PreK-16 Educational Collaboration

Robert Durón, Chair
Pauline A. Dow, Blanca E. Enriquez, Priscilla Foster, Phil Hatch,
John T. Kelley III, Richard O. Martinez, Sr., Clem Mejia, Jr.,
Richard Rhodes, Anna L. Skelton

UTEP Liaisons
Tammie Aragon Campos, Joanne Bogart, Sandra E. Braham

UTEP has spearheaded efforts to establish partnerships across the regional community to develop and implement practices aimed at improving achievement among all students. The PreK-16 Educational Collaboration Committee was charged with investigating and making recommendations on initiatives to ensure that all students can prepare for, enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Areas addressed include: PreK-12 outreach initiatives, curriculum alignment, teacher preparation, EPCC partnerships, technology and professional development.
Introduction

The PreK-16 Educational Collaboration Committee was charged with examining a range of issues associated with the University’s partnerships and collaborations with institutions in the El Paso region serving students from preschool through undergraduate education. The goal of this effort is the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for students entering and graduating from UTEP. The committee reviewed and discussed the University’s collaborations with PreK-16 institutions, data regarding the preparation and achievement of students from their earliest years through university completion, and “best practices” in PreK-16 collaboration at other sites. The committee also prioritized issues that should be addressed during the next decade.

Findings

The strong partnership among UTEP and PreK-16 institutions across the El Paso region has yielded significant benefits for students at all levels. This partnership is built upon a shared vision that all El Paso students should have access to the highest quality education. This vision also guides the work of UTEP faculty in training new teachers and administrators and the University’s outreach efforts, particularly in support of students with the greatest needs. Finally, through the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, the University supports region-wide PreK-16 reform efforts ranging from support for improved classroom instruction to changes in policies designed to support success for all students.

The PreK-16 Committee recognizes both the significant accomplishments of the University in promoting PreK-16 collaboration and the national recognition that effort has received. Building on these accomplishments, the committee recommends that, in preparation for the Centennial, the University should address priorities including improving opportunities for the preparation of entering students; improving the University’s graduation rates, which can be addressed through expanded collaboration with and outreach to educational partners (PreK-16); strengthening teacher and administrator preparation; and enhancing the effective use of technology.
Expanded PreK-16 Participation, Collaboration, and Access

UTEP serves as a national model in PreK-16 participation, collaboration, and access. As a leader in the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, the University has brought together area superintendents, colleagues from the El Paso Community College (EPCC) and the Region 19 Education Service Center, and local business and civic leaders to focus on ensuring high academic standards and achievement throughout the El Paso community.

The University’s partnership with PreK-16 institutions is also represented by outreach programs including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gear-Up, which focus on improving students’ preparation for higher education, and the “Think College Now” Initiative, which supports the engagement of business and community representatives in promoting college preparation and works in conjunction with the Texas higher Education Coordinating Board-sponsored GO Center initiative. Other efforts include the work of UTEP and EPCC in reaching out to students across the community to recruit them to higher education, the shared articulation agreement between the institutions, and efforts to provide joint preparation for placement examinations. The University also shares data with area school districts, most notably through the high school profiles addressing students’ participation and success at UTEP.

Despite these shared successes in PreK-16 collaboration, there remain significant challenges to be addressed. Among the most important are the continued need for improved preparation for postsecondary education, as reflected in higher SAT/ACT and placement scores; better communication among UTEP faculty/staff and parents regarding the University’s outreach efforts; and improved facilitation and streamlining of the enrollment process at UTEP through collaboration with high schools and EPCC. Expansion of University outreach efforts could also facilitate increased participation.

The following recommendations of the PreK-16 Committee address priorities and opportunities for promoting enhanced PreK-16 participation, collaboration, and access, with the goal of ensuring the high academic achievement of all students in the El Paso area. The committee further recommends that the University define the area(s) for which it wants to be most known and recognized. The committee’s recommendations are that the University:

- Focus on and showcase “Access and Excellence” PreK through 16, with an emphasis on increasing opportunities for students to attend college while ensuring rigor in the curriculum.
- Increase attention to the community’s investment in students through programs such as “Think College Now,” led by the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence to promote early preparation for postsecondary education.
- Promote stronger relationships between UTEP and high school counselors to prepare students for higher education.
- Increase collaboration with area school districts to share facilities—particularly in the rapidly growing eastern portion of the County—for teacher preparation and professional development and the expansion of outreach initiatives.
- Continue and deepen the partnership with EPCC to promote dual credit and shared recruitment, admissions, and exchange of data.
- Partner with EPCC in outreach to parents of children enrolled in Head Start. Speaking to parents early about postsecondary education can have a tremendous impact on the future of their children. In 12 to 15 years, children currently in Head Start may become UTEP students.
- Collaborate with EPCC and area districts to establish shared parent education programs that promote attainment of GED and bachelor’s degrees.
- Set targets and collect and report data on key educational transition points (e.g., preschool enrollments, 8th grade enrollments relative to high school graduates, EPCC graduates, and UTEP graduates with undergraduate and graduate degrees).
- Work with area school districts to enhance the role of counselors.

Teacher and Administrator Preparation and Retention

For more than seven decades, UTEP has been the key provider of teacher and administrator preparation across the El Paso region. This extensive history and the University’s partnerships with area school districts have resulted in strong collaboration and cooperation in producing the teachers needed to meet the region’s demands. The University’s success in training teachers who are bilingual, for example, has served the needs of the region and beyond.

The benefits of the University’s partnership with area
districts have extended beyond meeting the region’s demand for teachers. Innovative approaches to teacher training carried out through greater attention to the content knowledge and pedagogical skills of new teachers have not gone unnoticed by other teacher educators throughout the nation. Most recently, the University was one of only eleven institutions in the U.S. selected to participate in the Carnegie Corporation’s Teachers for a New Era program. Its goal is to expand and deepen connections between arts and science faculty and teacher education and build on the clinical approach first implemented in 1994 and required for all teacher candidates in 1996. This clinical approach places pre-service teachers in classrooms for periods exceeding traditional student-teacher requirements and brings faculty-led teacher preparation instruction from the university to the school site. Support for teacher preparation also extends to the University’s partnership with the El Paso Community College, which now offers a fully transferable associates’ degree in Teacher Education. In addition to preparing teachers to meet the growing needs of the community, the University has developed a strong program in administrator preparation. Increasing numbers of faculty and new leadership in the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations provide an opportunity to strengthen a program that trains significant numbers of school and district administrators through master’s and doctoral programs.

Along with the accomplishments of UTEP’s teacher and administrator preparation efforts come challenges and opportunities to be addressed in the coming decade. In addition to building on the existing clinical approaches and further integrating arts and science content in the pre-service teacher curriculum, the University must address the challenges faced by students in completing teacher preparation programs, often as a result of scheduling concerns. Developing a stronger focus on clinical practice and strengthening content and pedagogical knowledge also require expanded research and development in the area of teacher preparation. While the expansion of research funding is important, limited discretionary funding may curtail faculty opportunities to build research and development programs focused on improved teacher and administrator preparation. Finally, incentives for teachers to participate in master’s programs are limited and must be addressed.

The following recommendations of the PreK-16 Committee address priorities and opportunities for recruiting, training, and sustaining high quality teachers and administrators who will support the educational attainment of students throughout the El Paso region and beyond. The University should:

- Promote the recruitment of teacher education candidates at UTEP through outreach efforts designed to recognize teaching as a valued profession.
- Work with area school districts to coordinate and expand induction and mentoring programs focused on teacher retention. This may include the expansion of professional development opportunities that provide graduate credit, as well as the expanded collaboration among UTEP faculty and school district administrators and teachers in providing content area and leadership support to new teachers and their school colleagues.
- Collaborate with area districts to establish Professional Development Schools on school sites, which could serve as remote facilities for UTEP program offerings and research.
- Work with school districts to design meaningful incentives for teachers to work toward master’s degrees.
- Expand partnerships with districts through mutually beneficial collaborative research at school sites and shared sponsorship of a speakers’ series focused on research findings of relevance to teachers and their school or district colleagues.
- Continue to build on the partnership established with EPCC through shared articulation agreements regarding the preparation of pre-service teachers.
- Promote and market the bilingual environment in the El Paso area as an opportunity to recruit and prepare bilingual teachers from across Texas and the nation.
- Study and define characteristics of a “new generation” of school principals—with a focus on leadership, motivational skills, and a broad view of educational issues—and incorporate lessons into the training of administrators in partnership with school districts through expanded clinical practice.
- Provide expanded leadership training for school principals through partnerships with businesses that support school leaders in promoting motivation and teamwork.
• Cooperate with area school districts in developing three- to five-year targets in the area of teacher and administrator preparation and retention.
• Solicit business community input on the needs of graduates of teacher preparation programs.
• Establish a doctoral program to engage area teachers and administrators in research and practice on characteristics of high quality teaching.

Effective Use of Technology to Promote Opportunities for Students—PreK-16

The PreK-16 Educational Collaboration Committee recognizes that the effective use of technology will be critical in the University’s efforts to promote PreK-16 collaboration in this new century. Connectivity among UTEP and other area educational institutions (PreK-16) already exists through the Orion Ring, Internet2, and broadband; the effective use of this connectivity will be critical, however. Currently, for example, UTEP and EPCC use the same student records system; and technology is used to share information and resources associated with curriculum and other priorities.

Concerns do, however, remain regarding the access to technology that many local students have—particularly as innovations and subsequent costs increase. Thus UTEP should lead the development of a coordinated PreK-16 strategy for the use of technology across PreK-16 education in the El Paso area. The following recommendations of the PreK-16 Educational Collaboration Committee address priorities and opportunities for expanding and improving the use of technology to promote PreK-16 collaboration. PreK-16 partners should:

• Increase and improve access to public school records through the electronic transfer of student records and transcripts, which is not currently possible.
• Establish shared data systems to track student records PreK-16 to measure both aggregate improvements in achievement and the impact of support provided through PreK-16 initiatives.
• Partner with business and industry to identify and develop strategies for more effectively using technology PreK-16.
• Promote universal participation (UTEP, EPCC, area districts) in the Orion network.
• Promote the “Technology Corridor,” to include area educational institutions, Fort Bliss, Biggs Field, White Sands Missile Range, and Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories.
• Continue to expand the use of technology to promote improved communication with students and enhanced distance learning programs.

General Committee Thoughts

In addition to the preceding recommendations, committee members shared a period of debriefing during which they offered their thoughts on the “big picture.”

UTEP needs to “clearly define” what it wants to be the “best” in the world at, and all resources must flow into that idea. There should be a branding of key programs.

The Principal is the most important position on a school campus—a concept that must be emphasized when it comes to creating long-term change. We may be able to incorporate more effective models of administrative preparation by partnering with business. Indeed, we must determine how to best create an administrative culture in our schools that promotes motivation and teamwork.

Access may be our “Big Idea,” and UTEP should showcase its expertise in providing access. Access and Excellence should be meshed from grades PreK-16. Since Excellence is the other half of the big idea, we need to increase rigor throughout the PreK-16 pipeline while increasing opportunity. We must foster research on access and excellence.

We need to establish a “community education” account that draws on the analogy of deposits and credits (what we put in is what we can expect to get out—long-term investments pay out over time).

There must be an “all for one” mentality among UTEP, EPCC, and the public schools, with students as the focus. Perhaps another education summit might address this collaboration.

Teachers aren’t trained to be managers; they learn by default. This is a detriment to our educational leader pipeline.

In 12 to 15 years, children currently in Head Start may become UTEP students.