. Additionally, teams need to cyclically review data collected about the growth and progress of candidates and mentor teacher effectiveness. How do you know the candidates are becoming more effective in the classroom? How will you make decisions about next steps in response to the data? Monitoring this data should include a process to disaggregate data to the effectiveness of the pathway experience compared to traditional experiences. Joint review of data should occur at regular cycles in response to data collection points along the program, and the BranchED **Data Toolkit** is a useful resource for both monitoring effectiveness and measuring impact through data visualization and data conversations.



**DATA
TOOLKIT**

is available at
**BranchED
RESOURCE PORTAL**



ACTION NEEDED:

Monitoring Effectiveness of Innovative Pathways

In earlier stages, the partnership developed or reviewed an assessment and feedback cycle. During continuous improvement, the partnership will review the data collected through this cycle to determine effectiveness of the program and to determine any needed areas of improvement or next steps.

> Critical Moves

- Collaboratively review data collected on key assessments within the program to measure the progress of residents.
- Collaboratively review data collected regarding mentor teacher effectiveness.
- Document and delineate timelines for next steps.



ACTION NEEDED:

Measuring Program Impact

Measuring impact requires the EPP and district partnership to analyze the outcomes of the innovative pathway program in alignment with stated goals as well as its impact on PK-12 student learning. This process answers the question: Are you producing the quantity and type of teachers needed in the school community? Assessment and evaluation of the program as a whole provides a layer of accountability to all stakeholders and a lens for addressing issues in a timely manner.

> Critical Moves

- Review program outcomes and goals related to the teacher pipeline.
- Review student outcomes in classrooms where candidates serve to establish their impact on the PK-12 student learning.
- Document and delineate timelines for next steps.



Moving Forward

The critical work that EPPs and school districts are doing to strengthen the teacher pipeline will have long-lasting impacts on schools and communities in our country. As EPP and district partnerships begin to consider the development of a innovative pathways. BranchED is ready to support. This handbook as well as the tools referenced therein can be found on our website through the BranchED Resource Portal. For partnerships desiring more comprehensive support, BranchED offers a 2-year engagement that provides technical assistance and thought partnership to assist in the development and implementation of sustainable innovative pathways. Partnerships interested in this support can contact info@educatorexcellence.org. We look forward to supporting partnerships in their journey toward sustainable innovative pathways and being part of the Community of Learners that will inform and sustain this work.



Endnotes

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⁹ Guillaume, N., Jones, S. M., & De La Fosse, K. (2020). Academic Residency: Effective Engagement And Mentorship Of Doctoral Students. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 17(1), 1-10.



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