



What Does High-Quality Technical Assistance in Teacher Preparation Look Like?

In 2016, five Teacher Preparation Transformation Centers-- [EPIC/Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#), [National Center for Teacher Residencies \(NCTR\)](#), [TeacherSquared](#), [TeachingWorks](#) and [US PREP](#)--began supporting networks of teacher preparation programs that were developing, piloting and scaling effective teacher preparation practices to ensure that more teacher candidates graduate ready to improve student outcomes in K-12 public schools. This brief, the latest in a series (the first brief, an introduction to the series, is available [here](#), and the second brief about the Teacher Educator Practice Framework is available [here](#)), focuses on how Centers collaborated to define what high-quality technical assistance looks like in teacher preparation.

◆ Introduction

We represent five networks of teacher preparation programs, or Centers--EPIC, NCTR, TeacherSquared, TeachingWorks and US PREP--with different approaches to preparing teachers for the classroom. Our networks are organized differently, and we offer different types of technical assistance to the teacher preparation programs with whom we work. What we share is a commitment to providing teacher preparation programs with high-quality technical assistance and using data to continuously improve the support we offer. As Sarah Beal, executive director of US PREP, explains:

*What impact is our technical assistance **actually** having on teacher preparation, and how can we use data for our own continuous improvement?*

“We wanted to hold ourselves accountable for effecting sustainable changes with our preparation programs. We each had individual ways to measure progress of our prep programs aligned to key elements of transformation,¹ but we didn’t have a way of correlating that progress to our technical assistance and support.”

¹ For more information about the four elements of teacher preparation transformation, please see the first brief in this learning series, [How We’re Working Together to Improve Teacher Preparation](#).

And so we created a work group focused on data and started grappling with this simple but vexing question: What impact is our technical assistance *actually* having on teacher preparation, and how can we use data for our own continuous improvement?

Over the past several months, Sudipti Kumar (NCTR), Liam Honigsberg (TeacherSquared) and Sarah Beal (US PREP) tackled this question head on and co-created a [framework](#) to help us--and others in the field--assess and improve the quality of the technical assistance we provide to teacher preparation programs. As we explain below, the framework consists of four domains of high quality technical assistance--Quality, Sustainability, Reach and Impact--each of which has an aligned set of objectives, outcomes and indicators.



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In this brief, we'll explore what the framework is, how we collaborated to create it and how we think it can be used. We wrote this brief for technical assistance providers, teacher preparation programs, funders who invest in teacher preparation and anyone else with an interest in learning more about ways to deliver high-quality technical assistance to teacher preparation programs.

We hope the framework can serve as a tool to teacher preparation programs to discuss their practices and continuously improve, and help funders make grants to organizations whose technical assistance aligns with the criteria in the framework.

◆ The Origins of the Framework

We conceived of the framework because, as technical assistance providers, we were asking questions like: “What kinds of evidence--information, artifacts, feedback and other insights--tell us whether our efforts to support the teacher preparation programs in our networks are having the intended effects?” For example, if we deliver a full week of professional development to teacher educators, what evidence will show whether it led to sustained improvements in the teacher educators’ practices? If we conduct on-site program reviews for preparation programs, how will we know if the key recommendations were carried out, and if they had the desired result? If we facilitate a work group to share data and discoveries across teacher preparation programs, how will we know if and how those discoveries drove changes to program delivery, candidate experience or the ultimate outcome of producing new teachers ready to teach students of color and students from low-income households?

As we grappled with questions like these, we realized that we lacked a clear definition of what high-quality technical assistance should look like. We looked at research about high-quality technical assistance from both education and other fields. We reviewed research about effective technical assistance in health sciences,² studies on the impact of professional learning communities³ and literature in the program evaluation field about various theories of quantifying the impact of educational improvement efforts.⁴ We were most influenced by the research of T.R. Guskey, who identified five levels of data collection and analysis that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development for educators--beginning with participants' reactions and culminating with student learning outcomes.⁵

We aligned our framework to a vision of high-quality teacher preparation that each of our Centers supports across our teacher preparation provider networks. That vision of high-quality teacher preparation includes a set of quality implementation outcomes (programming that builds competency through practice; commitment to continuous improvement; effective teacher educators; and programming driven by communities and K-12 systems they serve) as well as definitions of impact, sustainability and scale (see Figure 1 at right).



Figure 1: The Four Domains of High Quality Teacher Preparation

◆ The Framework

The framework is comprised of four domains:

- **Quality:** What are we trying to achieve, by when and with whom? The technical assistance provider and its member programs should have a clear plan that explains what each member needs and what each partner--including school districts--are doing to enable improvement in teacher preparation programming. And they all must commit to collecting, analyzing and using data to continuously improve programming and support at every level.
- **Sustainability:** How will we maintain engagement and high-quality programming over time? Without sustainability, technical assistance will be one-shot, and improvements likely short-lived. Technical assistance providers must allocate finances and human

² Le, LT et al. [A Technical Assistance Model for Guiding Service and Systems Change](#). July 2016. Accessed June 6, 2018.

³ Vescio, V., Ross, D., and Adams, A. [A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning](#). January 2007. Accessed July 6, 2018.

⁴ Frye, A., and Hemmer, P. [Program evaluation models and related theories](#). April 2012. Accessed July 6, 2018.

⁵ Guskey, T. [Does It Make a Difference? Evaluating Professional Development](#). March 2002. Accessed July 6, 2018.

capital resources efficiently, and develop systems and structures that help them maintain support throughout the duration of their scope of work.

- **Reach:** How will we work to diffuse innovation and change? Technical assistance should reach beyond network members to generate awareness in the broader field about the solutions, tools and resources that support strong programming and effective teacher candidates.
- **Impact:** How will we measure our own effectiveness? Ultimately, technical assistance should lead to stronger programs and better-prepared teacher candidates. All partners need to assess and hold themselves accountable for implementing programming that has a positive impact and is attributable to the technical assistance (that is, any observed improvements wouldn't have happened even in the absence of external support).

Reaching consensus on the domains of high-quality technical assistance was a good starting point. Next, we needed to decompose the domains into outcomes and indicators that help us better collect evidence of those outcomes. This specificity is what empowers us, as technical assistance providers, to use the framework for our own formative development and improvement. The objectives, outcomes and indicators for the Quality domain of the framework are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Quality Domain of the Technical Assistance Outcomes and Indicators Framework

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS FRAMEWORK		
Quality Domain: Technical assistance supports programs in implementing sustainable, quality programming at scale		
Objectives	Outcomes	Indicators
The TA providers and teacher preparation programs have clearly articulated and agreed upon programming outcomes	Teacher prep programs, school systems and TA providers have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities	Evidence of clearly articulated agreement between school system, teacher prep programs and TA provider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of each organization ▪ Includes a data-sharing agreement
	TA providers obtain a baseline understanding of teacher prep program performance and readiness for technical assistance	Evidence of baseline performance and readiness metrics from multiple sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attitudinal (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups) ▪ Observational (e.g., artifacts, site visit) ▪ Outcome data (e.g., retention rates, placement rates)
	TA providers and teacher prep programs develop a plan for achieving outcomes	Evidence of a clearly articulated individualized plan with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Milestones/measures with timeline ▪ Teacher prep program responsibilities with timeline ▪ TA provider support with timeline
The TA provider uses data to continuously improve its programming and support	TA provider jointly collects data about teacher prep program performance and TA provider performance to shape its support	Evidence that TA provider has shared data collection plan for prep program performance Evidence that TA provider has a data collection plan for TA provider performance
	TA provider jointly analyzes data about teacher prep program performance and TA provider performance to shape its support	Evidence that the TA provider analyzes data about prep program performance Evidence that the TA provider analyzes data about TA provider performance
	TA provider uses data about teacher prep performance and TA provider performance to shape its support	Evidence that TA provider uses and shares data about prep program and TA provider performance to improve provider practices and/or structure Evidence that TA providers differentiate support based on the data

◆ How and Why to Use this Framework

So what will we use this framework for, and what do we hope to gain by sharing it beyond our three organizations? We see four benefits:

1. **Focus on impact.** The framework fills an important gap for organizations like ours, which provide technical assistance or consulting services to teacher preparation programs. Often, we measure the impact of our work by completing the tasks in a work plan or delivering a training to a certain audience, but the framework helps us focus explicitly and intentionally on what matters--*the impact* of our technical assistance on the teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates and students. A lot of organizations, including those outside the teacher preparation field, offer technical assistance or professional development, but not all have figured out the best way to assess the effectiveness of the technical assistance. We are earnestly seeking a deeper understanding of how our technical assistance affects the teacher preparation programs in our networks (and by extension, how we can improve our own efforts), and the framework helps us do this.
2. **Orient partnerships towards change.** Having an explicit definition of high-quality technical assistance situates technical assistance providers and their teacher preparation programs as partners. As Jill Pitner of NCTR explains, the framework enables those partners to “set goals for improvement, collaborate together to participate in program improvement efforts by examining and implementing strategies for improvement, and collect and analyze implementation and impact data to monitor progress towards goals.”

We have already seen the framework and the partnerships it creates lead to changes in practice among both our technical assistance providers and the teacher preparation programs we support. For example, the framework has prompted TeacherSquared to provide additional supports to preparation programs after trainings. TeacherSquared brings programs back together for follow-up meetings to troubleshoot challenges together and share resources they've developed. This enables the Center to monitor implementation of new practices and refine its technical assistance to ensure that future trainings lead to the right changes to practice.

3. **Get clear on evidence.** The framework also helps us better understand how to collect evidence and assess our impact. For example, we spent a significant amount of time discussing the Impact domain of the framework and ways to gather evidence of impact through measures like stakeholder surveys, site visits, implementation toolkits and school and district data. As we become more sophisticated at gathering and analyzing evidence of impact, we'll be better able to design and deliver high-quality technical assistance.
4. **Foster collaboration.** The framework is the byproduct of collaboration among our Centers, and we believe it will foster even more collaboration across the field by providing a common language and definition of high-quality technical assistance. Common language ensures greater alignment between technical assistance providers, teacher preparation programs, funders and other organizations. Perhaps more importantly, the framework helps technical assistance providers like ours share

promising practices with each other and build *the field's* capacity to deliver high-quality supports to teacher preparation programs.

Indeed, in working together to create this framework, we learned that collaboration across Centers can lead to positive outcomes. Having the expertise and perspectives of multiple Centers in the work group made the framework more relevant and applicable to both technical assistance providers and the diverse teacher preparation programs we serve.

Collaboration was essential to the work group's success, but it didn't just happen. Our funder played an important role in fostering collaboration between Centers. As Liam Honigsberg of TeacherSquared explained, "It was easy for us to say 'Our contexts are too different, so there's no need to collaborate on this issue,' but the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's instinct that each of us has something to teach the other was the spark that led us to create the framework." Once convinced, we then had to find the time to do the work together; we met regularly, both virtually and in-person to discuss our work, share information and best practices and build trust.

◆ What's next?

In the spirit of collaboration, we share our thinking with you. Over the next few months, we will continue to refine the framework and disseminate it to others in the field. We hope it will help providers of technical assistance to teacher preparation programs design new technical assistance offerings (or revise existing technical assistance), and funders to make grants to organizations whose technical assistance offerings align with the criteria in the framework.

What do you think? How can the framework help ground your work, accelerate improvement and promote collaboration? Do you think we missed anything important? Does it make sense in your context? We'd love to expand our collaboration and improve the framework with your insights. [Contact us](#) and let us know what you think about the content of the framework and how you think different stakeholders can use it.