



# **MOVING BEYOND THE PILOT:**

## **Sustaining the Success of the Transforming Lead Teacher Preparation Programs Through Multi-Partner Innovation Grant**

**SEPTEMBER 2024**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **Grantees**

Grantees included the following institutions of higher education (IHEs) as principal investigators (PIs), along with several state and local partners:

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College of Menominee Nation, Dr. Kelli Chellburg;  
Georgia State University, Dr. Tonia Durden and Dr. Stacey French-Lee;  
North Seattle College, Dr. Samantha Dolan;  
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University of Colorado Denver, Dr. Kristie Kauerz and Dr. Diana Schaak;  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Dr. Theresa Lock; and  
University of Nebraska, Dr. Julia Torquati and Lisa Knoche

## **About School Readiness**

The Beyond the Pilot report was prepared by School Readiness Consulting (SRC). As a consulting firm focused exclusively on children from birth through third grade, SRC partners to develop and implement strategies that improve outcomes for children in school and life. SRC believes that improving early childhood and affirming the right for all children to thrive represents the greatest opportunity to create a just society.

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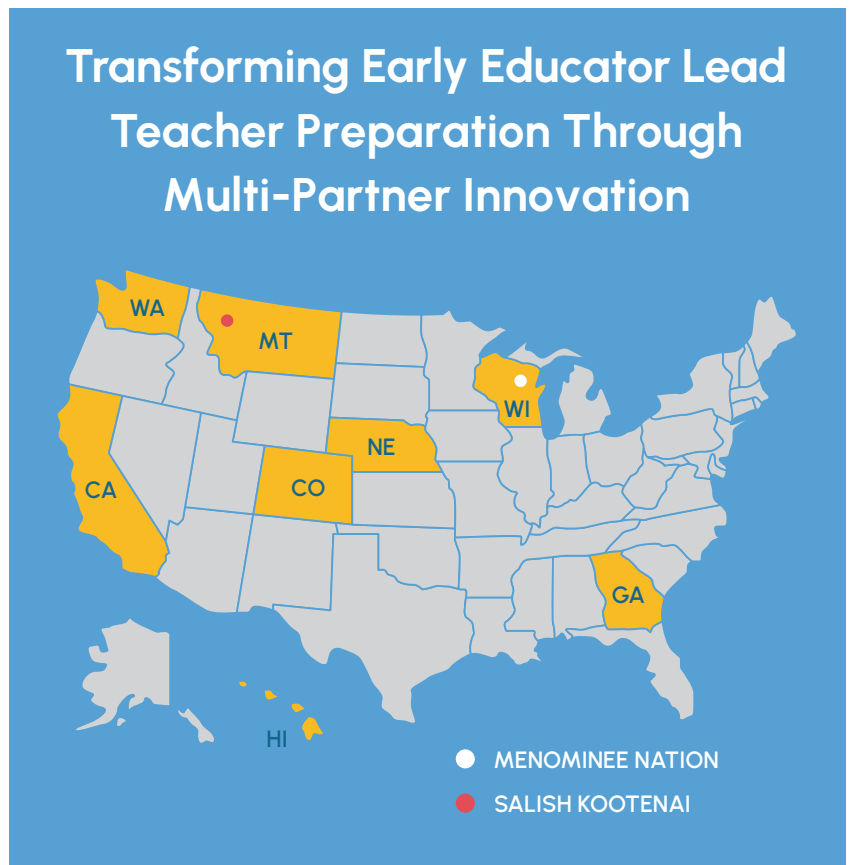
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2021, the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative) awarded eight partnership teams the Transforming Early Educator Lead Teacher Preparation Programs Through Multi-Partner Innovation grants. Grantees led innovation pilots focused on partnerships and activities that enable recipients to overcome systemic barriers in creating and strengthening opportunities for students in their early care and education (ECE) educator preparation programs. The Collaborative subsequently partnered with School Readiness Consulting (SRC) to lead a learning and technical support community for grantees. The grantees have achieved significant milestones in their innovation pilots during the three years since this opportunity began. Now, The Collaborative, SRC, and the grantee partners reflect on the lessons learned and their implications for the broader field.



With growing national concern regarding the shortage of high-quality early educators, it is crucial to recognize the role of teacher preparation programs. Early childhood education preparation programs not only address the immediate needs of the ECE field but also have the ability to lay the foundation for a more inclusive and diverse ECE workforce. By examining the key accomplishments, innovations, and lessons learned in the pilot innovations, we can elevate strategies that remove barriers to degree completion, enhance the preparation and support of our future educators, and ultimately ensure a well-equipped workforce ready to implement high-quality and culturally sustaining experiences across the country.

**Teacher preparation programs are part of the solution to the shortage of high-quality early educators.** The nation’s teacher shortage is real and growing. The early childhood field faces big challenges in changing the factors that impact the ability to attract and retain excellent teachers, such as low wages, limited ongoing professional development opportunities, and inadequate resources in classroom settings.<sup>1</sup> Although it will take a collective effort to solve these complex issues, institutions of higher education (IHEs) are at the nexus of educational advancement, preparing future teachers to provide high-quality, culturally relevant instruction. Grantees and their partners have developed and refined strategies tailored to the diverse cultural populations of their students. IHEs are uniquely positioned to strategically advance a future teacher workforce that represents the diversity of classrooms across the country. By prioritizing culturally responsive and sustaining education in teacher preparation programs, IHEs can ensure that future teachers are supported and equipped to meet the needs of the students, families, and communities they serve.<sup>2</sup>

1. Alban, C., Belyakov, C., Decker, C., Lawrence, N., & Snyder-Fickler, E. (2024). *The Seeds of Success: Investing in Early Childhood Workforce* [Research brief]. Duke Sanford Center for Child & Family Policy. <https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/01/Seeds-of-Success-Research-Brief.pdf>

2. D’Andrea Martinez, P. (n.d.). *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education*. NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education>

**Teacher preparation programs face unique challenges and opportunities in dismantling barriers for students seeking ECE degrees.** Traditional structures inside of higher education—such as tenure, shared governance, financial models, and oversight mechanisms—while fundamental, can inadvertently perpetuate systemic inequalities.<sup>3</sup> Entrenched processes in shared governance and resistance to change can impede quick and effective changes to the evolving needs of students, especially those with marginalized identities. Grantees have built their innovation pilots despite these challenges, leveraging multi-partner collaboration and systems change levers to advance new initiatives and strategies directly impacting current and future students. Teacher preparation programs are proactively paving the way for more inclusive and equitable academic landscapes where all students, including students of color and students for whom English is not a first language, can thrive and succeed.



**There are powerful learnings from those successfully implementing systems change efforts in teacher preparation programs.** Those implementing change efforts are often exclusively focused on their specific roles and lack opportunities to share lessons learned with the broader early childhood field. This report aims to provide practical lessons for leaders and implementers in teacher preparation programs by gathering insights from these diverse innovation pilots. This collective wisdom can help the field navigate complexities surrounding transforming teacher preparation programs and transition from pilot innovations to long-lasting changes—ultimately improving teacher preparation programs and creating real, enduring progress, particularly for students of color.

Grantees are in a unique position to identify the challenges and opportunities in preparing early childhood educators. As grantees have become deeply entrenched in the implementation of their work to transform teacher preparation programs, this report explores the lessons learned and considerations for sustainability by answering the following discovery questions:

### ***What has this grant accomplished over the past three years?***

Over the past three years, the Transforming Early Educator Lead Teacher Preparation Programs grant has achieved significant milestones in reimagining early childhood educator preparation. Through innovative pilots led by diverse grantee partnerships, the grant has fostered the development of culturally responsive curricula, and expanded accessible pathways to higher education. These accomplishments have improved teacher preparation and laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and diverse early childhood education workforce. By addressing systemic barriers and leveraging multi-partner collaboration, the grant has created lasting, positive impacts for students pursuing ECE degrees, ultimately ensuring that the next generation of educators is better prepared to serve the diverse needs of children and communities. This work is crucial for the future of early childhood education, as it builds a more equitable foundation for educational success and societal justice.

3. Johnson Bowles, K. (2022). Why Can't Higher Education Change? *Inside Higher Ed*. [https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-explain-it-me/why-can%E2%80%99t-higher-education-change#:~:text=Because%20the%20systems%2C%20traditions%20and,%2C%20and%20oversight%20\(accountability\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-explain-it-me/why-can%E2%80%99t-higher-education-change#:~:text=Because%20the%20systems%2C%20traditions%20and,%2C%20and%20oversight%20(accountability))

### **1 Comprehensive and flexible student supports are crucial to helping students attain degrees.**

Several strategies were leveraged across innovation pilots to create or increase the types of support that met students where they were. Students experience a variety of challenges to entering and completing degree programs, including working full-time jobs and caring for family. This is especially true for students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds, whose cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds are not always centered in higher education spaces and for whom lack of access to resources and rigid institutional policies make degree attainment challenging.<sup>1</sup> Tailoring supports helps IHEs create more inclusive and equitable environments, which enhance a student's ability to succeed personally and academically.

- Grantees removed barriers for students, starting with recruitment and admission, and redefined what is mandatory to enter higher education and demonstrate success along the way.
- Grantees employed wraparound services, acknowledging that students lead multifaceted lives and, therefore, require comprehensive, holistic solutions throughout their higher education journey.
- Grantees focused on competency-based frameworks and alignment across university systems to more effectively serve students at various stages of their careers, support the facilitation of transfer credit across institutions, and make it easier to award credit for prior learning.

### **2 Students and the education leaders who serve them benefit from culturally responsive and sustaining learning experiences.**

Educators across the country are continually striving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population despite the structural inequities embedded in society and within educational institutions. How these inequities show up on campuses and classrooms must be clearly understood and specifically addressed. When IHEs implement culturally responsive and sustaining education, learning environments become more inclusive and supportive, respecting students' diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. For educators and administrators, ongoing professional development focused on culturally responsive and sustaining education fosters better teaching practices, reduces biases, and promotes equity. This dual approach better provides equitable opportunities for students and builds the capacity of staff to succeed in supporting students' multiple expressions of diversity as assets for teaching and learning.

- Grantees built capacity among educators and education leaders to be effective with increasingly diverse student populations.
- Grantees supported students with comprehensive resources and teaching that keep culture at the center.
- Grantees moved beyond language access toward language justice so that students can participate equitably across IHEs.

### **3 Innovation can be fostered when IHEs and their partners shift to collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches.**

Silos are common in IHEs, where departments often operate independently, limiting cross-disciplinary interaction and collaboration. However, by shifting mental models related to collaboration and fostering partnerships within the institution and with external interest holders,<sup>2</sup> IHEs can break down these barriers. Internal collaboration allows for the pooling of resources and expertise, while external partnerships with policymakers, the community, and state organizations bring diverse perspectives, complementary strategies, and additional resources.

- Grantees brought together diverse interest holders in effective and action-oriented spaces.
- Grantees fostered meaningful collaboration toward greater alignment and shared resources between IHEs.
- Grantees aligned their efforts with larger state and national organization expectations and standards to create greater consistency across the field.

### **4 IHEs can address systemic inequities in teacher preparation by centering student voices and embracing power redistribution.**

Those most impacted by a system's challenges are the ones closest to the most effective and equitable solutions. When students, especially those from underrepresented groups, have a say in the decisions that affect their education, programs become more responsive and equitable. Redistribution of power ensures the inclusion of diverse perspectives, which is crucial for identifying and addressing systemic barriers that might otherwise be overlooked. To create truly inclusive and effective teacher preparation programs, IHEs should prioritize the voices and needs of students, especially those from marginalized communities. This effort involves not only listening to students' feedback but also creating spaces where their input directly influences policy and program development. By actively listening to and making space in decision-making forums for students, IHEs can foster a more collaborative and equitable environment. Ultimately, when power is shared and diverse voices are heard, teacher preparation programs can better serve all students and contribute to a more just and inclusive educational system.

- Grantees centered student and community voices in collaborative processes with educators and decision-makers to continuously improve teacher preparation programs.
- Grantees responded to top-down mandates with bottom-up reform, fostering a mindset of opportunity and abundance.







## ***How do partnership teams move from a robust and comprehensive pilot effort to a longer-term sustainable implementation approach?***

This report encapsulates valuable insights gleaned from the innovation pilots of various grantees, but it's important to acknowledge that not all lessons learned can be fully captured within these pages. Learning is a continual process that extends beyond this document. As we move forward to discuss sustainability, it's vital for grantees and others involved in transformative change to consider what comes next.

Transformative change in organizations and institutions requires dedicated capacity and resources because it involves complex and sustained efforts that go beyond routine operations. IHEs have learned the importance of having dedicated staff who are essential for conducting effective project management, addressing challenges, and ensuring the completion of tasks. Adequate resources enable ongoing communication and collaboration among IHE staff and their partners, fostering a collaborative approach to change. Furthermore, there is an opportunity for funders and other partners to provide support for learning and peer collaboration, creating environments where innovative ideas can flourish and long-term relationships are built. Such environments amplify the impact of transformational efforts. Without these dedicated resources, initiatives are likely to falter under the weight of logistical and operational demands on top of existing role requirements for IHE staff.

In order to move from a robust and comprehensive pilot effort to a longer-term sustainable implementation approach to support IHEs, efforts must do more than simply replicate the lessons learned from grantees in this report and across the country; more deliberate and intentional work is required. When the focus is on simply reproducing strategies that others found successful in a different context, deep systematic issues may never be addressed, and social problems may persist for those the initiative was intended to help and support.