



UTEP PREP



Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities for Educators in the Region

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Funded by all or in part of, the Department of Labor/ETA WIOA Formula Grants and Wagner-Peyser; the Department of Health and Human Services TANF and Child Care Development Fund; and the Food and Nutrition Service SNAP Employment & Training.

Impetus

In 2018, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) introduced an alternative funding source via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to be utilized differently and with more flexibility than traditional WIOA formula funds. Through this source, “WIOA Alternative Funding”, WSB was able to broaden the eligibility for clients as anyone who resides within the state of Texas. This broad definition allowed WSB to develop several innovative initiatives aimed at individuals who need workforce support but typically do not qualify under traditional regulations.

About the Program

Around the same time that the alternative funding was introduced, The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), El Paso Community Foundation (EPCF), and the Council on Regional Economic Expansion and Educational Development (CREEED) approached WSB with an invitation to partner in a year-long pilot program immersing student-teachers to work alongside a recruited and trained mentor teacher and receive onsite coaching/mentoring by a full-time UTEP clinical faculty member. The initiative also required support and participation from the regional school districts. Fortunately, several school districts seized the opportunity and took advantage of the availability of UTEP resident students as teacher’s aides. Socorro ISD committed to placing the residents in mentorship assignments within schools in the Socorro school district.

WSB committed funds towards this initiative because “educators” have been listed on our official Target Occupation List. In fact, WSB had conducted a comprehensive labor market analysis that showed that educators are in high-demand and that the Borderplex region is among the best paying regions across the state. This data further served WSB in helping the participants seek employment within the Borderplex/Region 19 area.

Thereafter, a cohort of 20 UTEP students participated as residents in the US PREP pilot program. Residents engaged in intensive hands-on learning over the school year alongside a trained mentor teacher. Residents were coached and mentored by a full-time UTEP faculty member/Site Coordinator who were based at the partner school. Residents also had the opportunity to apply and practice key pedagogical principles and concepts in an immersive setting as they developed their teaching craft. This pilot program was designed with the goal of positively impacting both teacher retention and student achievement from the moment Miner teachers enter the classroom.

Region 19 Education Service Center has helped program graduates receive priority employment within a Region 19 school upon program completion and graduation with a degree in Education. Socorro and El Paso ISDs also committed to giving priority to US Prep graduates for teaching jobs when they complete the program.

Funding Sources

In addition to the \$150,000 provided by WSB funds, CREED and El Paso Community Foundation each contributed \$50,000. The total program budget was \$250,000. The UTEP students received a stipend which ~~acted~~ as a source of income while they were enrolled in this full-time residency program. WSB was the employer of record and issued stipends based on a constituent hourly rate for all participants and dependent on the number of hours worked per week. WSB also captured the roles and responsibilities, captured ~~d~~ funding commitments, outlined standard operating procedures for stipend payment, and anticipated outcomes from each party through a formal Partnership Agreement.

Program Challenges

Throughout the first cohort of students for this program, the COVID-19 pandemic created its own set of challenges. Originally, they were doing in-class training. However, the students needed to adapt to online training programs. The adjustment was ultimately successful after a transition period. UTEP also provided additional training during this time.

Outcomes and Successes

Without the flexibility of the “statewide” eligibility, this program would not have been as successful. We would have had to rely on traditional eligibility requirements which would have delayed the enrollment of UTEP students into the pilot program. However, thanks to the change in eligibility requirements, we were able to assist our target population and received the following positive testimonials from teachers in the program:

Reflections by Teacher Candidates in Miner Teacher Residency (First Cohort) 2019-2020

- “I honestly don’t know how I would have been able to complete the year-long residency, let alone one semester of student teaching, without the financial support provided from our funders. The stipend from the residency allowed me to finish my last five classes on my degree plan while being able to give my all to my students at Mesita while also helping to support my family. Prior to the residency, I was applying everywhere for nighttime positions. Having a late-night job would have been a huge distraction from my school work and the amount of time that I put into the classroom. With the financial assistance we received, I was able to get a good night’s rest, go to work as early as 7:00 am to grade and work on projects for my students, stay as late as 4:30-5:00 some afternoons, and work on lessons and schoolwork peacefully in the evenings.” (Resident, Mesita Elementary)
- “This allowed me to dedicate and devote all of my time to student teaching, without having to worry about finding work to fit my schedules. It supported me financially which allowed me to focus on my student teaching experience 100%.” (Resident, Purple Heart Elementary)

- “It was a huge burden off my back to not have to worry about money while I was in this intensive residency. I was able to focus on becoming a great teacher for my students.”
(Resident, Purple Heart Elementary)

Solutions for the Future

UTEP Prep was the first pilot program of its kind for the region. Due to its success, WSB applied for additional funding in the summer of 2019 and was awarded a TWC Texas Industry Partnership Grant of \$100,000 from TWC and \$100,000 from El Paso Community Foundation and CREEED to repeat this program. WSB has since applied the lessons learned from the pilot to continue providing training opportunities for a second cohort of educators in the region. Other Independent School Districts have indicated interest in identifying ways to replicate the program in the future.

About Workforce Solutions Borderplex

Workforce Solutions Borderplex (WSB) is the public workforce system in the six-county Borderplex region that assists employers in finding quality employees, and training individuals with the skills necessary to thrive in the workplace. We administer a broad range of programs and services to effectively address local workforce issues. Workforce Solutions also establishes partnerships with various stakeholders within the region to improve education, employment, and economic development. Our organization aims to provide skilled workers for employers by advancing education, employment, entrepreneurship, and economic development opportunities in support of global competitiveness and regional prosperity. Ultimately, we are interested in empowering the most dynamic workforce to achieve global competitiveness and regional prosperity.