A philanthropic partnership with the California State University system of schools and colleges of education spanned several years, involved multiple supports, and yielded information that may serve other funders pursuing better outcomes for K-12 students through improved teacher preparation.

OVERVIEW

Through the New Generation of Educators Initiative, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation invested more than $20 million across six years, 2014 to 2019, to support high-quality preparation for new teachers in California. This preparation included a focus on instruction aligned to the state’s new academic standards for math and science.

The Foundation directed its investment to the California State University (CSU). The CSU system comprises 23 campuses that collectively prepare more than 50 percent of the state’s teacher workforce for K–12 education – and about 10 percent of the nation’s teachers.

The overarching goal was to demonstrate improved practices that prepare new teachers for success on their first day in the classroom, to scale and sustain these improvements across the CSU system, and to inform and influence the approaches used by other teacher preparation program providers as well as funders and policymakers supporting their efforts.

The strategy focused on strengthening rigorous teacher preparation that is relevant to the unique needs and contexts of local public school districts. It therefore featured support for partnerships between CSU colleges and schools of education and school districts in their respective geographies. The majority of grant dollars were allocated to colleges or schools of education on CSU campuses; these lead grantees were in turn required to engage school districts in collaborative improvement efforts and to provide funds to districts to support these efforts.

Primary components of the strategy included:

- Developing a set of five “key transformation elements” to guide improved teacher preparation practices by partner CSU campuses and school districts.
- Funding staff on campuses and in districts, typically through a .5 FTE position in each institution, to ensure dedicated attention to activating, supporting, and coordinating improvement efforts.
- Providing robust technical assistance through experts in clinical preparation for teachers, teaching practices that disrupt patterns of inequity in public education, and improvement science.
- Conducting evaluation and facilitating learning throughout the initiative, including supports for individual campuses and campus/district partnerships – as well as collective learning through initiative-wide convenings.

This brief provides further information on the initiative, including progress made, lessons learned, and suggestions for funders seeking to improve educational outcomes for all students through quality teacher preparation.
Backdrop: Why was teacher preparation a Foundation priority?

Drawing on the professional and personal interests of founder S. D. Bechtel, Jr., the Foundation has a long history of supporting engineering education and has been a champion of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) instruction in the new century.

As the Foundation moved through its concluding years – the board decided in 2009 to spend down all assets, ultimately setting 2020 as the last year of operations – it committed to significant, multi-year investments to advance high-quality models of teaching and learning in California’s K–8 classrooms based on the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics (CCSS-M) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). These academic standards emphasize critical thinking and require new problem-solving approaches to teaching. These standards as well as updated teacher credentialing requirements presented an opportunity – and need – to ensure that both current and future educators are prepared to provide students with the knowledge and skills required for success.

Foundation leaders have long valued adult practice in the classroom as essential to students developing the skills they need to participate fully in the 21st century economy and civic life in their communities. Research consistently cites teachers as the single most important contributor to student achievement.

The New Generation of Educators Initiative was predicated on the belief that quality instruction is more vital than ever in California. Today’s teachers must be experts in helping all students learn based on demanding academic standards. Teachers also must be effective conduits for social-emotional learning, and champions for equity and inclusion. It’s a big job, and every teacher needs the abilities – and confidence – to enter the classroom ready to succeed.

When teachers have quality preparation they are able, on day one, to help students stay on track with educational progress. Quality preparation increases the likelihood that teachers will remain in their chosen profession, helping break the cycle of teacher shortages that cause administrators to recruit educators who have not yet received their preliminary teacher credential – a problem that research shows is especially acute in high-need schools.

Students, communities, and teachers all benefit when the best possible training takes place prior to a new educator’s first days and years as a classroom leader, and the Foundation chose to pursue impact in this arena.
THE NEW GENERATION OF EDUCATORS INITIATIVE

The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation often explored developing major initiatives by making initial grants to potential partners. This was the case with teacher preparation: The New Generation of Educators Initiative (NGEI) grew out of a fruitful experience with the CSU Chancellor’s Office and its Department of Educator Preparation and Public School Programs. Information and relationships developed through this initial grant experience shaped the Foundation strategy for NGEI. The initiative launched with an open RFP to all 23 CSU campuses; many campuses submitted proposals and the Foundation selected 11 to receive multi-year grants.

Funds were awarded to support each campus to make changes that could transform its teacher preparation practices in partnership with one or more local public school districts. Campuses were required to share grant funds with at least one district partner in NGEI.

The CSU Chancellor’s Office played a vital, ongoing role in this initiative, providing perspective and thought partnership in the evolution of the work, and acting as a system-wide connector and communicator of lessons, enhancements, and opportunities emanating from the initiative.

Key transformation elements

A CSU faculty group was engaged through initial grant funding to offer recommendations on critical elements that would significantly advance teacher preparation practices. The Chancellor’s Office, Foundation staff, and technical assistance providers worked with these recommendations to identify a set of five key transformation elements that became focal points for all initiative activities. These “KTEs” were put forward in the NGEI Request for Proposals.

- **Forming deep partnerships** between campuses and districts that begin with a shared vision of effective K–12 instruction and take shape through a cohesive learning experience for candidates that spans pre-service through induction.

- **Collaboratively defining prioritized skills** – together, campuses and districts identify the abilities that are most vital to teacher preparation based on the needs of local students and instruction aligned with Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards.

- **Preparing through practice in school sites**, ensuring that candidates have high-quality opportunities to enact prioritized skills via hands-on instruction in the classroom supported by thoroughly prepared teacher mentors.

- **Creating a culture of feedback** for teacher candidates that is data-driven, specific, and actionable, featuring ongoing, coordinated inputs from CSU faculty, supervisors, and teacher mentors.

- **Using data to measure progress** toward proficiency as well as gaps in prioritized skills; employing the principles and methods of improvement science to continuously elevate the quality of educator preparation programs.
Technical assistance and collective learning

From the outset, the initiative featured technical assistance as well as learning supports to help partners transform their approach to teacher preparation. Initial providers and services featured:

- The National Center for Teacher Residencies to advise on high-quality clinical preparation and assist grantees in assessing and improving their approaches, including helping align campus instruction and supervision of candidates with the clinical experience and mentoring of candidates in district classrooms.

- SRI International and WestEd to provide site-based formative evaluation as well as initiative-level evaluation. This research team also informed strategy evolution throughout the initiative by investigating teacher preparation pipelines, changes to the nature of credentialing programs, effectiveness of teachers, and campus systems for supporting ongoing improvement.

- ConsultEd Strategists to support cohort-wide knowledge sharing and learning, including convenings for all campus and district partners along with the CSU Chancellor’s Office.

Engagement with evaluators and participation in convenings were stated as requirements in the RFP document. Participation with the National Center for Teacher Residencies was optional.

As the initiative evolved and the Foundation learned more about the needs and interests of grantees, additional experts were brought into the mix. These optional technical assistance offerings were presented as ways for grantees to elevate the bar with their teacher preparation practices. Virtually all grantees chose to participate in these offerings, which featured:

- TeachingWorks at the University of Michigan supporting campuses with strengthening their methods classes in math, emphasizing a set of high-leverage teaching practices, and working to disrupt patterns of inequity in K–12 education. The Foundation funded a process through which individual faculty self-nominated to become TeachingWorks Fellows and then participated in an intensive process to redesign one of their methods courses.

- Additional specialists from WestEd who led capacity building with campuses around improvement science. The Foundation funded Continuous Improvement Fellowships that provided ongoing training and support for individuals leading improvement projects on participating campuses. The Foundation also provided mini-grants, supported by WestEd, enabling CSU campuses not receiving multi-year initiative funding to gain knowledge and experience with improvement practices.

The Foundation added convenings based on a high level of grantee interest in connecting with peers in the initiative. One convening per year was stated in the RFP as an expectation for grantees; two convenings per year became the norm as the initiative unfolded. All grantees chose to participate in this optional second convening each year.

In the initiative’s later years, deans of CSU schools or colleges of education on campuses not receiving multi-year initiative funding were also invited to participate in convenings; virtually all joined these gatherings, providing their institutions with access to knowledge and practices developed by initiative partners.
System supports

A complementary set of grants was awarded by the Foundation to the Educator Quality Center (EdQ Center), a specialized unit within the Chancellor’s Office Department of Educator Preparation and Public School Programs. The EdQ Center is a central resource in CSU systemwide efforts to build a culture of data use and improvement in teacher preparation. The EdQ Center operates a set of customizable dashboards for all campus schools or colleges of education; conducts surveys with candidates completing their studies on CSU campuses, with alumni after they gain experience teaching in K-12 classrooms, and with employers of first-year CSU teachers; and is leading a process through which many or all campuses could standardize on a common data collection system. Foundation investments were aimed at building the capacity of the EdQ Center to do this work, including becoming an expert on data collection and usage as well as a resource for campuses applying the principles of improvement science.

INITIATIVE PARTICIPANTS

The following institutions received multi-year funding through the New Generation of Educators Initiative. Grants were awarded to CSU campuses as the program leads; each partnered with one or more K–12 public school district.

- CSU Bakersfield with Bakersfield City School District
- CSU Channel Islands with University Preparation Charter School and Ocean View School District
- CSU Chico with Chico Unified School District
- CSU Dominguez Hills with LAUSD Local District South
- CSU Fresno with Fresno Unified School District, Sanger Unified School District, and Central Unified School District
- CSU Long Beach with Long Beach Unified School District
- CSU Monterey Bay with Monterey Peninsula Unified School District
- CSU Sacramento with Sacramento City Unified School District
- CSU Poly San Luis Obispo with Lucia Mar Unified School District
- CSU Stanislaus with Ceres Unified School District and Turlock Unified School District

Each partnership is focused on goals and strategies that fit its local contexts. For example, partners worked to enrich or expand teacher residency programs, create pathways for candidates to gain relevant experience and ultimately join the faculty in schools facing teacher shortages, create curricula that integrate STEM into K–8 learning and teacher preparation, and redesign instruction of methods courses to improve candidate development of instructional practices – including practices that advance equity in education.
What has the Foundation learned through the initiative process? What are key takeaways for other funders to consider?

In formulating the initiative, the Foundation wrestled with the extent to which it should prescribe, rather than ask partners to define, program components. Several Foundation-required items ultimately proved important to grantee progress, especially:

- **Selecting and using a rubric** for assessing candidate instructional skills and behaviors and providing feedback to teacher candidates. Partners could choose between researching and adopting an existing rubric or creating a custom tool. In each partnership, the rubric became a focal point of collaboration that was instrumental to their efforts to improve teacher preparation. Campuses used the rubric to train faculty and teacher candidate supervisors in providing feedback; districts did the same with mentor teachers and administrators who observe candidates in classroom settings. Partners built shared data platforms around their respective rubrics. Candidates understood the rubric used in their locale and received feedback based on its components.
  - It is unlikely that all partners would have chosen to prioritize a common rubric had it not been a requirement of the Foundation’s RFP. As the initiative neared conclusion, virtually all reported that their rubric has been a vital element of their teacher preparation improvement efforts and plan to continue use after funding concludes.
  - In hindsight, the Foundation might have considered beginning with a small set of tested rubrics and asking grantees to select from these extant resources, as some grantees spent considerable time building custom rubrics that were not very different from products already available to them. In addition, these extant products typically were supported by trainings or other technical assistance that could have simplified for grantees the task of adopting a new rubric.

- **Dedicating staff to the partnership**; the initiative provided funds for a required half-time coordinator on campus and a half-time coordinator at each school district. These positions proved effective in leading and supporting collaboration across institutions.

- **Appointing a continuous improvement lead person on each campus** to facilitate changes in practice, including use of data to identify and address opportunities to elevate quality teacher preparation practices.

- **Engaging with technical assistance providers** who used their expertise, experience, and outside perspective to inform, inspire, and guide partners in advancing their practices.

- **Participating in peer-learning, primarily through convenings** in which each partnership team had opportunity to showcase their progress, gain knowledge and encouragement from others, and address challenges common across the initiative. In addition, the Foundation-funded technical assistance team provided an online repository of tools and resources used by participating partners and made these items available to others in the initiative.
Productive approaches

Foundation program staff offer these additional reflections as the initiative reaches its end point:

- **Continuity of funding through multi-year grants** was important, as transforming practices in large institutions takes time, involves culture change, and requires space for experiments and learning. Year one of the grants to campuses was especially difficult – most grantees underspent their budgets as they underestimated the scope of initiative ramp-up called for in their respective contexts. Campus teams gained deeper appreciation for the effort and time required to make significant, lasting change in teacher preparation partnerships and practices – including insight into what it takes to conduct systemic improvement informed by data. Technical assistance providers struggled to gain trust and traction with grantees, and to synchronize their collective efforts in ways that made sense to grantees and allowed each provider to contribute to grantee progress.

- **Providing dollars to ensure sufficient staff time** devoted to initiative work was also important. The Foundation and technical assistance providers saw benefits that arose from enabling each institution and partnership to have people with clearly defined responsibilities and enough time to plan and lead change. Focusing energy and having space to reflect on current practices was inherently valuable. For example, these grants caused campus teacher preparation faculty to spend substantial time with district leaders; this involvement yielded dividends as faculty members helped formulate and champion changes in teacher preparation practice.

- **Well-timed small investments can make a big difference.** As opportunities surfaced to accelerate or amplify grantee progress, the Foundation responded with expanded supports. For example, adding a second convening each year fueled added momentum, learning, and accountability across the grantee cohort. The Foundation also introduced improvement mini-grants in the fourth year of the initiative, offering any CSU campus $15,000 to focus on understanding a single problem with support from WestEd technical assistance providers. These grants sparked deeper commitment to continuous improvement and were perceived as highly valuable by grantees.
In hindsight: If we could start over…

Based on knowledge gained through implementation of the initiative, Foundation program staff point to several ingredients that were missing or under-emphasized in the initiative design and Request for Proposals. Looking back, the Foundation would have strengthened the RFP and initiative design with:

- A stated emphasis on candidate diversity, given the mutual interest of the Foundation and the CSU to ensure that all students – including low-income students, students of color, English learners, and/or students with disabilities – develop the skills they need to participate fully in the 21st century economy and community life. While most CSU campuses selected district partners that were considered high need based on student population characteristics stated above, and while these campuses drew teacher candidates from local communities that included a high number of students of color and low-income students, a more pronounced intent to ensure and support a diverse teacher candidate pool could have strengthened initiative implementation from the outset.

- An explicit requirement for active grant involvement by the dean of the school or college of education. This office is pivotal to setting a tone for improvement and leading change, including approving shifts in structures, practices, and resource allocation. Many deans were substantively involved from the beginning of the grant; in other cases, their involvement happened after teams were well into the process of formulating plans and grappling with the size of the task ahead. While all deans embraced information and supported approaches emanating from the initiative, early and consistent involvement of these leaders could have helped facilitate alignment and progress among partner teams.

- An elevation of the residency model as central to teacher preparation. Initiative activity and learning in many sites affirmed that clinical preparation merits focus as a signature element in teacher preparation. Foundation staff came to view high-quality residencies as the gold standard in this category. In the course of the initiative, the Foundation increasingly encouraged and supported effective residency approaches, finding that there is great value in candidates:
  - Being mentored by a carefully selected and trained teacher who models best practice skills and pedagogies
  - Participating in the full arc of an academic year, preparing for the rhythms and activities of the school calendar
  - Being supported by educators on their campus as well as in the school district who collaborate to make the candidate experience coherent

Quality clinical residencies were increasingly seen as an effective means of teacher preparation. Residencies may be a central component in efforts to affect systemic change.
If the initiative were being redesigned today, Foundation staff would focus more resources on engaging campus teacher preparation faculty and teacher candidate supervisors, as well as district administrators and mentor teachers, to advance application of the residency model in their contexts. An example of a productive residency generated through this initiative – the Kern Urban Teacher Residency involving CSU Bakersfield and Bakersfield City School District – is documented via this video and case study.

- Supports for mentor teachers and their vital work with candidates. The initiative yielded new insights for Foundation staff regarding the importance of mentor teachers. These professionals bring passion, experience, and perspective to their relationships with teacher candidates. They welcome instruction and support to equip them to effectively coach and help candidates develop. Those involved with NGEI expressed appreciation for opportunities to learn about observational techniques, co-teaching practices, and feedback approaches; these experiences helped them be more confident, consistent, and constructive in their work with candidates.

To do their job well, mentors spend significant time with their candidates. The Foundation would advocate for ensuring that mentor teachers receive compensation. A stipend or other form of payment is an important means for valuing the importance of this work and recognizing the contributions of the mentor.

- Recognition of the value of financial assistance for residents. The Foundation would also direct additional resources to ensure financial support for residents, making it possible for candidates to benefit from a full year of co-teaching and coaching without adding to the debt most incur in college, and minimizing the need for a second job that competes with or detracts from the residency experience and opportunity to grow as a professional teacher.

Foundation staff came to understand that the residency model, particularly if supported by a stipend, can be an especially effective means to provide high-quality clinical experiences for candidates from low-income communities and communities of color who seek to contribute to their home regions by teaching in high-need schools. This awareness, combined with learning from programs such as Raise Your Hand Texas, led the Foundation to collaborate with the Chancellor’s Office, in 2019, to provide 300 scholarships of $10,000 each supporting residency-year preparation for candidates with financial need who intend to teach for at least two years in a high-need school.
Additional suggestions for teacher preparation funders

The Foundation’s experience in implementing the New Generation of Educators Initiative yielded additional lessons that may benefit other funders doing related programming:

- **Work with the realities and incentives inherent to institutions of higher education.** The Foundation gained appreciation for the factors that shape the work of campus faculty, including the time devoted to publishing in addition to instruction, and the relatively limited opportunities for off-campus learning. More investment in helping each campus team identify and align initiative activities with current incentives could have supported greater impact.

  This includes understanding and addressing particular challenges unique to each context. For example, some campuses in rural regions produce teachers for a large number of relatively small school districts; this reality carries implications for configuring and resourcing effective teacher preparation partnerships.

  Through this initiative experience, Foundation program staff learned that:

  - There’s a hunger for learning among faculty and administrators in teacher preparation programs. Educators on CSU campuses wanted to benefit from the experiences and lessons gained by other grantees, and to connect with colleagues on campuses throughout the CSU system.

  - Similarly, there is a desire for capacity building; Foundation investments in technical assistance, fellowships, and special learning opportunities were put to good use by campus and district partners.

  - Data is essential to progress, and use of data can be embraced by all – including campuses and individuals that lack deep experience or structures supporting data collection and use. The initiative’s emphasis on data to fuel improved performance for preparation programs and their candidates represented significant change for some participants. Over time, all gained confidence with the use of data as an essential and ongoing component in their program design and delivery, and took strides to build protocols for ongoing data collection and usage.

- **Invest in building public school district capacity to improve, scale, and sustain practice.** Public school districts, especially those classified as high need, typically lack resources and operate with minimal infrastructure – they lack capacity to conduct systemic change efforts. Initiative research showed that, between 2014 and 2016, the number of teachers hired with an Intern Credential, a Provisional Intern Permit, or a Short-Term Staffing Permit increased dramatically in some districts; these districts lacked the finances, staff, and structures to address this need. Today, the Foundation would focus resources on building out the residency model for teacher preparation in these districts, including using the model as the basis for engaging mentor teachers, administrators, and all staff in elevating teacher preparation, induction, and supports – including building a culture of data use that supports these efforts.

  The initiative had a positive effect on the data practices of campus and district teams; many report meaningful progress in their ability to identify and address improvement opportunities.
**Incorporate communications early in the life of the initiative.** The Foundation made active use of communications in the second half of the initiative to facilitate knowledge sharing within and beyond the network of grantees, creating and disseminating case studies and videos, and adding content and products to the CSU website (visit [calstate.edu/ngei](http://calstate.edu/ngei)). A more robust communications effort sooner in the initiative – including an earlier emphasis on helping technical assistance providers as well as grantees think about communications opportunities associated with their work – would have brought additional benefit.

**What else would the Foundation do if it were to continue in this work?**

The reality of the Foundation’s conclusion in 2020 precludes longer-term investments. If the Foundation were perpetual, it would consider funding evaluation that examines the extent to which changes in teacher preparation practices affect student outcomes including academic achievement in K–12 classrooms, as well as teacher retention.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation website, New Generation of Educators Initiative, includes evaluation reports:

The California State University Website, New Generation of Educators:
calstate.edu/ngei

**CSU CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE**

Marquita Grenot-Scheyer, Ph.D., Assistant Vice Chancellor, Educator Preparation and Public School Programs
mgrenot-scheyer@calstate.edu

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