

# UK College of Education – Quality Assurance

2020-2021

## Stakeholder Focus Groups Report: 2020-2021

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6/10/21



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## INTRODUCTION

In spring 2018, the University of Kentucky's College of Education formed a Quality Assurance System (QAS) Committee whose responsibilities including guiding the College toward the next accreditation visit and assisting the College in the development of robust systems of assessment and evaluation designed to promote continuous improvement. The committee is comprised of College leadership including Associates Deans in charge of accreditation, school partnerships, and assessment. Staff and faculty members from offices of accreditation, school licensure, and student teaching also are members of the committee. In addition, the College contracted the services of the Evaluation Center housed in the College of Education to participate in the quality assurance work. The Evaluation Center staff serve as members of the committee and provide support in data collection, analysis, and evaluation.

In academic year 2020-2021, the Evaluation Center was tasked with collecting feedback to the TEP across multiple stakeholder groups. Focus group questions were developed following a review of existing data that included third-party collected interviews with (1) current K12 students, (2) Kentucky parents, (3) administrators, (4) advocacy groups, and (6) diversity, equity, and inclusion professionals. After reviewing the existing data, evaluators focused questions on the UK TEP preparation of teacher candidates in relation to the following topics:

1. Diversity, equity, inclusion & culturally responsive instruction
2. Communication with families
3. Data-driven instruction and assessment
4. Teacher stress/burnout
5. Dispositions needed to succeed in the teaching profession
6. Quality of UK programs and general program feedback

After developing sets of questions, the evaluation team held focus groups with three separate groups: school principals from across the state; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) administrators from a local school district; and current teacher candidates. Due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, participation from these three groups was low for teacher candidates: two candidates participated in the focus group interview with one candidate being a graduating senior and the other just entering the TEP. However, seven school administrators participated in the school administrator focus group. Finally, three DEI administrators participated. While the overall participation was low, the collected data provides some robust feedback across multiple topical areas and similar themes emerged across all three groups during analysis.

Below we summarize key findings from these three focus groups and provide a brief list of recommendations. Following this summary, detailed findings across all the topical areas are provided.

## KEY FINDINGS

Key findings cover a range of topics and represents the findings across all three groups. Specific details to support these findings including direct quotes from stakeholders can be found in the detailed findings section of the report. Key takeaways from the focus groups include:

- Principals overwhelmingly feel UK graduates are well prepared to enter the teaching field, with one indicating UK graduates are “leaps and bounds” above their peers.
- While principals feel current early-career teachers are generally more culturally competent than past cohorts, all groups interviewed feel candidates need more training during their studies to prepare them to work toward being culturally responsive.
- The general consensus was that cultural responsive teaching preparation includes teaching multicultural history (specifically African American history), relationship building skills (both generally and across cultures), and empathy.
- DEI administrators and candidates felt Kentucky (not UK specifically) teacher candidates had mindset issues that hindered their growth in terms of cultural responsiveness due in part to a lack of exposure to diverse cultures, a “savior” mentality, and/or “deficit” thinking.
- All groups expressed that UK graduates (and early career teachers generally) are not proficient in analyzing data in ways that inform in-class decisions.
- All groups feel UK candidates are not well prepared to communicate and engage with students’ families.
- Dispositions/skills multiple principals say they seek in new teachers included (1) the ability to communicate, (2) self-assessment and the ability to take criticism, and (3) a drive for lifelong learning and continual improvement.
- Principals and candidates perceive UK TEP (and TEPs generally) may be “sugar coating” the difficulties that come with teaching, resulting in teacher turnover and burnout. Principals and candidates also blame social media for these misperceptions of teaching.
- All groups expressed that UK needs to diversify both its staff and candidate pool.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, the evaluation team recommends the TEP consider the following actions:

- Create or require a history course that emphasizes multiculturalism or more specifically African American history. Consider also increasing exposure to diverse histories in other classes that are required of all candidates (not as a substitute for a history course but in addition to).
- Review the curriculum to find ways to provide candidates more practice on how to (1) build relationships, (2) use data to inform decision-making, and (3) work with families.
- Utilizing “badges” or microcredentials may be a way to focus TEP energies on improving candidates’ cultural competency, working with families, and working with data.
- Continue to find ways to provide opportunities for students to engage with different cultures.
- Incorporate testimonials of real-life experience that represent challenges of teaching and how teachers navigate those challenges

## DETAILED FINDINGS

Detailed findings are broken down by specific topical areas that were discussed and that emerged in analysis. Findings areas include (1) cultural responsiveness, (2) data-driven instruction, (3) communicating with families, (4) dispositions, and (5) program feedback.

It is again important to note that these findings only represent responses from a limited number of stakeholders. Despite this, stakeholders shared similar perspectives and thoughts across most thematic areas, which may increase the reliability of these findings.

*Note that quotes presented below have been edited and abridged for clarity.*

### CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

All groups were asked specific questions about working with diverse cultures, helping address socioeconomic disparities in the classroom, and differentiating instruction using culturally responsive instruction. All groups were asked (1) how well prepared UK graduates are in each of these areas and (2) what the TEP can do to better prepare candidates in each of these areas. Responses from all groups were analyzed individually for common responses then responses were analyzed across groups to develop themes.

#### **Principals generally believe UK is preparing teachers to think about culture and ensure diverse cultures are represented and acknowledged in instruction.**

*“Our newer teachers bring a diversity to the literature that we have; not only in their classrooms, but in our library, and [they bring] an awareness of students – reading books that have in them people that look like our student population – has been a big a big plus...I think that the students who are coming out of the universities have this mindset of, ‘we need to make sure that we’re not just teaching the old classics. That we need to have a new and diverse literature base for our kids to choose from and be exposed to.’” – Principal D*

One principal noted a grant-funded project between their district and UK that exposed candidates to diversity in a productive, learning-focused way:

*“[people from UK] wrote a grant...for pre-practicum students or student teachers to actually work in one of our apartment complexes in the summer, providing enrichment activities and tutoring to our refugee population.... getting out and having opportunities to interact with kids in*

*different environments has been one thing that's been a great benefit to graduates.” – Principal E*

## **Candidates and DEI administrators expressed the TEP and its candidates were not well equipped to work with diverse populations or teach in a culturally responsive way.**

For the two TEP candidates we interviewed, there was a consistent feeling that while culturally responsive instruction was discussed, it was not a true focus of their programs. One candidate noted a “social justice lesson plan” that they had to do in pre-practicum classwork and also tools and “phrases to use” to help combat “bullying, like from racism...or any sort of discrimination,” but the consistent feeling of the two candidates was that there was not enough exposure to diverse cultures or how to work with diverse cultures:

*“Where is that cultural diversification? Where is that talking about SES and that kind of thing. In every class I’ve ever had in the TEP program, we have touched on reading, and how important reading books is. And in every subject, reading is so important. ...[but] not all of us know how to handle those situations that come up culturally or a student that’s having a problem socioeconomically, that kind of thing.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“Diverse classrooms shouldn’t be like just a chapter in our course. That chapter can just be disregarded and moved along: pass the quiz, do the lesson plan, what’s next?... it should be a focus.” – TEP Candidate 1*

*“Being in the classroom with students and seeing how culturally diverse the classroom is, it’s scary going in and not knowing how, if a student comes up to you and has a problem that I...have never faced or never had to face—how to talk to them about that, or how to find someone who can better talk to them about something—It’s scary. I don’t know how to do it. And it’s something that I’m going to have to learn from experience instead of being taught how to do it which is kind of disappointing.” – TEP Candidate 2*

Similarly, DEI administrators felt candidates were not being well prepared to engage with diversity. One DEI administrator noted that candidates were not necessarily well prepared to differentiate instruction in a culturally responsive way:

*“[Candidates] talk about the deconstruction of standards, but then taking that deconstruction and put it into practice for implementation and*

*addressing the needs of the students when they're teaching, we see a big disconnect.” – DEI Admin 1*

*“Another piece that I see as a need in terms of culturally responsive teaching and learning is understanding about how to teach to diverse learners more than just thinking that it is about putting [up] posters of Martin Luther King, or having things that represent a culture, or celebrating a Cinco de Mayo. Understanding that those things are not culturally responsive, so there's a big disconnect.” – DEI Admin 1*

**For all three groups—but primarily DEI admins and candidates—there was a feeling that Kentucky’s teaching population struggled with mindset issues around diversity.**

All three groups interviewed—candidates, principals, and administrators—all spoke to various mindset issues teachers struggled with in terms of diversity. For candidates, the mindset issues stemmed from a lack of awareness of white privilege and racism. While they noted that the college made efforts toward teaching about systemic inequities like white privilege, they expressed frustration that other students (and teachers) seem to deny the existence of things like white privilege and systemic inequities:

*“We actually went over a section about white privilege, and I remember a girl telling me how upset she was about/with the concept of white privilege. And, she was saying, ‘you know, that’s racist against white people.’...So it was clear...the execution of the lesson was not full because she still was not understanding what the professor meant by white privilege...I tried my best to explain it, but I’m not the teacher. I’m a student.” – TEP Candidate 1*

*“The Hall of Fame Speaker Series...I’ve been to a couple of those, and they are really good, and they are really informative, but it’s getting the TEP students who maybe aren’t interested in learning more culturally... it’s not ok to say, ‘that’s not important to me, I’m going to study for the Praxis.’ The Praxis is very important, but teaching culturally diverse students is something that, as an educator in the US, you’re going to deal with for the rest of your career....I have noticed a lot of our TEP students aren’t [“mindful about how [they] speak to certain people”], which is really sad to say. But I have met students who don’t care about the way that they speak about different people or to different people. And it’s very sad to say that, but I think that incorporating it into our curriculum would maybe cut back on some of that feeling [that] it is a choice when you’re in the education system.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“You get into the school system when you’re student teaching and you hear a lot of the things that some of the teachers are talking about, especially some of the White teachers, how they’re reacting to some of the things that are going on, and it’s extremely concerning. So, I think it’s extremely important for us to be trying to teach our TEP students how to properly deal with these situations.” – TEP Candidate 2*

For DEI administrators and principals, the concern was focused more on teachers (both pre-service and in-service) stereotyping students through deficit thinking or believing that, because a student comes from (or the teacher perceives a student comes from) an impoverished background, that student in some way cannot achieve at the level of other students. Both groups consistently talked about how this produced low expectations for some students and also caused teachers to come in with a savior complex:

*“[Some pre- and in-service teachers] beliefs in terms of children of poverty is that they come as empty vessels. They don’t have the parents’ support, parents are not as engaged, so they come to save the children. It’s that mentality of saving the children.” – DEI Admin 1*

*“We don’t want our teachers to come with a deficit mindset thinking when it comes to our students. If you have a deficit lens before you walk into a building, that is going to generate gaps further and further, so we just want to make sure that the teachers understand the difference between deficit and asset thinking we definitely want them to understand the opportunities around implicit bias [and] understanding your own [biases].” – DEI Admin 2*

*“Can I add one more thing about socioeconomic status? Just also connecting that with how systemic it is. I think we do a lot of victim blaming with it ...[instead of going] back [to the] historical context. Not just focusing on the victim blaming, which is what we do as well.” – DEI Admin 3*

*“I think poverty is one that hits us. It’s not so much race, it’s the idea of, ‘They live in such bad situations. Oh, can we still hold them to the same expectation?’ And because we’re heartfelt people, because we teach, we tend to sometimes go, ‘It’s okay I’ll do this. I’ll help you.’ And, I think we’ve got to teach our incoming teachers that’s not helping [students], it’s hurting in the long run... But I’m not sure how you do that, in preparation, any differently.” – Principal A*



*“We get a lot of folks...that come here to be on the mission field. And then when they see what the mission field really looks like, sometimes it's uglier than what they thought...And I don't know how you prepare them for that...But those are the ones that I see that, when they don't feel like they're being successful in helping those students rise out of poverty, is when the burnout comes.” – Principal D*

**Stakeholders felt that teaching candidates to be more culturally responsive includes (1) exposing candidates to diverse histories and cultures (specifically African American history), (2) teaching and practicing relationship-building skills (both generally and across cultures), and (3) promoting empathy as a disposition.**

All three groups were asked to share ways they thought the TEP could better prepare candidates to be culturally responsive teachers and/or help address socioeconomic disparities in the classroom. Across all three groups some common themes emerged.

All three groups highlighted the need for candidates to be **exposed to diverse histories and cultures** to help improve their cultural competency:

*“Could there be some tasks that students do during their student teaching that could, you know, get them to dig into the culture and the different cultural aspects of the class that they're assisting in to explore that about the school that their student teaching in. And I just wonder if that could be added into the expectations of the student teaching program.” – Principal F*

*“I think that it's important for college students to have some background around the intercultural development inventory. It's the IDI and that kind of tells them on the spectrum where they land, it could be from polarization to maximization all the way up to you know just really being knowledgeable of cultures...it's important that we really educate our new educators coming out into this field about black history, it's American history, there is a textbook ... black history 365. They have an elementary component, they have a middle school component, and they have a high school component...[all the way] to the College level, and so I just wanted to share that that might be something that you guys can think about in terms of, again, teaching historical opportunities to our students.” – DEI Admin 2*

*“Maybe replacing a class with [a class on] teaching culturally diverse populations, or something like that.” – TEP Candidate 2*

Similarly, both principals and DEI administrators talked about connecting the teaching of diverse cultures with a **focus on building empathy in students**, arguing that empathy was key in getting candidates to internalize the foundations of cultural competency:

*“One of the things that I think is really important is to really embark upon implicit bias and to help educators that are coming into urban districts to understand their own bias and what that means, and, not only what it means, but how it may impact walking in someone else's shoes, employing on empathy, compassion—not looking at curriculum only through a monocultural cultural lens—you have to see it through the eyes of where the children are coming from.” – DEI Admin 2*

*“Any type of social justice opportunities that you could provide there at the College level to understand the plight of a preschool child all the way up to high school.” – DEI Admin 3*

*“We’ve got different types of diversity, and there's no way you can prepare them for all of the different diversity of what the school is going to be...They just have to have some general skills, and empathy, and be willing and able to use that.” – Principal B*

*“The empathy side of it and trying to understand where our families come from and to be okay with being uncomfortable initially.” – DEI Admin 3*

Finally, individuals in all three groups suggested that focusing on **learning skills and techniques to build relationships both generally and with people from other cultures** was something that could lead toward better cultural responsive practice:

*“Maybe...having a course that really dives into the problems that you’ll face, the things that you’ll see, how to speak about certain topics, how to be mindful about how you speak to certain people.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“it’s the importance of relationships with students, with families, with coworkers, and how that lends to being able to address and recognize implicit bias. Being able to better understand how to teach at each student's level, so I would just say the importance and the value and the power behind relationships.” – DEI Admin 3*

*“I also think the university too could always prep teachers going into the profession on how to have those conversations. You know when the impact survey went out and teachers are responding if they were even comfortable having conversations with students around any area of*

*diversity, not a lot of teachers are comfortable with that. So, I think prepping graduates to ask the right questions, how to find a community to reach out to if you need that, and just prep them with the skills to tackle those things when they are, when it is in front of them. Because it will happen. So, I think just teaching them how to approach the situation and to have the necessary tools, I think, would be important.” – Principal C*

**The other consistent recommendation to improve cultural responsive practices of teachers both in the TEP and in the field is to diversify the candidate population and the TEP faculty.**

*“Have somebody who is culturally diverse teach a course over culturally diversifying education or something like that. I think that would be extremely helpful. I remember last semester I had social studies for a class. And we did maybe a week over like Black History Month and I think that’s as culturally diverse as it got, and that’s a social studies course.” – TEP candidate 2*

In response to what else the TEP could do to improve cultural competency: *“Hiring people of various races in the College” – DEI Admin 2*

*“Diversity of classmates. Because within the classroom setting where we are... to have the different kind of thoughts in the space, and that leads to more respectful work when they become teachers...I think UK has been spot on and trying to improve that effort [diversifying candidates]. So you know, diversifying the admissions in the class across the board and then again just that intentionality and being unapologetic in addressing bias.” – DEI Admin 3*

*“I’m having a hard time getting qualified candidates that will represent diversity on my staff. I’m having a really hard time with that.” – Principal G*

## DATA-DRIVEN INSTRUCTION

**Principals and DEI admins indicated that early career teachers and UK candidates are generally skilled in understanding how to collect and manipulate data.**

While at least one principal reported that “just getting the data and disaggregating it is overwhelming for some” (Principal C), the consensus across principals and DEI admins was that incoming first-year teachers (both generally and specifically from UK) were skilled in data collection and manipulating the data:

*“I’ve seen our new teachers be able to create the most beautiful spreadsheets ever in the history of man—that changed colors automatically and explode flowers on kids that are doing a great job, and these types of things.” – Principal D*

*“It’s not the collecting the data or the organizing the data.” – Principal F*

*“A lot of our districts are data rich.” – DEI Admin 1*

**However, all groups agreed that candidates are not well prepared to analyze data and utilize those analyses to modify or differentiate instruction.**

*“A lot of our districts are data rich but analysis poor, so the analysis of the data to impact student achievement that is missing across the board. And they just pile data and data, but it’s just making instructional decisions and how to really be intentional with the exit slips...we just give them the spreadsheet and then it’s hard for them to make decisions on data—intentional decisions to impact student achievement. I see that as a gap.” – DEI Admin 1*

*“Like a lot of these things just weren’t even touched on and if they were it was just like, ‘oh and here’s a couple days of that.’ But assessments I had never spoke about until literally this semester when we had a seminar in our student teaching seminar, and somebody came in and told us about MAP data and how to communicate that, and what to look for, and that kind of stuff. We have never talked about K-PREP. We have never talked about standardized testing...We’ve obviously talked about formative assessment and how to create your own quizzes and things like that, but when it comes to state-wide testing or schoolwide testing, Brigands testing in kindergarten—I don’t even know what the test is but I’m trained to give it which doesn’t make sense. But I think focusing a lot more on just assessment in general would be great because I don’t know when, before*

*the student teaching semester, that I have even been exposed to that.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“The toolbox of utilizing the data that they're breaking down is where I see a deficiency sometimes. They just don't have the toolbox to make a change and teach in a different way. And so that's something you gain over experience in time, but that's been more my experience with data break down, with our new folks.” – Principal D*

*“But to look at the data and, you know, change the instruction. But then, what if it doesn't change? What if it doesn't get better? You know, what are the other tricks to try?...So they're good at reading the data, knowing that they need something, [but] then maybe some help with how do you figure out what they need.” – Principal A*

*“It's not the collecting the data, or the organizing the data. It's the applying that data to the next steps that seems to be the trickiest for them. They know they need to do it, and they know they need to assess and gather that data from the assessment. But then figuring out what to do when the kids didn't get it is tricky.” – Principal F*

## COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

**All three groups generally agreed that communication with families was an area where early career teachers needed more instruction.**

*“When you ask educators if they've ever had to take a class on working with families that's required, and most say no, and so, when they have that engagement then they're not prepared it can turn to be negative and that's their footprint for work with families, so they develop that deficit mindset so anything that can be geared toward You know, family engagement what it could look like in valuing and families and what they bring to the table.” – DEI Admin 3*

*“I think that's a big one for us, and a lot of times our new teachers are a little bit afraid of [talking to parents].” – Principal F*

*“And so some of this is just with age and time, but it would be good to have like a toolbox of things that they could go to and refer to. And yeah, I think it's so important that their mentor teacher – that's with them*

*during that, you know, in their building - is truly a good mentor. Because that can be very helpful.” – Principal G*

*“I think they're actually more comfortable talking about diversity than they are talking to parents.” – Principal B*

*“So it’s something that I feel like should be talked about more because it is such a touchy topic, and so hard to master. Like I, I as a student teacher don’t even feel qualified to talk to parents... I guess the idea of talking to a parent can be really scary. And so I’m scared that without that experience, I won’t know how to do it as a first-year teacher. And with everything else that’s super overwhelming as a first-year teacher, that is a huge part of that. And so I don’t know how to exactly approach that in the program, but it’s definitely something that hasn’t been expanded upon.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“I have not like learned any skills on how to talk to parents. And that is definitely something I’m really afraid of.” – TEP Candidate 1*

**DEI admins felt re-focusing family engagement around seeing families as resources—or funds of knowledge—can promote better relationships with families.**

*“When we start talking about asset mindset, looking at the positive when engaging families and when following up with those strengths, those are the Aha moments that we mainly see because we tap into, we find a way to tap into disrupting bias in working with our families.” – DEI Admin 3*

*“Work with families; recognizing families funds of knowledge.” – DEI Admin 2*

*“We spent a lot of time in our professional learning really focusing on redefining what family engagement [is], so it’s not the old school parent teacher conferences come here, we sit down, we will ask for schools to go where our families are, to be innovative and what that looks like. Not just telling families what they need to know but bringing families to the table to be co-creators in in their child's learning and what can happen in a classroom.” – DEI Admin 2*

**Similar to cultural competency, administrators see teaching relationship building skills as a way to help candidates feel more comfortable engaging with parents and families.**

*“Day one or two, you're going to be able to tell, like this is a student I'm probably going to have to call home on, because we're having an issue. Let's go ahead and call on day two because they did something well; because I know down the line, I'm going to have to call for something else. So, but I think that... I think they're not as comfortable with that.” – Principal B*

*“So, having strategies in place: of what to do when the situation gets tense, what to do when a parent is asking you questions that you don't know the answer to...We give them like little scripts of here's what you can do, here's what happens in this situation. But they know they don't know and aren't going to be able to answer everything, and they don't want to give the impression to a parent that they can't handle it. So, you know, teaching them skills, such as active listening, conflict resolution, what to do in a situation when it gets tense...Those are all things that are, you know, are great for us as professionals in general, let alone (for) young professionals graduating.” – Principal E*

*“The power of that phone call when it's a tricky situation, and them just being able to hear your voice and hear your tone. And [] being able to decipher what's text and message worthy and what really needs that personal phone call: [that] would be another suggestion, I think.” – Principal F*

**One candidate suggested incorporating family engagement into the UWA Student Assessment Project as a low stakes opportunity to practice family engagement.**

*“I think that maybe taking volunteer parents...maybe sending out an announcement that's like, ‘Hey, we would love to have our student teachers spend a few hours out of the week with your student.’ Like I know we do student assessment projects in the program. So maybe tying that in with contacting the family in a certain way, because we have to sit down with them and do running records and things like that with the students, and so maybe using that as an opportunity to be like, ‘Hey, your child has been you know, a volunteer for the SAP, Student Assessment Project. Do you think that also we could take a little bit of your time for*

*our students to practice...doing uhm, you know, contacting families?’ And maybe stressing to them that there is no certain way they have to act: Like throw it at the teachers because we have to be ready for every situation.” – TEP Candidate 2*

## DISPOSITIONS

**Dispositions/skills mentioned by multiple principals include (1) the ability to communicate, (2) the ability to take criticism and to persevere without constant reinforcement, and (3) a drive for lifelong learning and continual improvement.**

*“Problem Solving, leadership ability...organized, committee organizer, and (that they) participate in some type of organized sports, because then you know that they are a good teammate. Collaboration and communication skills cannot be stressed enough...soft skills are something that is so important. So, those are things that I look for all the time. And the willingness to take corrective feedback or constructive criticism and know that that's not an attack on them as a person. But that we're all professionals and we have to have that growth mindset, so to speak, and that just you have you have never you never arrived. You are constantly learning.” – Principal E*

*“I look for work ethic...communication is huge...lifelong learner, always wanting to improve on your craft.” – Principal G*

*“The ability to power through in those difficult situations, or when you're not feeling like you're getting that direct and positive feedback...newer teachers, they should be getting positive feedback, but you're not always going to be in a school where you're getting constant positive or regular positive feedback from administration...they need the ability to push through and do good work, even if they don't always feel, appreciated...so, they need to have the ability to go into a situation and say, “you know what??? I'm going to do this; not because I feel like I'm getting a pat on the back.” And I feel that is especially true of some of our younger teachers—is [them saying/feeling], ‘I need that affirmation. If I'm not getting that affirmation, then it kind of gets off the rails for me.’” – Principal B*



*“I don't want teachers coming in and they're (just) going to implement something that is handed over to them - I'm going back to differentiation. I want them to be creators. This is their profession—going back to the lifelong learning. And a big one, and I know we're in a pandemic year, but some emotional stability. We have so much going on in classroom with our families and our kids, I feel like our teachers have to, when they walk into that classroom, they have to be the ones, you know, (with) feet on the ground. We're stable helping our kids get through some difficult times. And then, we got to save, you know, our intense emotions and our roller coaster for other private time.” – Principal C*

*“The ability to handle and cope with stress.” – Principal E*

*“I always am looking for people who speak to relationships, who want to build relationships with students who believe that they need to know they care about them before they need, before they'll learn...all the other stuff I feel like I can teach them: how to make a good lesson. But, I can't teach them how to care for kids and believe that this is what they're supposed to be doing.” – Principal A*

## PROGRAM FEEDBACK.

To assess feedback to the program, evaluators coded data based on “positive feedback” or positive perceptions of the program and then “areas for improvement.” These feedback areas overlap with other thematic areas.

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### POSITIVE FEEDBACK/PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRAM

#### **One candidate praised the student teaching experience.**

*“I think the student teaching experience is well set up. I think I've learned the most in my student teaching experience than I have my entire time in the program. Which I think is based heavily on like hands-on experience, and like actually getting to do things. I think that's set up really well.” – TEP Candidate 2*

#### **One DEI admin was extremely positive about the relationship between UK and their district.**

*"I just want to say to continue our partnerships with University of Kentucky they have actually been absolutely phenomenal. You know, as we have reimagined you know how we do things, they've been very supportive around equitable practices and professional learning for our culturally responsive leaders and for teachers and so that partnership has been phenomenal just this year alone, and then other partnerships that we have, through the university and the College of Education it's just been very helpful supportive very forth, you know, moving forward, you know. purging ahead in the work, so we really appreciate the partnerships and this opportunity today." – DEI Admin 2*

**Principals overwhelming feel UK graduates are well prepared to enter the teaching field, with one indicating UK graduates are "leaps and bounds" above their peers.**

*"We don't get a lot of Kentucky grads...we do have one, this is her first year with us. And just going back to her interview when we hired her, she was leaps and bounds above other people that we interviewed. She just felt like she had a really solid foundation of what it meant to be a teacher and what it takes in the classroom. And she had very data driven conversations with us, and what that looks like. So I feel like just within that interview process and what we've seen her do in the classroom has definitely spoken to how UK prepared her." – Principal C*

*"We've got a science teacher this year...she has done a great job of representing UK in the way that she has engaged kids. Especially, in a year like this that has been very, very challenging. But I've seen, I've seen some good at least foundational work from, from new hires that have gone through UK... Because that that's something they have they've talked about, and they put some focus into obviously." – Principal B*

*"I would echo what others have said. That, that the folks that we get from UK, whether it's for student teaching or whether it's for, that we've hired them at the beginning of their career, are well prepared." – Principal D*

*"I have not had very many UK grads in the last five years or so, I haven't had any concerns about any that I have had, and I feel like you know they've been well prepared." – Principal F*

**One principal also spoke very highly of the UK program, their activities, and the active partnerships UK has with the schools and with the community.**

*“I appreciate the open communication and collaboration with the faculty at UK...They want to prepare graduates. And I frequently get when someone will call me about a student teacher who's been here. Uhm, and that their interviews stand out, especially with their literacy knowledge and what they know about and what they can do. And I believe that that is, uhm, those changes have taken place, just that conversation; and “what do you see? What do you need? You know conversations like this. Uhm, and then reacting to that, to that feedback, and how we can make it better, and working as a team. I think that's something that's been, that's you know, a real positive part of the student teachers coming out, and because of the program.” – Principal E*

*“I work closely with [redacted], and [that person] and [redacted] wrote a grant. And the grant is for pre-practicum students or student teachers to actually work in one of our apartment complexes in the summer, providing enrichment activities and tutoring to our refugee population. So that's unique to us, but UK did that all on their own. They went through, they wrote a grant. ...**those are the types of things that I see UK faculty and staff doing that enriches the preparation of teachers.**” – Principal E*

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AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

**Candidates and principals felt that TEPs may not be fully setting expectations about the challenges of teaching—that the TEP was “sugar coating” the profession.**

*“I think if I can say something in all capital letters, without like yelling at you it would be, BE HONEST. Because I feel like a lot of our situations and expectations in the program are sugar coated and kind of made out to feel like a fairy tale. Or like this, I don't know... If you've ever seen like the Instagram or YouTube teachers who only show the good and never talk about the bad, I feel like that's kind of a good representation of at least some of the things that we go through in the program. Uhm because, and I know we keep going back to these lesson plans, but like the lesson plans that we're expected to write are like eight pages long, and then you get*

*in your first year and you don't have time to do that. And so your lesson plans end up being six bulletin points on a sticky note and you feel like you've failed. And that's just something that adds on to that negative mindset. Like oh, I took three years to prepare for this and I can't even fit it in??? And then like going back to the assessment and not knowing what to do there. And so, I think that professors being honest, like 'Hey this is not a cakewalk. This is not an easy profession. Not everyone can be a teacher. Teaching is hard.' And then telling us that there's that teacher turnover because I didn't even know about that until I got into student teaching. And so, seeing all the teachers who are planning on leaving the profession this year, just after being thrown into a virtual world is really overwhelming and kind of unexpected. And so, knowing that that's a real problem may be even before getting into the TEP, in our classes, would really help students to kind of know that you're first year is not always lollipops and rainbows and Instagram covers and bulletin boards... knowing that it is really hard and there are days where you do want to quit even though you love your job. So, I think that being honest about the profession is really important." – TEP Candidate 2*

*"I would just reiterate what [Principal B] had said earlier about, just a real good look into what the job is going to be. And I think, you know, even though student teaching should be that, something's still missing from that. I think there's still just a very naive view of what the job will be for a lot of our new teachers. And to me, that's our biggest challenge right now. So, I just wanted to reiterate that part." – Principal F*

*"You know, I almost feel like teacher programs in general, need to have a unit, not a full course, but a unit, that spends a month and a half just talking about all the crappy stuff that has to do with education. Not sprinkled in there, but we're just gonna, you're gonna have to learn to deal with a month and a half of—we're just talking about the hours you have to put in, and the people you're going to come into contact with, and the nasty parents. And that after that, two months of dealing with that, 'now's the time to you to decide, do you really want to do this or not. Now's the time to decide,' As opposed to, 'I talk about all the good stuff. And every once while we talk about the things you're...going to have to run into.' But maybe that needs to be a punch in the gut for [them in] teacher prep programs and then gauge from there. 'Here's some skills to cope with it, do you really want to do this? Because that will be part of what you're doing.'" – Principal B*

*“So, something that can be done earlier in the program that gives them a little reality check about what is ahead of them; that this is not an easy profession. We are professionals, we are not just missionaries, and shooting rainbows everywhere. That this is hard work, and I think they need to know that.” – Principal C*

*“I think that, in my working with newer teachers, that one of the things that weighs on them is the everything that we are also responsible for outside of the classroom. Like the first time...they have to make a call to social services. ...The first time that we...see the home...the holes in the roof and the dirt floor, becomes a lot....And when they put all of the factors together, that are out of their control, but they're solely responsible for making sure that that kid is on reading grade level, it's a lot. And so, I think that the heaviness of education is more than just what they're doing inside that classroom sometimes weighs on them. And I don't know how UK maybe could prepare them for that better....We get a lot of folks here...that come here to be on the mission field. And then when they see what the mission field really looks like, sometimes it's uglier than what they thought, in certain situations. And I don't know how you prepare them for that....But those are the ones that I see that, when they don't feel like they're being successful in helping those students rise out of poverty, is when the burnout comes.” – Principal D*

*“Sometimes there is a romanticized view of what teaching is. And when you look at that you are...you are the end all and be all, and you are the number one determining factor of, you know, success for the students and this year in your classroom, some people aren't are aware until they get into it. That truly teaching is not what an Instagrammer, or a social influencer selling things on Instagram, that that's all rainbows and unicorns and everything; that it looks great... Because that's not the true work. The true work is teaching kids and moving them and knowing what they need. So sometimes it's simply, 'I did not, I did not expect this. I didn't expect this to be the job.' That that's what I've seen.” – Principal E*

### **Principals feel that early career teachers can struggle with making engaging activities that are also well connected to learning goals.**

*“I think with any new teacher they understand engagement really well, sometimes the engagement isn't connected to the learning...Like we're studying pigs, and so we find these cute little pigs to color with numbers on them. So I think there's just in all of the programs around us... Or how*

*do you engage them in a way that's it's meaty and rich and not just fluffy.”*  
– Principal A

*“I think you know, balancing those engagement strategies with, with just knowing the content and knowing what they're supposed to teach, (and) when, is always a struggle.”* – Principal F

*“I would concur with what [Principal A] said in the beginning, in that sometimes the engagement activities, per se, are not as connected to the content as they should be. So it's a great... Kids love it. It's a great activity. But you know, what I find myself saying to new teachers is, ‘what is the purpose of the activity, and what content are, you know, is driving this activity?’”* – Principal E

## **Other areas of improvement mentioned by principals include self-assessment and improvement, cross-disciplinary knowledge, and intervention strategies.**

### ***Self-Assessment:***

*“An area for improvement probably is the trial and error aspect of engagement. Where you know, if you try something and it doesn't, you have a great idea and it doesn't work. How do you pick up the pieces and tweak that idea? The idea might not be bad, the execution just may need a little bit more work, or to be tweaked.”* – Principal B

### ***Cross-disciplinary knowledge:***

*“I would like to also see some newer teachers just be more comfortable with content that they're not comfortable with, and how they attack it. I have a lot of teachers that are math teachers or they're not math teachers, and they are scared of it. Uhm, and so what does that look like when you have to teach it and you aren't very strong at that; having that learner mentality that they're going to go figure that out. And not just kind of default to, well I'm just more of a literacy person or vice versa, that they know how to become a learner and use that in the classroom.”* – Principal C

*“I'd also like to see, and this might have changed since I went through the program, a better knowledge from general ED teachers on what special ED teachers do, and how that interacts. I feel like our special ED teachers have such a robust knowledge of those students, and what that looks like. And our general ED teachers do not. Unless they have that additional*

*degree, unless they've been through that in some way. So, bridging that gap. Going kind of back with the RTI too, that they have a knowledge of how everything works in a school system: What does a speech pathologist do? What does the school site do? Just, to have a really, uhm, broad picture of what all goes in to helping kids succeed.” – Principal C*

**Intervention strategies:**

*“We did an interview today with a [person] who just graduated from UK’s program recently, and there was a gap in [their] knowledge about the MTSS and RTI processes. I think that [they] was really solid on all of [their] tier one kind of instructional practices and knowledge there, and able to share a lot about lesson planning and those types of things. But when we got to the part about intervention there was a gap. So, I don’t know. I just thought I’d share that since it was recent.” – Principal D*

**Candidates want more practice in on-the-fly adjustments to lessons.**

*“But then knowing like, oh my gosh, there’s a surprise tornado drill what am I gonna do when my students come back to the classroom and I’ve not had time to teach this entire lesson: How do I improvise that? That has just ruined an entire hour lesson plan that I’ve spent, I don’t know, it always takes me like two hours to create one of those formal lesson plans doing, when I could have bulleted six things that I’m gonna do. Here’s what I’m gonna do if something happens in 40 minutes.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“Because we learn how to be prepared, but we don’t know how to be prepared for that unexpected; when things happen that throw you out of the loop, what do you do? Like how do you switch it up? You know?” – TEP Candidate 1*

**Both candidates felt the excessive workload at the beginning of the TEP hindered their ability to retain information. They felt some courses could be taken before TEP entry.**

*“I remember trying to find time to study for the Praxis and having, I also had like eight classes, and I was working on the side so I had a job. And oh my goodness, everything at once. It’s a lot and I kind of feel like some of the classes that we are required to take, like don’t get me wrong they’re very important classes but, maybe could be taken pre-entrance to the TEP program because they aren’t incredibly difficult. And then some of the*

*more difficult classes, like some of the uhm like materials courses and things like that, definitely need to be taken once admitted. So, I think restructuring is like definitely a good word to choose.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“I’m taking eight classes right now. Like eight classes, and I’m trying my best to juggle every single class, retain all the information for when I take my praxis, get it all done on time, like wake up early, go to like, observing, and like all of that. So, I just feel like it’s a lot. This semester it’s eight, next semester it’s seven, and then I’m student teaching. So, it’s like, how am I going to like, how am I going to remember all this? I’m really like overwhelmed. Just like getting into the program it’s really been overwhelming.” – TEP Candidate 1*

### **Candidates feel their program over emphasizes lesson planning and under emphasizes other skill areas.**

As discussed throughout the other sections, candidates felt the program does not provide them with enough training related to some areas due to an over emphasis on lesson planning. Both candidates repeated multiple times that they felt other things could be focused on more and reduce the focus on lesson planning:

*“When it comes to like data and collecting data and evaluating data we don’t get a lot of that in the program. I feel like the program is very heavy on this is how you write a lesson plan, this how you write a unit, this is how you write this, this, and this, but not how to execute those things. And that’s just something that I’ve noticed going into teaching, an area that I have been really weak in because I haven’t had a lot of experience in that.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“I was thrown into a situation in student teaching where I had never done that. And so, all I knew was this is exactly everything I need to write in a formal lesson plan, now how do I execute it?” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“Basic classroom interactions you know... Like talking to kids, I think that is really important. Like I think that should be more of the focus than like the grueling lesson plans.” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“I mean like when [TEP Candidate 1] and I say that it is hard core, just like lesson plans, we’re not even kidding. Like a lot of these things just weren’t even touched on.” – TEP Candidate 2*



## **Other feedback from candidates included wanting practice with mock interviews and help with the Praxis.**

### ***Praxis help:***

*"I'm going to be honest; I think a practice course would be extremely helpful. Mostly because a lot of the students in the TEP program are doing the things that are necessary for them to pass. And obviously the Praxis is. But when you have like these papers that you're writing that are like fifteen pages long, and these lesson plans that are six pages long that are counting towards your grade, you kind of put studying for the Praxis aside because you don't have the time in your day to really complete it all. So I feel like a course that's like worth credit hours that would count like towards graduation and could take the place of another course or something like that could be really helpful for everyone in the program."*

– TEP Candidate 2

*"I definitely agree. Especially with like the Praxis II, because we're going to be like tested on what we've learned like the past year, or the year before. So it's like knowing what points in each class that we need to specifically remember. And back to the fact that we're taking eight classes a semester, like it's really hard to retain all that information and then a few months later take a test, try to remember everything for that like, for all those classes. Trying to figure out what was the most important like points." – TEP Candidate 1*

### ***Mock interviews:***

*"I think that mock interviews would be fantastic. I don't even know what to expect when I walk into my first interview. I don't even know when to start handing out my resumes." – TEP Candidate 2*

**DEI admins felt the college should work to reduce barriers to admission for students of color; focus on hands-on, project-based learning; encourage candidates to have high expectations for all students; and focus on teaching how to give good feedback to students.**

### ***Reducing admission barriers:***

*"What are the policies and practices governing and looking at opportunities to recruit more minorities...not only just the entry process, application process, and things like that, but that score that you had to*

*have to get in...those are some things that we really need to think about as folks that are putting teachers into your program, and those are things that we need to think about when we recruit—that score doesn't really mean much of anything.” – DEI Admin 2*

**Project-based learning:**

*“We need opportunities to where kids can do project-based learning from K through 12 grades, that they have STEM opportunities that are embedded in the curriculum at the University, so that when teachers come out, they have some hands-on things for students.” – DEI Admin 1*

**High expectations:**

*“High expectations for all children; high expectations for all children, no matter the zip code demographics, religion, background. It’s the high expectations, but if I don’t do that in [my] work, those biases are going to come up, and [I will] water down the curriculum and think less of my students and my families.” – DEI Admin 1*

**Feedback:**

*“Feedback is valuable, it adds value to the student, and it just really helps the teacher to understand how [the students] learn and how they receive him or her, and that they feel that they can that they can trust them because they support them and help them.” – DEI Admin 2*

## REFLECTIONS

### **Candidates’ discussions of in-service teachers suggest school cultures that diminish the value of some of the things the TEP emphasizes as important.**

While it is very important to stress that the conversation with TEP candidates only contained two candidates, both candidates made comments that suggested in-service teachers downplayed the importance of some activities the candidates’ programs emphasized as important. Primarily the way they described in-service teachers’ reactions to their lesson plans seemed to suggest derision toward the practice:

*“We don’t need to spend like our entire TEP program focusing on something that we’re not even going to be doing when we’re teaching like. **The teachers were literally laughing at me. They’re like you have to write six-page lesson plans? They’re like literally a post-it note. And I was like, ‘What am I doing?’**” – TEP Candidate 2*

*“I was just talking to one of the teachers at the school I was subbing at. And I was like I’m working on a lesson plan, and **she was like I literally write what I have to do on a post it.**” – TEP Candidate 1*

Moreover, both candidates may be internalizing this attitude:

*Like honestly; honesty, knowing what to expect. Back to the lesson plans: You’re not going to have time to write a six-page lesson plan. **And you’re not going to have time to follow a six-page lesson plan.**” – TEP Candidate 1*

*“It always takes me like two hours to create one of those formal lesson plans doing, **when I could have bulleted six things that I’m going to do.**” – TEP Candidate 2*

While these comments may only represent the experience of two people, the description of the cooperating teachers do suggest flippant or derogatory attitudes toward developing rigorous lesson plans. It may be worth investigating further if the culture of schools is socializing candidates to view the profession less seriously in some ways. Alternatively, if the improvised shortened lesson plans is expected with experience, it may be useful to discuss with candidates about in-service vs. learning, emphasizing why the “six-page lesson plan” is important as a starting point (i.e. “walk before you can run”).

**While it seems unlikely all candidates will be culturally competent as they enter teaching, the discussions here do offer a framework or “toolbox” that could help set candidates on track toward cultural competency.**

Principals repeated multiple times that they do not expect first-year teachers to be truly culturally competent because culture often looks so different school to school. However, as these data suggest, tools candidates can put in their “toolbox” (as the principals called it) are skills related to building relationships and learning about the historical realities of America that have created systemic inequalities for people of color. By promoting these two areas, it may help move some candidates more toward an empathetic and ultimately culturally competent mindset.

A word of caution about educational activities that promote intercultural communication or interactional diversity: literature shows that while these types of activities do promote cultural competency (Castellanos & Cole, 2015; Park & Denson, 2013), they are often can further perpetuate racial inequities: white students, particularly at predominately white institutions like UK, do not inherently have to interact with students from diverse backgrounds. Students of color, however, often have no choice but to interact with people from other cultures. As a result, research suggests these activities—if not well designed—can center whiteness which can reinforce white privilege and monoculturalism (i.e. in order to “succeed” in the interactional activities, individuals must speak, act, and conform to the dominant culture (Gusa, 2010)) (Bowman & Park, 2015; Park and Denson, 2013). While this is not to discourage intercultural

communication/interactional diversity activities from being designed and promoted in the college, it may be appropriate to focus on generally relationship building skills and/or have the people designing these activities work with DEI professionals in the design and implementation phase.

### **DEI administrators provided some resources that may be useful to the college.**

When asked about resources that could be useful for the college, one DEI administrator indicated that the Intercultural development inventory (IDI) was a tool that they found useful in their work at their district. The IDI is a paid measurement tool that asks people to answer questions and then places them on a spectrum in terms of their cultural competency.

Another tool recommended by the DEI administrators was the Black History 365 textbooks. This textbook, they noted, has lessons and work that could be used from elementary school all the way through college. This may be a tool for review by the College, recognizing it is being recommended by administrators in a district that hires many UK graduates.

### **Microcredentials or badges may be a useful way to integrate areas of improvement into the curriculum.**

Recent talk in the College of developing micro credentials and badges that are meant to be tied directly to specific skills sets may provide a unique opportunity for the college to explore ways to work on the specific areas of improvement discussed in these findings including working with families, working with data, and gaining skills in cultural competency. Given these are areas that stakeholders feel need improvement, these areas could provide an excellent place to focus any efforts related to badges or microcredentials.

## APPENDICES

### METHODS & DATA SOURCES

For evaluation questions and goals, the Evaluation Center models qualitative data analysis on a deductive content analysis coding structure (Hayes, 1997; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In a deductive thematic analysis, also called directed content analysis, researchers utilize existing theory and concepts to identify a pre-determined coding schema. For the purposes of evaluation, pre-determined codes are developed utilizing evaluation questions or goals, topical areas identified in instrumentation, the program logic or theory of change identified by program personnel, and any theory or theoretical framework developed as part of evaluation planning. While deductive thematic coding takes primary precedence during data analysis, coders are encouraged to identify themes within the data that fall outside coding schema by utilizing a phronetic iterative analysis (PIA) approach which works back and forth between emergent qualitative themes and the deductive coding structure that guided the coding process (Tracy, 2020).

To guide this analysis, evaluators examined existing data sources to assess the topics and themes being discussed by relevant stakeholders. Using this existing data, evaluators selected multiple thematic areas to focus on when developing the focus group protocols. These themes included culturally responsive instruction, addressing socioeconomic disparities, teacher turnover and burnout, data-drive instruction, working with families, assessments, and working with online instruction. These themes were then utilized as codes during the coding process to deductively segment the data. Data were then reviewed using Tracy's PIA approach to develop common themes across stakeholder groups.

For presentation, direct quotes have been abridged for clarity. In addition, quotes have been edited to remove non-essential phrases (e.g., "um," "like," "you know") that reduce clarity.

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