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Raising the Bar for Teacher Preparation

Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working Across the State



Louisiana has recently adopted ambitious reforms to its teacher preparation system as part of a broader set of initiatives to improve education outcomes for children of all ages (Kaufman et al., 2018). These comprehensive reforms—which will require considerable collaboration among the Louisiana Department of Education, teacher preparation providers, and school systems—include the adoption of a yearlong residency requirement, competency-based curricula, the establishment of partnerships between teacher preparation programs and school systems,¹ and the development of program quality indicators to facilitate communication and transparency.

The state’s efforts to raise the quality of education that students receive will be successful only to the extent that teachers have the capacity to enact the reforms. One of the primary factors that is likely to influence how teachers adapt their instruction in the face of new policies is the training that they receive before entering the classroom as full-time teachers. As we discuss in more detail below,

¹ Throughout this report, we use the term *school system* to be inclusive of school districts and charter school systems in Louisiana.

the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) is adopting policies to improve the rigor and relevance of the training that preservice teachers receive, particularly through efforts to promote deeper knowledge and provide practical experiences for teacher candidates.

These major teacher preparation policy shifts happening in Louisiana are occurring in the context of nationwide reexamination of traditional approaches to teacher preparation and a growing understanding of the need to ensure that teachers develop deep content knowledge and knowledge for teaching their particular disciplines (i.e., pedagogical content knowledge). A 2010 National Research Council report that summarized evidence regarding high-quality teacher preparation called for training that develops candidates' content knowledge and their pedagogical content knowledge in the relevant disciplines (National Research Council, 2010). That same report, along with others from organizations such as the National Council on Teacher Quality, also pointed out the value of clinical experiences that give candidates opportunities to hone their skills and expertise in contexts similar to ones they will enter

after they complete their training (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2017).

These clinical experiences are often offered through a residency program that pairs a teacher-in-training with a mentor teacher in a classroom setting. Research suggests several factors that contribute to a high-quality residency experience, including robust partnerships between preparation programs and school systems, expert mentors, and financial support for candidates (Guha, Hyler, and Darling-Hammond, 2017). In addition to helping candidates gain practical experience, residencies can serve as a mechanism to broaden teacher candidate pools (Silva et al., 2014), and there is some evidence that the achievement growth of students whose teachers completed residencies is slightly higher than that of other students, though this research base is currently limited (Papay et al., 2012).

Another fairly recent development in teacher preparation and professional development involves competency-based courses and programs. This approach aims to replace seat time in courses with an approach that defines the competencies that prospective teachers need to develop and provides multiple

KEY FINDINGS

- Believe and Prepare, Louisiana's pilot grant program, established partnerships that built on existing structures and relationships. Those involved in these partnerships emphasized the vital role of the partnerships in building the foundation for greater collaboration aligned with the state's ambitious vision for teacher preparation.
- Teacher preparation providers identified some refinements in their mentor training in response to state policies, although providers also identified the scarcity of strong mentors for resident teachers as a key challenge.
- Although the state's new yearlong residency requirements will involve considerable shifts to existing programs, both program providers and school system staff voiced optimism about and support for these requirements and their potential impact on teacher candidate quality.
- Program providers described numerous examples of ways that they have revised their programs to address state requirements, but provider approaches to these requirements appeared to vary substantially and have created complex challenges for program providers.
- Program providers commented on the considerable challenges they faced in shifting to a competency-based model, particularly among those who had emphasized traditional, credit-driven approaches.
- The Louisiana Department of Education is developing a teacher preparation quality rating system that could increase transparency, but the large reforms represented by this new system could raise technical and political challenges.

The “Raising the Bar” Series

This report is part of a four-part series on how Louisiana policy actions might be connected with teaching and learning from birth through graduation across the state. The other reports that are part of this series and are being published along with this report are

- *Raising the Bar for Early Childhood Education: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working for Early Childhood Providers and Community Networks* (Jill S. Cannon, Sophie Meyers, and Julia H. Kaufman, 2019; available at www.rand.org/t/RR2303z1)
- *Raising the Bar for K–12 Academics: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working for Schools, Teachers, and Students* (Julia H. Kaufman, Elizabeth D. Steiner, and Matthew D. Baird, 2019; available at www.rand.org/t/RR2303z2)
- *Raising the Bar for Graduation Pathways to College and Work: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Affecting College and Career Readiness* (Shelly Culbertson, Matthew D. Baird, Sophie Meyers, and Julia H. Kaufman, 2019; available at www.rand.org/t/RR2303z4).

opportunities for teacher learning and assessment of those competencies, along with some form of credit (e.g., “badges” or microcredentials) once a competency is mastered (Cator, Schneider, and Vander Ark, 2014). For example, the School District of South Milwaukee—in partnership with BloomBoard—has used microcredentials to award credits toward completion of a certification program based on demonstrated competencies (BloomBoard, undated). Tennessee has also begun piloting a microcredentialing system for teacher preparation (Tennessee Department of Education, undated). In line with these examples, Louisiana intends for the combination of a residency experience and competency-based coursework to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge and skills that they will need to be successful in the classroom.

Louisiana’s teacher preparation reforms are aligned with the guidance developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) through its Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP), a multistate collaborative in which Louisiana participated (CCSSO, 2017). In particular, other NTEP state partners, such as Connecticut and Georgia, have been working to improve the quality and intensity of clinical experience that candidates receive. Louisiana’s reforms are also consistent with those of the many states that are adopting quality indicators and dashboards to document the

performance of teacher preparation programs, as we discuss below.

Background and Methods

In 2018, RAND published the report *Raising the Bar: Louisiana’s Strategies for Improving Student Outcomes* (Kaufman et al., 2018), which provides an overview of recent Louisiana state policies intended to improve student outcomes in the areas of early childhood education, K–12 academics, teacher preparation, and graduation pathways. The current report, which is part of a four-part series, focuses on Louisiana’s strategies for K–12 teacher preparation and addresses the following research question: How have teacher preparation providers and other stakeholders responded to Louisiana’s key actions to support teacher preparation? We specifically examine this question in light of the key state actions explored in Kaufman et al. (2018), and we have slightly revised our descriptions of those state actions in light of additional information gathered in the course of our investigation.

Although it is too early to assess how Louisiana’s policies and efforts are leading to change in student outcomes, this report aims to provide insights to inform the work of LDOE and other state education agencies whose leaders are exploring changes to their teacher preparation policies, as well as teacher

preparation program providers and school systems that are considering changing their approaches. Our examination of the early phases of implementation allowed us to discover early signals of how implementation and uptake are progressing, which can provide valuable lessons for Louisiana and other states considering similarly large-scale reforms to their teacher preparation systems. In the next section, we describe the key policy changes that LDOE has enacted to improve the quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation throughout the state.

Louisiana's Actions to Support and Improve K–12 Teacher Preparation

Table 1 summarizes the three key actions that Louisiana has undertaken to improve teacher preparation across the state. In addition to these major reform efforts, Louisiana has engaged in targeted actions to improve early childhood education, K–12 academics, and students' postgraduate training and education opportunities; those actions are summarized in the three other reports in this series. Each of the three key actions within teacher preparation aligns to one or more specific policy levers (see Table 1):

1. **Mandates:** Rules or requirements for individuals or organizations.
2. **Resources:** Tools or information aligned with goals and intended to support individuals or organizations in meeting those goals.
3. **Incentives:** Inducements intended to encourage individuals or organizations to follow mandates and utilize resources.
4. **Communication/planning processes:** Communication networks, messages, technical assistance, and collaborative structures to inform stakeholders and gather inputs from them.

These policy actions mainly occurred starting in 2014, when the state started gathering information about stakeholders' perceptions of teacher

preparation, although mandates for teacher preparation providers described in Action 3 just began going into effect in 2018. For more information on these actions and the timeline for them, see Kaufman et al. (2018), which describes these actions in detail.

These three actions worked sequentially: The information-gathering mechanisms and pilot funds and supports discussed in Actions 1 and 2 formed a foundation for full, mandated implementation of these requirements that followed in Action 3. Specifically, and as part of Action 1, school systems and teacher preparation programs in the state applied for grant funds during the Believe and Prepare pilot period. These funds supported their work to engage in new and expanded school system–provider partnerships, shift to yearlong residency programs, and use competency-based approaches to evaluate candidates' readiness for the classroom. When Believe and Prepare launched in 2014, seven school systems and providers participated the pilot program. By 2017, the program had grown to more than 30 school systems and 20 preparation providers, comprising a significant portion of the 70 school systems and 49 approved preparation providers across the state (LDOE, undated-a, undated-b, undated-g). The Believe and Prepare program may have supported gradual shifts in teacher preparation.

As teacher preparation programs transition from the Believe and Prepare pilot period (2014–2017) to full implementation in 2018 and beyond, LDOE has dedicated transitional funds to support programs as they enact these new policies. These transitional funds have been used for program administration and coordination, residency stipends, and mentoring stipends since 2016 and will be available through 2019, and programs can also apply for grants to cover additional costs, such as transition coordination costs, mentor training costs, and provider support activities, such as partnership development. Finally, Louisiana's Teacher Incentive Fund grant money will be allocated to support rural schools as they transition to the new teacher preparation policies until 2021 (LDOE, undated-e).

TABLE 1
State Actions Related to Teacher Preparation

State Action	Policy Lever
<p>1. Incentivize early adoption of the state’s vision for high-quality teacher preparation through information gathering and communication activities and voluntary school system-teacher preparation partnership funding. In 2014, LDOE began to gather information through a survey about where to focus its quality improvement efforts in teacher preparation. From 2014 to 2017, the state ran a pilot grant program called Believe and Prepare, through which teacher preparation providers and school systems applied for grants to collaborate around enacting the new program components discussed below in Action 2 and Action 3. In 2018 and beyond, the state will continue to support programs’ collaborative work through Believe and Prepare transition funds and reallocated Every Student Succeeds Act, Teacher Incentive Fund, and other federal funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives • Communication/ planning processes
<p>2. Provide consistent expectations and training for new teacher mentors. The state intends to build a cadre of high-quality mentor teachers through statewide mentor training, which began in 2017. This policy requires that mentors earn the mentoring microcredential by completing state-approved training and passing a licensure assessment. The training, which is designed and delivered in partnership with the Dana Center (University of Texas at Austin) and Learning Forward, aims to help mentors build strong relationships with their teacher resident mentees, support residents in developing teacher preparation competencies, provide resources and coaching to residents, track and facilitate resident progress, and support other teachers in their schools (LDOE, undated-c). We regard the training as a resource, in that it provides information to support LDOE goals. That said, it can also be regarded as a communication mechanism because it supports a consistent message about high-quality teaching across the state.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources • Communication/ planning processes
<p>3. Codify a vision for high-quality teacher preparation that includes clear requirements and accountability structures for teacher preparation programs. The state has defined key mandatory program components that teacher preparation providers must adopt in order to operate in Louisiana: (1) a yearlong teaching residency for teacher candidates under the guidance of a mentor teacher and (2) competency-based coursework that prepares candidates for the realities of the classroom. LDOE’s Believe and Prepare grant program, which provided \$4.89 million in grant funds to preparation programs and school systems as they piloted the new policy components from 2014 through 2017, paved the way for the introduction of these new requirements in 2018 (LDOE, undated-b). In addition, starting in 2019, LDOE will release annual public profiles of teacher preparation programs to provide programs with feedback, inform enrollment decisions, recognize program excellence, and support programs in need of improvement (LDOE, undated-e). Starting in 2023, the potential consequences of unsatisfactory performance will include a corrective action period, an at-risk designation, a requirement for improvement plans, limited enrollment, and program closure (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandates • Incentives

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

To address our research question, we collected several kinds of data, which are summarized in more detail in a technical appendix accompanying this report series (available at www.rand.org/t/RR2303z5). For each type of data, our technical appendix discusses the sample and data sources in detail, along with our analysis approach. Also in the technical appendix, we provide information on the questions we asked in interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys. Here, we provide a brief summary of the sample, data sources, and analysis relevant to findings discussed in this

report, and refer readers to the appendix for more detail.

Case study interview and focus group data. We conducted case study visits to four Louisiana school systems (which are not identified in this report in the interests of confidentiality) in spring 2018, where we conducted interviews and focus groups with 24 central office staff (including three school system central office staff who liaised with teacher preparation institutions), 17 school leaders, and 77 new and experienced teachers. The selected school systems varied on key dimensions—such as urbanicity, traditional district or charter, and student demographics—to represent a range of school contexts in Louisiana.

In addition, we asked school system–level staff to provide us with recommendations and contact information for the teacher preparation providers from whom they recruited new teachers. We received more than 20 recommendations, of which seven teacher preparation providers agreed to an interview for this study. These interviews, which took place in the late spring and summer of 2018, right before full implementation of that state’s new teacher preparation policies, included six representatives from five traditional, university-based programs and two representatives from alternative certification programs. We also interviewed LDOE officials for the project to triangulate and clarify findings from our case studies. We coded and analyzed these qualitative data to identify key themes that are discussed in this report (see the appendix for details).

Limitations

When considering the findings and implications presented in this report, readers should keep data limitations in mind. First, while our case study sites represent a variety of geographic and demographic characteristics, they are not representative of all the students, staff, schools, and teacher preparation programs in Louisiana. Therefore, case study data and findings should not be interpreted as indicative of what is happening across the state, but instead as providing illustrative examples of how stakeholders are responding. Second, our interviews with case study participants and teacher preparation consist of self-reports of stakeholders who voluntarily participated in our study; we cannot independently verify the veracity and accuracy of their responses, and we do not know the extent to which the views of these volunteer participants are similar to the views held by others in the state who did not volunteer.

Nonetheless, our analyses provide insights about how state policies are influencing decisions and practices in teacher preparation programs and school systems across the state, and they help us identify important considerations that can influence policy uptake and enactment.

In the next section, we summarize the results of our analyses of stakeholder responses to the state’s teacher preparation policies. The final section presents our conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

On-the-Ground Responses to State Actions

Louisiana’s teacher preparation policy changes have already begun to shape the preparation landscape in the state: Most of the preparation program leaders and school system central office staff with whom we spoke indicated that their piloting of the new mandates and support structures have influenced their practice in meaningful ways. In particular, many providers noted that the state’s provision of additional resources allowed them to explore and refine the collaboration structures and routines that facilitate teacher training. Even the three preparation providers we interviewed who noted that they had to make few changes to comply with the policies predicted that those policies would transform the broader teacher preparation system in Louisiana.

Through interviews, we also learned that the nature of existing teacher preparation programs and new teacher support varied widely from one institution to another. Interviewees indicated that while the policies aimed for system-wide alignment and coherence, approaches to implementation have varied. While most interviewees predicted that these new policies would result in improved quality of teacher preparation, many also expressed trepidation about coordination and sustainability. In this section, we explore how stakeholders—including teacher preparation providers, school system–level staff, and teachers—perceived and interpreted the state actions summarized earlier, as well as the extent to which these groups believed that the state actions have influenced their work to this point.

State Action 1: Incentivize early adoption of the state’s vision for high-quality teacher preparation through information gathering and communication activities and voluntary school system–teacher preparation partnership funding.

Approach and Key Findings

How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We asked teacher preparation providers and staff involved in teacher preparation in our case study school systems about their experiences with state information gathering and communications, their past and present partnership work, and how that relates to and interacts with their enactment of the new policies.

Key findings:

- The Believe and Prepare partnerships prompted providers and school systems to build on existing collaborative relationships and structures. Individuals involved in these partnerships emphasized the vital role of the partnerships in building the foundation for greater collaboration aligned with the state’s ambitious vision for teacher preparation.
- Stakeholders expressed concerns about the financial sustainability of these expanded partnerships.

I feel like the question should be like, are we doing the right thing for people? Then, we can talk about sustaining. . . I don’t know that we’ve nailed that anywhere in the state. I think right now, we’re eager to answer the question of how we make it better. . .

—university-based teacher preparation provider

To guide its efforts to improve the quality of teacher preparation statewide, LDOE started gathering information early in the implementation process to inform its work (Kaufman et al., 2018). In 2014, LDOE administered a survey to examine the relationship between teacher preparation and school systems’ needs. Novice teachers, preparation program faculty, and school and central office administrators responded to the survey, which an LDOE official referred to as a “call to action” that clarified its aims and intentions for policy design. LDOE officials reported drawing on the trends and themes

that emerged from the survey to guide the design process, particularly in terms of facilitating collaboration between school systems and preparation programs, creating mechanisms to train mentors and match them with teacher candidates, and bolstering alignment between practical experience and teacher training. LDOE then launched the Believe and Prepare pilot program shortly thereafter, which ended in 2017. In this section, we consider how these mechanisms—including the state’s communication strategies and pilot program—have supported early adoption of teacher preparation policies.

Believe and Prepare partnerships prompted providers and school systems to build on existing relationships and structures but enabled additional collaboration.

As a precursor to state requirements for teacher preparation providers, which we discuss under Action 3, LDOE incentivized deeper partnerships and collaborations between school systems and preparation providers through Believe and Prepare grant funds. In interviews, both preparation providers and school system staff discussed the vital and foundational nature of Believe and Prepare partnerships for supporting collaboration that would be necessary down the road for making new teacher preparation policies work. They specifically noted that Believe and Prepare required more extensive collaboration to support mentor matching and residency placement than did previous partnerships. For instance, Believe and Prepare grant funds supported the development of field placement coordinator or liaison positions in both universities and school systems. These staff took the lead on arranging placements for teacher candidates' residencies, pairing them with mentors, and handling other logistical concerns. One alternative certification provider talked about how collaborating with school systems to build in-house teacher training pathways allowed them to create greater alignment around teacher training expectations, which they argued would contribute to improving the quality of teacher training more generally. A university provider also talked about how the state facilitated partnership

Both preparation providers and school system staff discussed the vital and foundational nature of Believe and Prepare partnerships.

connections where there was a need for them, and how the grant process allowed the state to highlight potential connections among organizations whose leaders might want to collaborate. Together, these data suggested that the new teacher preparation policies in Louisiana required foundational revisions to partnership models to support these new policies.

The form, function, and depth of Believe and Prepare partnerships appeared to be highly variable even though they enriched and deepened specific aspects of teacher preparation. For example, one representative from an alternative certification provider reported that their organization initiated Believe and Prepare pilot partnerships with districts and charter management organizations to develop in-house residency and mentor teacher programs. Another preparation provider described how the opportunity to collaborate more deeply through Believe and Prepare pilots helped the program's university-school system partnerships become more about "co-construction" than collaboration, particularly in terms of utilizing the school system staff's expertise more extensively. An additional preparation provider noted that building on existing relationships with local school systems had been "vital," explaining, "If we didn't have close relationships with them, then I don't believe [our pilot partnerships] would have been as successful as they have been."

While Louisiana has put in place transition and continuing funding to support the new residency model, stakeholders expressed concerns about the financial sustainability of expanded partnerships.

While much of what we learned from interview data about this partnership development work suggests that these expanded collaborations were moving teacher preparation in a positive direction, the new residency model also brought challenges. One challenge consistently mentioned by school system representatives and teacher preparation providers was the cost associated with initiating and maintaining the residencies, as well as the additional staff necessary for this collaborative partnership work.

Believe and Prepare’s pilot program and grant money supported many program changes from 2014 through 2017, and most of our interviewees, particularly those in university-based preparation programs, stated that they relied on those state-distributed, competitive grant funds to enact the new policies, and that they would have to seek out additional financing to sustain their progress as the pilot period for Believe and Prepare ends. Preparation programs and school systems applied for Believe and Prepare grant funds on an individual basis during the 2014–2017 pilot period, and the state has continued to make grant funds available for the three-year “transition period” from 2018 to 2021 for three “foundational transition costs”: administrative personnel, stipends for undergraduate residents, and stipends for mentor teachers (LDOE, undated-f). This includes funding for a transition coordinator to assist with the additional responsibilities related to the new residency model and competency-based requirements. Following this transition period, the state will continue to fund mentor stipends, and residents can elect to serve as substitute teachers for up to 20 days per year, giving them the opportunity to earn the rough equivalent of the state-provided stipend made available during the grant and transition periods. Schools in improvement status (i.e., schools identified as Comprehensive Intervention Required [CIR], which are schools with consistently low overall performance or graduation rates) are also now expected to request funding to support the training of at least one mentor teacher who will support teaching residents at the school (LDOE, 2018a). This funding is intended to develop pools of mentoring talent in high-need contexts.

Interviewees expressed a particularly high level of concern about funding for residencies and the collaborative structures required to support them.

One provider discussed how its residency/transition coordinator, whose position was funded through a Believe and Prepare grant, was critical to its success because of the relationships and social capital the coordinator built during the Believe and Prepare pilot period. Louisiana provided support for this transition coordinator role with the expectation that the role would be eventually subsumed within the work of the teacher preparation program clinical/field placement coordinator. However, this provider’s comments suggested that they viewed this position as key to their continued work. They noted that LDOE had said it would try to fund the position for another three years, but if that plan did not work, their program “would have to go begging somewhere [for funding]” because the residencies would not be successful without a coordinator on staff. Another university-based provider noted that residents are also quite costly for school systems, and that the cost could be a hard sell once the grant funding starts to dry up. One interviewee also connected these worries about sustainability to the tough budget choices educators are being forced to make across Louisiana, perhaps reflecting a more general uncertainty about funding education in the state.

Some of those with whom we spoke discussed strategies to support the continued costs of these partnerships. For example, several university-based providers reported plans to pursue additional grants to continue to coordinate mentor development, mentor-candidate pairing processes, and residency placements. Additionally, several university-based providers noted that they had developed new, salaried liaison or coordinator positions at their home institutions to facilitate residency matching and placement activities.

Interviewees expressed a particularly high level of concern about funding for residencies and the collaborative structures required to support them.

State Action 2: Providing consistent expectations and training for new teacher mentors.

Approach and Key Findings

How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We asked teacher preparation providers and school system central office staff about mentor programs and training structures.

Key findings:

- Many interviewees spoke about the challenge of providing residents with strong mentors.
- Teacher preparation program providers identified some early benefits of the state's support for mentors, although programs are taking a variety of approaches to align existing mentor processes with the state's vision.

Our sole purpose as mentors is to develop a resident like to be ready day one. And that means putting a stake in the ground around the expectations for development and key points in the year so that when we turn them out over to their own classrooms, in this district or elsewhere, they're really ready and it's a stamp of approval.

—school system residency and mentoring coordinator

An important aspect of teacher preparation is matching teacher preparation candidates with high-quality mentor teachers who guide teacher trainees through their residencies. In recognition of the important role of mentor teachers and the value of consistent expectations and training, the state is developing a cadre of state-trained mentor teachers and making various program-level changes around mentor training and the process of matching them with candidates. Teacher candidate mentors are not a new concept in teacher preparation in Louisiana, but the state's new residency requirement places a new emphasis on their quality. LDOE is aiming to establish a cohort of at least 2,500 trained mentors by 2021 who are prepared to support teacher candidates in their yearlong residencies (LDOE, undated-c).

To meet this goal, in the 2017–2018 school year the state offered mentor training to an inaugural cohort of 300 mentor teachers who were selected by their school systems. LDOE recruited and trained an additional roughly 500 teachers in the 2018–2019 cohort, and plans to train 1,000 in 2019–2020. LDOE has partnered with The Dana Center at the

University of Texas at Austin and the nonprofit organization Learning Forward to develop and conduct mentor training (LDOE, undated-c). This training focuses on a few key components: building strong relationships with new teachers, learning to identify and address the needs of new teachers based on teacher preparation competencies, using available materials for each content area to guide conversations with new teachers, providing coaching and improvement resources, and following the new teachers' progress (LDOE, undated-c). These components are defined in a publicly available database of state mentor teacher training materials, which includes documents that summarize the training content for each of these components and the desired outcomes the mentor training should achieve. Mentor teaching materials are also differentiated by subject area (English language arts and mathematics) and grade level (elementary and secondary) and closely aligned with Louisiana's teacher preparation competencies and content aligned with Louisiana's standards and recommended curricula (LDOE, 2019). In October 2018, LDOE also announced that mentor teachers

Mentor selection is a challenge for providers, particularly in terms of assessing the characteristics of a high-quality mentor and finding those mentors in high-need school contexts.

can now earn Mentor Certificates, which count toward the credentials required to become principals or assistant principals (LDOE, 2018b).

Many interviewees described challenges in placing new teacher residents with strong mentors.

Preparation providers in both school systems and universities discussed the perennial challenge of finding appropriate school environments and effective mentors for new teacher residents, particularly in terms of placing candidates in high-need schools and determining what observable qualities make for a strong mentor teacher. State officials with whom we spoke echoed the idea that mentor selection is a challenge for providers, particularly in terms of assessing the characteristics of a high-quality mentor and finding those mentors in high-need school contexts. These challenges suggest that the state's policy to identify and train mentors is a welcome change. One university-based provider who mentioned the difficulty of connecting residents with high-need schools indicated that it can be difficult for preparation providers to identify effective mentor teachers in such schools. This challenge may be attenuated as the state establishes and grows the corps of trained mentor teachers, although the geographic distribution of these teachers is not yet clear. Several university-based providers also mentioned the importance of leadership buy-in for residency placements, which can become a challenge in cases of leader turnover. Although participants were generally optimistic about the promise of more robust and aligned mentoring structures contained in the new training program, they also talked about some challenges associated with coordinating mentoring

for trainees, particularly in terms of the matching process.

Furthermore, both school system- and university-based participants talked extensively about the interpersonal and relational components of mentor placement that pose an enduring challenge—some interviewees described this part of the process as “imprecise” and “unscientific,” perhaps belying some trepidation about this part of mentor selection that can be politically delicate and difficult to quantify. In addition to identifying teachers with strong content knowledge and classroom management skills as potential mentors, providers also must match new teachers and mentors on other less quantifiable factors, such as whether a mentor will be comfortable providing critical feedback and whether the two will be compatible. A central office staff member who coordinated mentor placements in one of the case study school systems noted that principals often play a key role in the matching process, since they have a grasp of potential mentors' dispositional qualities, as well as their instructional performance. This staff member also mentioned “the dispositional skill set that mentors need to have . . . when it's like soft skills for communication, having hard conversations, cultural competence, those aren't there.” These issues are now explicitly included in the state mentor training materials, which may help school systems address these challenges.

Several university-based providers, all of whom partner with many different school systems, noted that school systems varied in the way matching is carried out. Louisiana's new mentor training may assuage some interviewees' concerns by streamlining mentor training and providing a stable pool of possible mentors. Nonetheless, the complexity of this mentor training and matching poses some challenges

Table 2
Mentor Matching Challenges, by Preparation Program

Mentor Matching Challenge Reported in Interviews	
Provider A	Difficulty identifying high-quality mentors, particularly in high-need schools
Provider B	Many complex logistical steps involved in mentor placement that require coordinating across school system and university organizations
Provider C	Efforts involved in managing dispositional factors that underpin mentor-candidate match
Provider D	Leadership turnover impedes collaboration with school system partners

for both preparation providers and school system partners. For instance, while the new training materials include support for dispositional skills necessary to be a good mentor, a mentor-teacher pairing may still face interpersonal compatibility challenges.

Teacher preparation programs identified some early benefits of the state support for mentors, although programs are taking a variety of approaches to align existing mentor processes with the state’s vision.

New state policies for mentor training appear to be leading to refinements in mentoring programs that have, up until this point, been pursued on a program-by-program basis. LDOE is developing and piloting a rubric to assess impacts of the new state-level mentor teacher quality expectations embedded in the policy, but this rubric has not yet been deployed. However, the preliminary signs are positive. Multiple faculty members in university-based preparation programs talked about the benefits of defining what quality mentoring looks like, since being an effective teacher does not necessarily translate into being a strong mentor. As one provider noted:

[The state] did a nine-day over-the-course-of-the-year training for mentors to get better at that coaching piece, which is something that we’re really trying to develop in our mentors, and at the university level, we don’t always have the manpower to do as much professional

development with our parishes if we like, so that support piece was nice.²

University-based providers talked about a variety of existing approaches to teacher mentoring in their programs, and they explained how these are being reshaped by the state’s new policies and training guidelines. These variable approaches may have been a product of the different kinds of primary challenges with mentor placement that providers reported. See Table 2 for a description of these challenges. For example, one university-based preparation provider described how mentor teachers working with their program were, in the past, first vetted by their home school system, then attended university-based mentor training, followed by a residency fair with school systems to meet the potential resident candidates. Resident candidates then submitted their requests for school system placements and were matched with mentors. According to this program provider, the matching process has been streamlined through their Believe and Prepare grant. Now, their program can work with partner school systems to help them facilitate the matching process with the assistance of a residency coordinator, whose position was established and funded by a Believe and Prepare transition grant. Other university-based providers also talked about selecting mentors from a “pool” of candidates from school systems and then training them in university-based mentor preparation programs.

Some university-based providers said that Believe and Prepare grants had facilitated the development

² A *parish* in Louisiana is a territorial division corresponding to a county in other states. One school district typically serves students in each parish, although charter school systems serve most students in New Orleans Parish and some proportion of students in some other parishes.

of more-standardized mentor teacher training and matching structures, but they reported engaging with these structures in different ways. One provider discussed how the university was developing a training program to focus mentor preparation on strategies for co-teaching, coaching, and mentoring. A university-based provider reported that faculty had been researching matching techniques to address the relational aspect of resident-mentor pairings and improve the likelihood that mentor-candidate pairs would be compatible. Given the relative flexibility of Believe and Prepare pilot funds and the decentralized nature of teacher preparation in the state, it is not surprising that individual programs are developing this variety of approaches to implementation.

Focus groups with new teachers provided additional evidence that moving toward more-consistent expectations and supports for mentor teacher quality would be an improvement over the current approaches. Reports from early career teachers in case study school systems indicated that their

preservice mentoring experiences were highly variable: Some teachers' student teaching and co-teaching experiences involved limited mentoring, while others were mentored by a variety of colleagues and supervisors, including school principals. Teachers from alternative certification programs such as Teach for America had mixed opinions about the effectiveness of supports provided by those alternative programs. One new teacher felt that the mentoring they received seemed like a compliance activity, in which mentors might simply sign off as having conducted mentoring, without providing feedback. Some new teachers were unsure whether they even had a mentor, while others noted how important their mentors were. For instance, one teacher called the mentor a "superhero" and another noted that the mentor "saved [their] life." The state's new requirement that each teacher candidate work closely with a mentor and its efforts to create a trained cadre of mentor teachers suggests that future teacher trainees may have a more consistent and higher-quality mentoring experience.

Moving toward more-consistent expectations and supports for mentor teacher quality would be an improvement over the current approaches.

State Action 3: Codify a vision for high-quality teacher preparation that includes clear requirements and accountability structures for teacher preparation programs.

Approach and Key Findings

How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We asked teacher preparation providers and case study central office administrators involved in teacher preparation about their thoughts on the content of the new policies, their experience implementing them, supports provided by the state, and their perceptions of whether the policies will lead to improvement in teacher preparation quality.
- We reviewed public documents to summarize the content of each new policy.
- We asked state officials about the details of LDOE’s vision for how these policies should be enacted and the implementation supports they’re providing.

Key findings:

- Although the state’s new yearlong residency requirements will involve considerable shifts to existing programs, both program providers and school system staff voiced optimism about and support for those requirements and their potential impact on teacher candidate quality.
- Residency placement was highly complex and variable, and the new state policies aimed to streamline the process, though it is too early in the implementation process to know whether this will be successful.
- Adopting competency-based curricula in course-based university preparation programs is a complex and challenging process that currently appears highly variable from one institution to another, and it represents considerable time and burden for preparation providers to make these changes.
- Going forward, a teacher preparation quality rating system will share information about program quality and, eventually, act as an accountability mechanism.
- Together, these ambitious and large-scale state policies aim to better align a highly variable system, although more time will be necessary to observe their effects.

With the new programs came the new courses that were competency-aligned, and also came the year-long residency incorporated into those degree plans. . . . We’ve got just about all of our programs completely approved and are implementing this fall. It’s really been a two-year process starting with the competencies and we piloted year-long residency starting two years ago. We just did a small case study version so we could identify issues and troubles, and then we added each semester a new cohort, and now we’re at full implementation. This past year, we had secondary do their first round in piloting, and then this fall, it’s full-on for everyone to be doing the new degree programs and yearlong residency, so it’s been quite the journey.

—university-based teacher preparation provider

After years of information gathering and planning through Believe and Prepare, Louisiana’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education passed requirements intended to better align teacher preparation with K–12 standards and goals in 2016. These policies represented major shifts for existing programs, including a yearlong residence requirement for teachers-in-training and a competency-based curriculum requirement for teacher preparation programs.

Louisiana developed a list of teaching competencies—what a teacher trainee should be able to know and do to be eligible for certification—in collaboration with educators, content experts, and higher education professionals. The state also solicited feedback via a survey of teachers, teacher educators, and parents before the competencies were approved as policies in 2016. Louisiana’s mandated competencies include a set of general competencies in four areas that apply to all educators: learning environments, curriculum, assessments, and instructional planning. The state has also developed and published several specific sets of competencies for special education, English language arts, mathematics, literacy, early childhood, and other certification areas (LDOE, undated-d). In addition to the requirement that teacher preparation programs have year-long residencies and competency-based curricula, partnerships with set expectations for collaboration between preparation providers and school systems are encouraged.

The policies were intended to go into full effect in 2018–2019 and apply to any teacher candidates admitted to programs after July 1, 2018 (LDOE, 2017). Louisiana’s new residency requirement is closely linked to the new mentor teacher training structures discussed in the previous section; teacher trainees are paired with a mentor to complete their teaching residency, during which they spend a full year in their mentor teacher’s classroom learning through hands on co-teaching experiences. In addition, starting in 2019, LDOE will review teacher preparation programs annually and publish annual profiles of each program, with consequences for unsatisfactory performance going into effect in 2023 (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). We learned from state officials that the details of these review procedures are still in a

“learning phase,” which we discuss in more detail later in this report. All preparation programs are expected to comply with these policies, including alternative certification programs, although any program may apply to the state for a design extension if it has a need for more time to comply with the policies as written. These extensions grant programs up to an additional year to make required changes. Programs may also request accommodations for program innovations: For instance, an art education residency program may request an adjusted residency format to help teachers gain experiences in a variety of classrooms to prepare them for interdisciplinary art instruction. These exceptions are evaluated by LDOE on a case-by-case basis.

Program providers and school system staff were optimistic about the impact of residencies on teacher candidate quality.

We interviewed program providers and school system staff in spring 2018, in the school year before the new requirements were expected to go into effect. Nearly all the university-based teacher preparation providers we interviewed—including those describing challenges associated with changes to teacher preparation that we discuss in more detail below—expressed optimism and enthusiasm about the state’s policy to require expanded residencies, noting that residencies and mentorship opportunities have the potential to improve the strength of teacher candidates in Louisiana. Though they also often remarked that it is too early in the implementation process to talk definitively about outcomes, this positive energy around both the new policies and the state’s manner of supporting school systems and preparation providers were common themes in our interviews. The alternative certification providers we spoke with were already using adapted versions of residency models, but they predicted that the new requirement to provide more sustained clinical experiences statewide would create systemic improvement in teacher preparation. New teachers also echoed the importance of field experience opportunities when discussing their training.

Alternative certification providers

We interviewed two alternative certification providers that are operating in Louisiana. According to each, their program design was already competency-based. One said that the new state policy prompted an internal review of the program's competencies, which were found to be in alignment with the state's policies. This provider also remarked that their program included yearlong residency experiences before the policy change, but without a formal mentoring mechanism: Their candidates come into this program after being "pre-vetted" in another school system or partner organization, where they typically have their co-teaching experience, and then lead a classroom through a practitioner license while they are still enrolled in alternative certification training. Presumably, this program would need to apply to the state for a design exemption to continue operating with this kind of co-teaching model. The second alternative certification provider noted that the program already had mentorships, yearlong (two-semester) residencies, and competency-based training. However, the new state policy prompted this provider to "bolster" its competencies, since "it wasn't a stringent requirement." Both providers expressed positive attitudes about the state's policy shifts in teacher preparation and noted that the new policy components reflect national trends in high-quality teacher preparation. One of these providers, however, was concerned about how the residency requirement would affect nontraditional candidates (e.g., candidates making a career change in midlife, as opposed to traditional candidates coming to training at the end of an undergraduate degree program) who need full-time employment during their training.

We also spoke with three school system central office administrators focused on partnerships with teacher preparation providers, who had additional insights about implementing clinical residency programs in their school systems. One worked for a university and served as a full-time residency and preparation coordinator, one was paid by the school system and responsible for coordinating field experiences for teaching trainees, and the third was a mentor teacher. These staff members talked about the potential benefits of the new state policy. The school system-based field experience coordinator was particularly excited about the new yearlong residency requirement; for instance, they noted that teachers with yearlong residencies took "more ownership" of their work. All three interviewees felt the requirement of a full year of field experience represented a significant quality improvement over the existing models that only provided one semester or even one quarter of clinical residency or student teaching.

Several central office administrators from our case study school systems also thought the full year of teaching residency would improve teacher

candidates' readiness for the classroom, and a variety of respondents in different roles said that these robust residency programs can create recruiting pipelines for school systems. For instance, one superintendent explained their positive perception of the way that yearlong residencies prepared teachers more thoroughly than a shorter period of student teaching: "I think the residency programs help tremendously. They come in and they are essentially ready." A school principal noted that the residency provided candidates with an opportunity to develop strong classroom management skills before their first year of teaching independently, which is especially important because new teachers often struggle with classroom management.

School system administrators and other central office staff focused on teacher preparation, and a small number of university-based providers also noted that teacher trainees were increasingly being hired by the school systems where they completed their residencies. As one university-based teacher preparation provider said: "I had a principal tell me, 'I've never hired a first-year teacher before, I've never

believed first-year teachers were ready,' and he has hired three of my residents already." This provider thought that this change in hiring practices was connected to the deeper clinical preparation experiences facilitated by LDOE's new state policies, even though those policies might not have fully taken hold in some teacher preparation programs with which school systems were working.

The providers described highly complex and variable residency placement and mentor matching processes; it is too early in the implementation process to determine whether state policies will streamline these processes.

Several providers discussed their plans and the changes they were making to comply with state requirements. However, as with approaches to mentoring, programs varied widely in the changes they made to comply with the yearlong residency requirement. Among the providers we spoke with, one university-based provider and one alternative certification provider already included yearlong residencies, although many other interviewees said that implementing this residency component would require significant program changes. For instance, one university-based provider said the school was gradually rolling out a yearlong residency, starting with its master's degree program, because it is smaller and less complex than the undergraduate teacher preparation program. Another university-based provider had already been exploring co-teaching models before Believe and Prepare pilot work began in 2014, which made the shift to yearlong residency less challenging. The most salient theme among university-based teacher preparation providers was the high degree of variability in clinical residency arrangements before the start of Believe and Prepare, and many interviewees were optimistic that standardizing the experience could lead to stronger and more consistent teacher preparation across the state.

Key challenges of implementing the yearlong residency requirement included the low stipends provided to residents and difficulties of finding good mentor matches for residents.

Our case study interviewees mentioned two main challenges associated with residencies. The first was finding high-quality, trained mentor matches for trainees, which was discussed in the previous section and could be addressed through the state's new emphasis on mentor training. A second challenge was the cost of the residency for the teacher trainees. Typically, residents work for a year on a very small stipend (e.g., \$2,000 per year), covered by grant money for those who participated in Believe and Prepare partnerships, and thereafter through transition funds from the state. Following the Believe and Prepare transition period, residents will have the opportunity to work as substitute teachers for 20 days per year, which amounts to roughly the same amount of pay (about \$1,600 per year) that candidates might earn working part-time in a minimum wage job (LDOE, undated-f). This stipend is still low relative to other teaching residency programs nationally; for instance, the Boston Teaching Residency program pays residents \$12,600 per year, plus health insurance. Yet many such successful teaching residency models are private or grant-funded, and not state-funded. Several interviewees mentioned concerns about lost wages, which would likely be far higher than what they would receive through substitute teaching for 20 days per year. One university provider said that most of its students were first-generation college-goers who relied on financial aid. Thus, the residency requirement was an extra burden for these students, since they were often already working to support themselves while attending college. Alternative certification providers, on the other hand, are not required to include residencies in their programs; their candidates typically serve as the instructor of record and earn a full salary. However, an alternative certification provider we spoke with shared university-based providers' concerns about the resident candidate stipends, noting that the expectation that all university-based candidates will do a full-time, yearlong residency at a low wage

Louisiana's move to require competency-based curricula has triggered a wide variety of shifts for teacher preparation providers.

disproportionately affects older candidates who are making career changes.

Competency-based curricula varied across course-based university preparation programs, reflecting variation in providers' interpretation of what competency-based curricula entail.

Consistent with the emerging implementation themes we observed for new teacher mentoring and yearlong residencies, Louisiana's move to require competency-based curricula has triggered a wide variety of shifts for teacher preparation providers. For some providers, making the change to competency-based curricula has been challenging and complex. Several university-based providers described a difficult process of convincing program faculty to tailor their courses around the state's competencies. This complexity was compounded because different content areas of teacher preparation are housed in different programs and colleges across these universities. While some providers noted that the competencies were published and packaged by LDOE and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in an easily measurable form that helped to facilitate the transition, others described the effort of coordinating multiple content areas and faculty members as difficult. Another provider found the competencies to be "measurable" but said that the logistics of the "backwards kind of design" required to map them to a course-based university program

were problematic. Yet another university-based provider mentioned faculty buy-in as the most difficult hurdle in the transition to the competency-based approach.

University-based programs with traditional, credit-hour course structures had to make significant shifts to align with the competency-based curriculum policy. For example, for one provider the shift required organizing additional summer sessions with faculty to help them plan their courses around the competencies. Another provider described redesigning its preparation program around both the residency and the competency requirement, using a Believe and Prepare pilot to weave those two policies together in a new degree program. Several university providers also mentioned the complexity of cutting across content areas to adjust their programs to competency-based curricula. One provider noted that shifting to competency-based coursework was particularly difficult for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) content areas, since STEM majors had more degree requirements to meet than other majors in their university.

Some providers in both universities and alternative certification programs, however, told us they already had some version of competency-based curricula in place and, thus, for them, the uptake of this policy component required minimal changes. Two university-based preparation providers said they focused on using assessments to comply with the competency-based curricula requirement. This approach did not require significant change, since they retained their initial course structures but refined the specifics of those courses to align with assessments and rubrics that showed how that coursework complied with the competencies. Both alternative certification providers we interviewed indicated that they already had competency-based assessments in place before the state rolled out the new requirements, so their alignment work was minimal. Because we were not able to review the assessments or coursework, we cannot determine the extent to which these components of the programs were truly competency-based.

Significantly, there appeared to be some variation in the way that providers thought about the competency-based approach mandated by LDOE

and the ways to assess competencies, which may have affected their claims about implementing competency-based curricula. One provider reflected:

I don't want to say that I've had training on the competency-based and what is that, I just know that it's a thing and we have to do it. I don't believe that it's like, here's this, this is what this is, this is what it looks like, like a streamline. I feel more it's been left for individual institutions to decide what that looks like. We're all professionals; we all know what that looks like, I believe. You assess what the student should master, but how or how is it measured, things like that, I'm not sure that that's been clearly [what] we measure. We say we've met the competency if we have an assessment tool and a rubric that shows that we met that. I don't know how other universities are doing it.

This response illustrates the need to provide more clarity for providers on how to enact a competency-based approach, and to monitor the implementation of competency-based curricula as they are rolled out.

LDOE's teacher preparation rating system aims to increase transparency but is still being refined.

To accommodate flexibility in program design while ensuring that each program meets quality expectations, LDOE has incorporated the competency-based curriculum component into its teacher preparation quality rating system, which was finalized in the summer of 2017. This quality rating system is part of its teacher preparation accountability system, in which programs will be evaluated using an on-site review system. The key elements of the quality rating system are

1. teacher preparation program experience—e.g., quality of program content, quality of clinical experience, quality of program management, and knowledge and teaching methods—which makes up 50 percent of the score
2. educator workforce needs, a measure of candidate placement in high-need subject areas and

school systems, which makes up 25 percent of the score

3. the quality of the teacher candidates produced in the programs, as measured by value-added assessment scores calculated after graduates have been in their teaching roles for at least a year, which makes up 25 percent of the score (LDOE, undated-e).

Although the system is still being refined as of early 2019, state officials reported that the teacher preparation program experience measures will assess the ways in which programs enact the competency-based curriculum. State officials explained that on-site reviews were in a “learning phase,” in which programs will undergo the review process and receive feedback from evaluators without consequences. Starting in 2021, the on-site reviews and quality rating system will become attached to accountability measures.

LDOE is using the quality rating system and the accompanying on-site review process to construct public profiles of preparation programs. Because the quality rating system is currently in a “learning phase,” performance profiles and quality ratings for programs will be produced and published for informational purposes only. This also allows LDOE to test and refine the quality rating system, and propose amendments as needed. Starting in 2021, accountability measures will be attached to these quality ratings and performance profiles, and by 2023, program quality ratings will factor into ongoing program approval decisions made by LDOE and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (LDOE, undated-e).

The effect of the teacher quality rating system and on-site reviews on the state's teacher preparation system as a whole remains to be seen. Because this quality rating system does not currently result in consequences for providers, the next two to three years will be a critical period of content and process refinement. Given the many competing factors that inform teacher workforce needs and shortages, and the complexity and controversy surrounding value-added measures of teaching, this system will need to be built and enacted with care and with realistic but rigorous expectations for preparation

programs and their role in the broader education landscape. The stakeholders we spoke with did not discuss the quality rating system or the value-added measures that are part of it, perhaps because this element of the teacher preparation system is still being refined.

Together, these new state policies aim to better align a highly variable system.

A salient theme in interviewees' discussions of Louisiana's current teacher preparation system is the high degree of variability in program design and teachers' preparation experiences. As we noted earlier, training structures for teacher candidates prior to Believe and Prepare, initiated in 2014, varied dramatically from program to program. Consequently, the process of fully adopting the state's new residency and mentoring requirements by 2022 will vary from program to program, and different providers will likely need different kinds of supports. New teachers' perspectives about their training experiences further elaborated this extensive variation; some early career teachers talked glowingly about their mentorship experiences, while others did not even know whether they had had a mentor, and others sought out master teachers and school administrators for feedback and support. These inconsistencies in new teachers' field experiences suggest that LDOE's move toward standardizing requirements for mentoring and residency could provide much-needed structure in system that currently provides uneven opportunities for fieldwork and support for teacher candidates.

LDOE's move toward standardizing requirements for mentoring and residency could provide much-needed structure.

Conclusions and Implications for Louisiana and Other States

In this report, we summarized the key features of Louisiana's teacher preparation reforms, and we presented findings from analyses of qualitative data that provided information on how stakeholders are responding to these reforms. This final section provides a brief recap of key findings and discusses their implications for teacher preparation policies in Louisiana and in other states.

Key Findings

Believe and Prepare pilot partnerships built on existing structures and relationships. Those involved in these partnerships emphasized the vital role of the partnerships in building the foundation for greater collaboration aligned with the state's ambitious vision for teacher preparation. Through its Believe and Prepare grants program, LDOE incentivized school systems and teacher preparation program providers to collaborate on features such as residency placements. The program leaders and school system staff we interviewed reported that partnerships had already been in place but that Believe and Prepare funds enabled them to deepen their partnerships and collaboration in ways that supported improved mentor matching and residency placement. One program leader, for instance, noted that the collaboration between the program and the school system enabled the program leaders to benefit from the school system's expertise more than they had previously. Most interviewees spoke favorably about these new partnerships, though some expressed concerns about whether the funding would be available to sustain new partnership activities and grant-funded positions for the long term.

Teacher preparation providers identified some refinements in mentor training in response to state policies, although providers also identified the scarcity of strong mentors for resident teachers as a key challenge. Teacher preparation providers noted that the mentor training has helped to define what quality mentoring looks like and—in some cases—helped to streamline and standardize matching processes. However, many preparation providers

also discussed the challenge of matching teaching residents with strong mentors, particularly in high-need schools. In addition, interview participants also described challenges stemming from the need to identify good mentor-resident matches and to understand the extent to which a prospective mentor has the necessary skills and disposition to serve effectively in that role.

While program providers were revising their programs to address state requirements, approaches to residency placement—in particular—appeared to vary across the state and have created complex challenges for program providers. Many interviewees expressed optimism that the state’s new residency policies would lead to higher-quality teacher candidates, and they also discussed plans they were making to comply with state requirements, including gradual rollout of yearlong residency requirements and persuading faculty to tailor their courses to align with state competencies. Several stakeholders voiced concern about the small size of stipends provided to residents, which may make it financially impossible for some candidates to stay in a residency all year. Providers also noted that the process of placing program participants in residencies is complex and that efforts to place residents in high-need schools are particularly challenging because of the lack of high-quality mentors in many of those schools. As we noted, LDOE is working to address that challenge by providing funding to struggling schools (i.e., schools with Comprehensive Intervention Required) that allows schools to provide teachers with stipends to attend the state’s nine-day mentor training, which is aligned with Louisiana’s teacher preparation competencies and K–12 content standards; teachers who complete the training receive a credential indicating their readiness to support residents in their schools.

Efforts to place residents in high-need schools are particularly challenging because of the lack of high-quality mentors in many of those schools.

Program providers commented on the considerable challenges they faced in shifting to a competency-based model, particularly among those who had emphasized traditional, credit-driven approaches. In university-based programs, leaders had to work with faculty to restructure their coursework and degree requirements around the new model, and convincing everyone to make this shift was reportedly difficult. Moreover, even in programs in which leaders reported that they had adopted competency-based courses and assessments, we were not able to review these materials, so we cannot determine the extent to which these new approaches are truly competency-based.

LDOE is developing a teacher preparation quality rating system that could increase transparency, but the large reforms represented by this new system could raise technical and political challenges. Starting in 2019, teacher preparation programs will be evaluated using an on-site review system, and ratings will be published to foster communication with prospective program participants, school systems, and other stakeholders. Aspects of the proposed system, particularly including value-added measures to measure quality, are technically challenging and potentially controversial. The system is being piloted and is likely to undergo refinement as the state and other groups gain experience creating and making sense of the ratings.

Implications for State-Level Teacher Preparation Policies

The findings presented in this report are drawn from one state's experience but might have implications for other states that are exploring changes to their teacher preparation policies. Although it is too early to determine whether or how any of the changes will affect the quality of teaching and learning in Louisiana, early responses from program leaders, school system central office administrators, and educators suggest that many are optimistic about the promise of these reforms. The findings also point to a few considerations for those who are developing or implementing teacher preparation policy changes:

- **A high-quality residency requires effective mentoring; attention to mentor quality and match is crucial.** Mentor teachers play a key role in ensuring a high-quality, relevant residency experiences for candidates. Mentors need to be able to model effective practices and give residents opportunities to hone their skills in real-world settings that are aligned with residents' goals and career plans. Interviewees described several challenges to the mentor selection and training process, including difficulties finding high-quality mentors and securing a good mentor-resident match. States need to develop consistent mentor development models, enact strong recruiting approaches, and monitor the effects of mentor training to ensure a sufficiently large cadre of qualified mentors. In addition, state leaders should consider ways to enlist principals or other school leaders in their efforts to assess the skills and dispositions of prospective mentors.
- **Program providers could benefit from guidance and resources to develop competency-based coursework and assessments.** Despite widespread enthusiasm for the shift from traditional, credit-based models of teacher preparation to a competency-based model, some interviewees reported significant challenges. We observed a lack of clarity among program providers on what *competency-based* means, and we heard that the shift was particularly difficult for programs with a long history of traditional coursework. States should consider providing vetted, aligned, high-quality competency-based curriculum and assessment resources, such as sample courses that could serve as a model of what a strong system could look like. Having concrete models might reduce the burdens associated with modifying courses and developing assessments, and could support state efforts to align local program offerings with the competencies it views as most important.
- **Developing an economically diverse cadre of new, highly trained teachers might require active outreach and other recruitment strategies.** The high cost of participating in the program (due to the low stipend provided and lost earnings) could limit participation by lower-income and first-generation college students. To address this challenge, active outreach should involve efforts to ensure that the program is accessible to all, not just candidates who have solid financial resources. This may be accomplished by offering financial incentives and other support resources.
- **The state's efforts to track residents' performance in their early teaching positions to assess quality and effectiveness of preparation programs could provide transparency and accountability but face technical challenges.** Louisiana's plans to publish program ratings that draw on multiple data sources should result in useful and accessible information to improve program quality, support hiring decisions by school systems, and help prospective residents assess program quality. However, the state will need to evaluate the reliability and validity of each measure for the intended purpose, and should pay particular attention to the measure of teacher effectiveness based on value-added models (VAMs). Researchers have identified limitations in VAMs, particularly for high-stakes uses (American Statistical Association, 2014;

Glazerman et al., 2010; Koedel, Mihaly, and Rockoff, 2015), and many teachers will lack a VAM estimate because they do not teach in tested subjects or grades. Research also suggests that aggregate value-added scores for teacher preparation program graduates tend to be characterized by a high degree of error (von Hippel and Bellows, 2018). The likely benefits of including VAMs need to be weighed against the potential harms, and Louisiana or other states considering such a rating system should explore alternative ways of gathering information about the quality of graduates. It could be helpful, for example, to ask both the graduates of the programs and their principals or other supervisors to provide feedback on the extent to which the graduate appeared to bring the necessary skills to his or her teaching position.

- **Communication and stakeholder engagement might help promote support for, and sustainability of, the reforms.** Louisiana engaged in extensive outreach efforts to communicate about, and build support for, its reforms to teacher preparation and to the education policy landscape more broadly. Interviewees for this study expressed excitement about the reforms but also had concerns, particularly about sustainability. Continued efforts to engage educators, program providers, and other stakeholders could help build support as new models and practices are implemented and new challenges are identified. This support could help promote sustainability, particularly if funding needs to be shifted away from other activities in the future.

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About This Report

This report is part of a four-part series on how policy actions intended to support students from birth through graduation from high school in the state of Louisiana are being implemented by educators and the organizations where they work, and how those policy actions are related to successful student outcomes. Each of the four reports addresses a different topic that has been the focus of Louisiana's education policy reforms: early childhood education, K-12 academics, teacher preparation, and graduation pathways. The report series follows up on *Raising the Bar: Louisiana's Strategies for Improving Student Outcomes* (Kaufman et al., 2018), which provided an in-depth description of the key actions that the state has been taking in each of these four areas to support and improve outcomes for all students in Louisiana. Taken together, these reports provide an overview of how an ambitious set of interconnected state policies, introduced in 2012, are making their mark on the teaching and learning happening in early childhood centers, schools, and teacher preparation institutions across the state.

This report focuses on teacher preparation. We describe the early stages of an implementation of a suite of statewide teacher preparation policy changes, including key state actions described in Kaufman et al. (2018) intended to support and improve teacher preparation across the state. We draw on the insights of stakeholders from a sample of programs across Louisiana to examine early indicators of how these changes are working on the ground and to consider the lessons to be learned from the uptake of this suite of policy changes.

RAND Education and Labor

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