

# Sustaining Quality Coaching of Pre- and In-Service Teachers During a Teacher Shortage

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## Abstract

*During teacher shortages, many school districts petitioned the Texas Education Agency for waivers to hire classroom teachers who are not fully certified. However, the quality of teachers must be considered during this time. This study considers the Texas Instructional Leadership (TIL) coaching model not only to coach pre-service teachers during preparation in Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) but also using this model to support personnel hired without certification collaborating with EPPs to recruit potential candidates into programs. This article will consider the impact and sustainability of implementing the TIL coaching model in one EPP as an exemplar to ensure teacher quality.*

Keywords: Texas Instructional Leadership, coaching model, teacher preparation, teacher shortage

In a day and age where there are not enough teachers to meet the needs of every classroom, school districts are looking for creative solutions to hire educators each academic year. Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and school districts alike are seeking unique solutions to the challenges of having enough teachers to fill every classroom but also to ensure each classroom contains a highly-qualified teacher. The largest school district in the state of Texas, Houston ISD, requested a waiver from TEA for the 2023-2024 academic year to be able to hire classroom teachers without certification due to the shortage of certified teachers in the state (American School & University, 2023). Additionally, many rural school districts have sought this same waiver since 2021 due to the lack of certified teacher applicants to their districts after the COVID-19 Pandemic when the shortage of teachers became dire (Garcia & Clifton, 2022). The Texas Education Agency defines a highly-qualified teacher as an educator who at minimum has earned a Bachelor's degree, is fully certified by the state of Texas, and has shown mastery in each of the academic subjects that the teacher teaches (TEA Guidance Document, 2015).

In an essay excerpted from "The Great School Rethink" published by Harvard Education Press, Frederick

Hess (2023) posited a theory that school reform should begin with more flexibility beginning with hiring competent and experienced personnel who may not hold a teaching certification. Hess's position is that veteran engineers, journalists, or military members have much to offer school classrooms and that the current requirements of teacher certification make it difficult to change careers into the teaching field. Hess cites research by Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2007) noting that their research found no significant performance difference between certified and uncertified teachers in the classroom. Hess also cites The Aspen Institute data finding that only 7% of school superintendents and 13% of school principals believe that certification ensures a quality teacher who will be effective in the classroom (The Aspen Institute, 2021).

With the unique challenges of a teacher shortage and more and more districts filing waivers to hire teachers who are not certified and, in many instances, do not yet hold a Bachelor's degree, how do EPPs and school districts ensure that the teachers who are in the classrooms are high-quality and use best practices when instructing students? Based upon the notion that non-certified educators would be in classrooms before completing or even entering EPPs, West Texas A&M University's (WTAMU) decided to shift to a

coaching model of feedback for candidates to best support them to be “Day 1 Ready” to independently teach upon issuance of their standard certification. With the support of Raise Your Hand Texas (RYHT) and Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity initiatives, WTAMU’s EPP implemented the Texas Instructional Leadership (TIL) coaching model to train field supervisors to provide actionable steps for immediate improvement in candidates’ teaching understanding that the EPP could partner with the Educational Service Center (ESC) in Region 16 as well as school districts who were already implementing the TIL coaching model to not only improve teacher effectiveness but also to recruit uncertified educators into an EPP for standard and full certification.

WTAMU formed a collaborative committee to focus on candidate field experiences with Local Education Agency (LEA) district partner schools. This committee worked on a variety of initiatives and included various constituents to provide multiple voices for consideration. One major accomplishment of this group was to transform field supervisor training so that they were able to move to a coaching model to provide candidate written feedback on formal observations. Two members of this committee were employees of the Region 16 ESC and had extensive training and expertise of the TIL model. They proposed that WTAMU’s EPP adopt the TIL model and provide professional development and calibration to the field supervisors to not only improve written feedback to candidates but also to improve the coaching of candidates for immediate improvement of their teaching in the classroom.

While this initiative initially focused on improvement of feedback and coaching, it supported candidates and LEAs simultaneously. Candidates were provided “bite-sized” actionable steps of how to immediately implement research-based teaching strategies and classroom management techniques that could be mastered within one week, which allowed them to show immediate improvement in the classroom. This affected EC-12 student learning and growth as students in the classrooms were not waiting extended periods of time for the candidate teaching the class to be able to teach effectively. LEAs were also affected as several of WTAMU’s immediate partners for placement were also in various stages of TIL implementation. This is a significant point of impact as WTAMU graduates will enter school districts as first year

teachers speaking the same language and understanding the same coaching concepts from the university to the LEA. Additionally, uncertified teachers in the LEA received the same type of coaching from the school district partner. The ultimate objective of this initiative was to produce a more effective teacher on Day 1 to impact EC-12 student growth immediately, and this began with improving feedback and coaching from the university field supervisor to the candidate while working with partnering LEAs engaged in the same TIL coaching model. Finally, WTAMU then scaffolded the TIL framework throughout the arc of the curriculum in EPP training coursework so that candidates understand the teaching strategies, all Teacher Educators are using the same vocabulary to teach, and candidates are experiencing cohesion from coursework to field-based experiences to their first teaching positions in district partner schools.

### Literature Review

Texas Instructional Leadership is based on the training models of Relay Graduate School of Education (2023), Teaching Trust (2023), New Leaders (2023), and Uncommon Schools (2023). The research is based on Paul Bambrick Santoyo’s work in *Get Better Faster* (2016), *Leverage Leadership 2.0* (2012), *Driven by Data 2.0* (2010), and *A Principal Manager’s Guide to Leverage Leadership 2.0* (2018). In a ranking of all 8,700 public schools across Texas in “Meets Grade Level” performance on standardized STAAR assessments, nearly 43% of schools led by Teaching Trust leaders appear in the top decile for student growth over time. In fall of 2018, Teaching Trust expanded its partnership with TEA to build capacity of Education Service Centers across the state. The TIL model is built upon data-driven instruction, which is a “highly effective, research-based training that guides teachers and administrators to spend less time teaching their students what they already know and more time on what their students need” (Texas Instructional Leadership, 2021). The TIL Model encompasses three components: face-to-face professional development, implementation support, and one-on-one coaching.

A review of the literature tells the story of “why traditional professional development fails, what prompted the development of the model of instructional coaching, various forms of coaching, and the research conducted on instructional coaching” (Knight, 2007, p. 1). Knight (2007)

explained the failure of traditional professional development in this way: “With their magnifying glasses focused on instructional practices, many school leaders are discovering that traditional training methods simply do not get the job done and [t]he unprecedented interest in instructional improvement has heightened decision makers’ interest in effective professional development practices” (p. 1). According to Bryan K. Butler (in Wink, 2017), supporting teachers’ professional learning and development must be “varied, intentional, inclusive, collaborative, and nonthreatening” (p. xiii). Wink also posed interesting questions about the quality of teachers to consider: “1. Why are we here and what is our mission? 2. What role do teachers play in achieving that mission? 3. How do we make *all* teachers successful?” (Wink, 2017, p. xiv).

The literature touting traditional models of professional development for teachers posited that only the “super-levers” of successful schools included “data-driven instruction and student culture” with “observation and feedback” as arguably the most effective levers to improved instruction (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012, p. 59). In *Get Better Faster*, Bambrick-Santoyo (2016) focused on first-year teacher development because “a first-year teacher is a professional in action, doing the urgent work of teaching” (p. 8). Although it may be the first year for the teacher to teach, it is important to remember “it’s the students’ *only* year to learn the content” (2016, p. 8). “Giving quality guidance to new teachers is critical to the development not only of the students but also of the new teachers themselves... In fact, coaching may be one of the most important factors that determines both how successful a teacher’s career is and whether the teacher chooses to continue along that career path at all” (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2016, p. 9).

Highlighted by the recent 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic, the need for public schools to improve the efficacy of educators and of instruction in the classroom has never been greater today than at any other time in the history of American education. With both synchronous and asynchronous instruction as an ever-evolving mode of instructional delivery during this challenging time, administrators, teachers, parents, and students alike have all felt the ensuing pressure of this need. If we truly believe that teaching and learning are the most important aspects of education, then EPPs must carefully study the best instructional practices that train pre-service teachers to

become the most effective educators possible that are “Day 1 Ready” to teach and to inspire students to learn. There truly is no greater need in our schools today.

### **Innovative Coaching Model to Improve New Teacher Performance**

In an innovative implementation of the TIL coaching model, field supervisors provided written feedback to candidates and coached actionable steps during candidate observations. The goal of this innovative initiative was to improve the quality of written feedback to pre-service teacher candidates and implement a coaching model so that candidates were able to understand not only what to improve but also be provided with specific action steps of how to improve immediately and illustrate mastery of the action step within one week. This in turn led to the goal of impacting EC-12 student growth immediately. West Texas A&M University’s ultimate programmatic goal was to certify educators who are “Day 1 Ready” to effectively and independently teach and make a significant impact on EC-12 student learning and growth. To achieve this programmatic goal, WTAMU’s EPP focused on ways to provide high-quality written feedback and to implement a coaching model of field supervision to accelerate their growth and ensure significant and lasting change.

To implement the TIL coaching model, the Field-Experience Collaborative Committee met multiple times to focus on how to transform candidate feedback from the perspective of a cheerleader to that of a coach. While WTAMU field supervisors have traditionally done exceptional jobs providing feedback and supporting candidate growth, the TPI-US inspection report led the EPP to understand that more could be done to help candidates grow as educators more quickly. The EPP realized that in some cases the feedback was either not written down but provided orally during the post-coaching conference, or so much feedback was given that the candidate was overwhelmed and did not understand how to implement it.

Working with Region 16 ESC partners to understand the TIL model, the EPP quickly realized this model was the direction to best support candidate growth and to make the most significant impact on EC-12 student learning. The EPP began by contacting Mr. Rene Cano and Mrs. Brenda Foster from Region 16 ESC to modify the TIL professional

development to fit the coaching needs of a field supervisor coaching a Clinical Teacher or Intern. The same core values were included, but the logistics of a university field-supervisor observing and coaching candidates from the EPP were different than those of an educational leader providing coaching to a classroom teacher in the LEA.

In collaboration, the Director of Teacher Preparation and the Department Head identified all field supervisors to be included in the first cohort of this training as well as key faculty who worked with curriculum, and graduate faculty who were field supervisors for non-teacher class certificates to engage in the TIL training. This group engaged in thirteen days of professional development and calibrations concerning the TIL coaching model. Professional development days included direct teaching of the TIL strategies, modeling, rehearsal, and implementation. As Brenda Foster has stated, “You cannot do what you have not practiced,” so it was important for WTAMU’s faculty and field supervisors to practice these steps, strategies, and modeling, so they would be able to illustrate these for candidates. Additionally, several of the training dates were used to go into partnering LEA schools to practice walk-through observations and then meet with peers to calibrate about the highest leverage action on which to coach each candidate. Finally, the group would meet together and practice writing full coaching plans based on the TIL model and receive guidance and feedback from the Region 16 ESC experts to hone these skills.

Faculty then used their learning from this training to redesign courses and curriculum in the Summer of 2021. Teaching strategies, TIL language, and classroom management techniques were embedded throughout strategic training courses so that candidates would begin receiving this training before they reached Clinical Teaching to have a firmer understanding of the strategies and techniques.

The Educational Leadership department also engaged in this TIL training so that future principals would understand the coaching model, and as they take administrative positions, they will use the TIL coaching model to coach classroom teachers both certified and non-certified due to hiring needs. This is a cyclical model that embeds training from coursework to field experience and beyond. LEA partners receive both principals as

instructional leaders and classroom teachers who understand the teaching strategies and how the coaching model works for immediate improvement and growth within the classroom to impact EC-12 students.

### **Success and Scale**

Progress monitoring was strongly considered from the inception of implementation, and this is actually built into the TIL professional development model as well. The Region 16 trainers ensured progress monitoring by having the participants practice the concepts by modeling to their peers in the professional development and trainings. Additionally, multiple days of calibration were built into the TIL training model to monitor progress and ensure continuous improvement. Three LEA district partners Amarillo ISD, Canyon ISD, and Sunray ISD allowed TIL Cohort 1 to practice walk-through observations in their classrooms. The participants then had time to calibrate on highest leverage action steps and receive coaching on their coaching plans from the trainers.

Additionally, the TIL trainers assisted in the creation of an evaluative tool to rate the quality of written feedback. Feedback was then pulled from candidate files pre, during, and post TIL implementation, and ratings were conducted to illustrate growth in the quality of written feedback. Finally, a second cohort was developed to engage all faculty in this training and ensure that they have embedded the principles from TIL into the coursework. A second phase of training and coaching was implemented for Cohort 1 to continue the progress monitoring and improvement of coaching techniques.

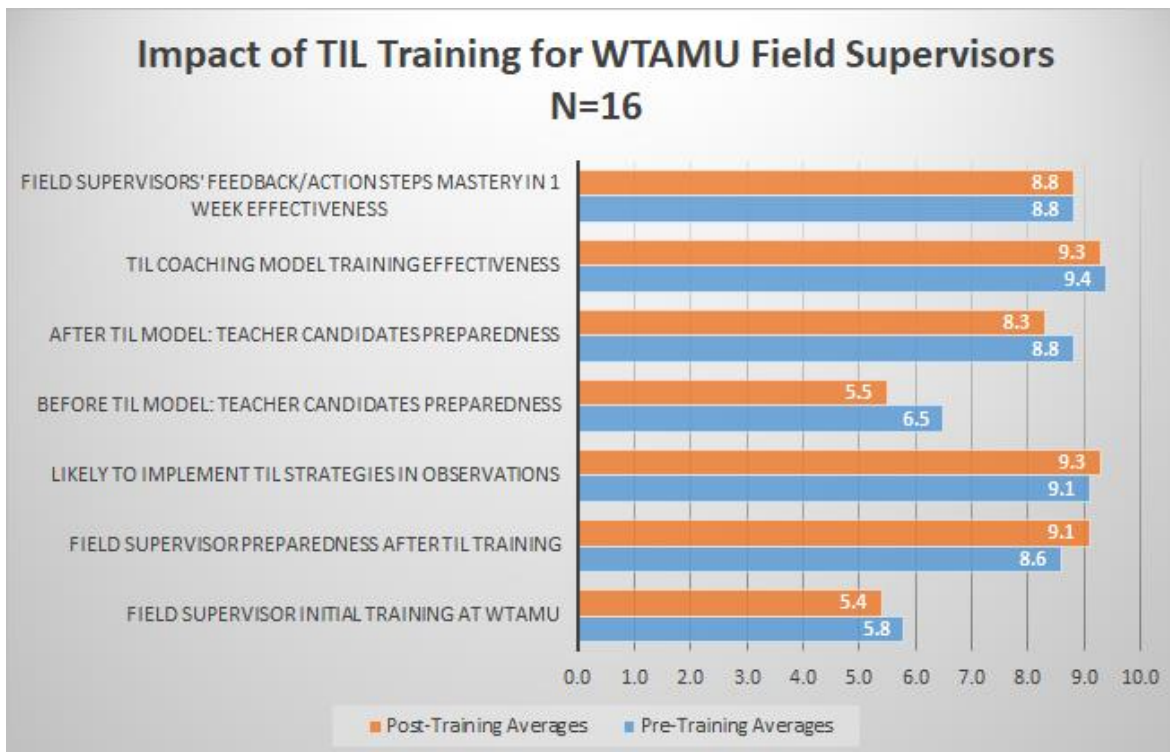
### **Data-based Outcomes**

The data collected illustrated three areas of growth due to the implementation of the TIL coaching model. These areas included the following:

- Improvement of the quality of written feedback provided from field supervisors to candidates
- Accelerated growth in candidate’s ability to teach effectively and independently
- Understanding of the coaching model and how to implement this for continuous improvement

## Quantitative Data

### Field Supervisor Pre and Post Survey Data



The most significant impact shown in the pre and post surveys of field supervisors was growth in candidates' preparedness to teach and field supervisors' preparedness to coach. Field supervisors also noted a significant growth in ability and willingness to implement these research-based, best-practice strategies. Additionally, this also illustrated to field supervisors that they had an inflated sense of ability prior to the training, and the TIL training assisted them in understanding their espoused readiness to coach and prepare pre-service teachers.

### Analysis of Written Feedback

Two experts in the field of TIL training assisted WTAMU researchers in the creation of an evaluative tool to rate the quality of written feedback. This rubric was based on quality indicators from TIL training as well as research from Relay Graduate School of Education Level II Assessment Rubric: See It, Name It, Do It Feedback (Relay Graduate School of Education, 2023). One hundred artifacts were included in the sample of field supervisor observations and written feedback. All field supervisors who conducted observations in the chosen semesters were

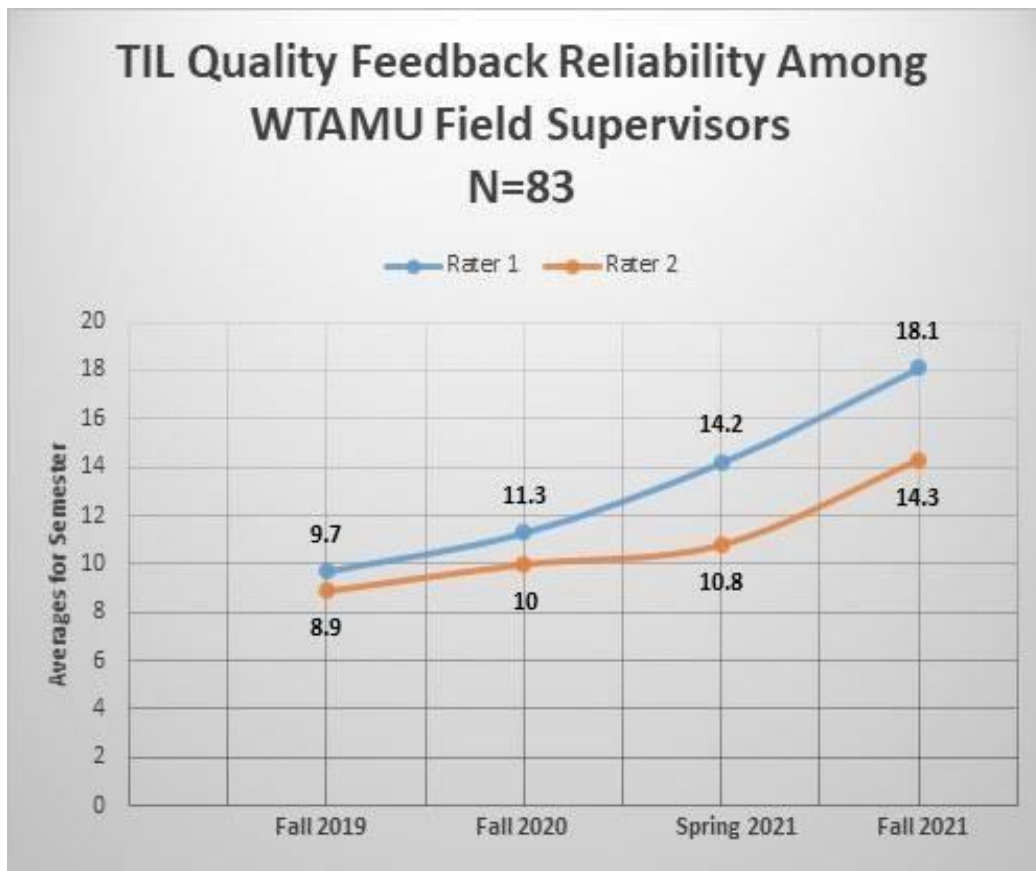
included to produce a robust and random sample of feedback provided to candidates. Samples were included from Fall 2019 semester, Fall 2020 semester, Spring 2021 semester, and Fall 2021 semester. Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 were pre-TIL implementation. Spring 2020 was excluded due to unusual circumstances during that semester with the COVID-19 Pandemic and global lockdowns. The researchers did not find that a sample from that semester would be reliable data; therefore, it was excluded. Spring 2021 was the beginning implementation of TIL training and Fall 2021 the field supervisors completed the TIL professional development.

To establish inter-rater reliability, both reviewers independently rated each artifact of written feedback and scored the feedback using the WTAMU Field Supervisor Written Feedback Rubric. Samples were scored on an evaluation sheet for each of the criterion, and an overall score was given per artifact. The researchers were able to establish 82% accuracy between the ratings. As established in the methodology (McHugh, 2012), 80% or greater would indicate reliability among the raters. While there were

variances in the scores on each artifact, the raters consistently scored 82% of the artifacts within 0-4 points according to the WTAMU Field Supervisor Written Feedback Rubric. This level of consistency indicated that

the tool was reliable for evaluating the quality and impact of field supervisor written feedback to pre-service teacher candidates.

### TIL Quality of Feedback: Fall 2019—Fall 2021



Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 review of data do not show significant growth as these semesters were pre-TIL implementation. Spring 2021 indicates some growth in quality of feedback; however, these supervisions took place in the very early stages of TIL professional development. Fall 2021 does indicate growth; however, it is important to note that the participants were still engaged in TIL training, professional development, and calibrations, so the field supervisors were still learning during this semester as well. The EPP is currently in the process of evaluating 2022-2023 data and will continue to evaluate written feedback each semester with the expectation of continued growth. Additionally, the EPP realized that the observation tool used for candidate feedback needed to be revised to incorporate learning from the TIL training and to prompt

field supervisors to include specific action steps with “the what” and “the how” on the feedback to candidates. This observation tool was revised in the Fall 2021 semester and was implemented in Spring 2022 based upon this data.

### Qualitative Data

#### *Field Supervisors*

While field supervisors believed that they were providing quality coaching and instruction to help prepare candidates to be ready to independently teach, they soon realized that the TIL model greatly improved their ability to provide specific written feedback to candidates that they were able to implement immediately to see improvement. At some point in the professional development, each of the

participants noted, “I wish I would have known this when I was teaching in the classroom because I could have been an even stronger teacher for my students.” Additionally, in a focus group of field supervisors after the final TIL training, one field supervisor stated,

I thought I was doing a great job before, and I think I did a good job, and candidates improved, but I didn’t know what I didn’t know. Now that I have been through this training, I realize how much more impactful I can be to the candidates I observe as their coach. I did not realize I had become their cheerleader, and I was not giving them what they needed to make significant and rapid growth (Garcia & Clifton, 2022).

Several other field supervisors agreed with this statement and echoed similar sentiments. All participants indicated that this was one of the most impactful professional developments/ trainings they had attended in their careers.

### *Candidates*

Candidates no longer attempted to put on a show for their field supervisors. This was most telling when multiple candidates began asking field supervisors to observe their most challenging content areas and/or courses. They were no longer attempting to make perfect scores on their observations, but they noticed the impact of the coaching model and requested support in the areas they needed. The importance of this shift should not be minimized as this is one of the most impactful areas of growth experienced by both candidates and field supervisors as they were able to care less about the scoring in each domain but focused on true growth and improvement in areas of need.

One candidate stated,

I have really enjoyed using the new coaching model that WT has implemented into their clinical teaching program. I have been fortunate to be able to be taught under this new method and have found it to be very helpful. I have really liked the specificity of the coaching model because instead of giving broad criticism, our field supervisors are able to give specific goals to work on and then leave us the steps to use to be successful in achieving these goals. This model helps to clarify exactly what you need to work on and gives you small attainable steps to do it (Garcia & Clifton, 2022).

### *Researchers*

In observation of the participants during the implementation of the TIL Coaching Model, the

researchers noted a possible effect of Overconfidence Bias (APS, 2018) in their first ratings of their proficiency to provide effective feedback. However, in the observations of the participants, the researchers noted that field supervisors provided a great deal of instruction verbally, but the written comments on the required observation tool did not match the verbal instruction. This was also evidenced in the TPI-US report provided to West Texas A&M University’s EPP by initiatives with Raise Your Hand Texas. Based on the feedback in this report, WTAMU’s EPP found it necessary to change the quality of written feedback. Additionally, while field supervisors wrote down many comments on practices candidates needed to improve upon, they did not address how the candidates could make these changes, how the candidates should provide evidence of these changes, nor did they model what this might look like to the candidates. During implementation of the TIL Coaching Model, researchers noted vast improvement in the written feedback as evidenced in the quantitative data; moreover, specific actions steps were being written down for candidates with steps on how to implement these changes. Field supervisors modeled for candidates how these strategies would look; however, they were reluctant to make the candidates practice before going back into the classroom. This action indicated more professional development and training were needed on that aspect of the model.

### **Sustainability and Long-Term Impact**

WTAMU plans to ensure sustainability of this innovative practice in several significant ways. First, as this initial cohort of trained supervisors and faculty found after engaging in the training, multiple phases of training and practice with calibration are necessary. In a similar fashion to the TIL trainers observing district administrators as they coach and receive feedback and coaching from their trainers, Cohort 1 needed this ongoing support, coaching, and calibration as well. WTAMU’s EPP has requested that the trainers from ESC Region 16 continue coaching and supporting them. In Phase 2, Sunray ISD allowed WTAMU’s Cohort 1 to visit their Teacher Academy Candidates and conduct observations. WTAMU field supervisors from Cohort 1 spent time writing full coaching plans and delivering these to Sunray ISD Teacher Academy Candidates. During this time, the trainers from Region 16 observed the coaching plans and delivery of the coaching.

After candidates received their coaching plans and action steps, the trainers then coached the field supervisors on their coaching methods and provided them action steps to implement in their coaching. This helped to ensure fidelity of implementation. Phase 2 continued in this manner in other district partner classrooms throughout the 2022-2023 academic year. Additionally, Cohort 1 engaged in continued calibration at least twice each semester to ensure inter-rater reliability.

WTAMU created and initiated Cohort 2 comprised of all other Teacher Educators in the Department of Education for the 2022-2023 academic year. This second cohort engaged in the same professional development, implementation of support, and one-on-one coaching as Cohort 1 did previously. This helped to ensure that the TIL teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and common language were scaffolded throughout the arc of the program at WTAMU and embedded these elements into the curriculum. This too supports continuous improvement initiatives within the EPP and the sustainability of this innovative method as the framework and language of TIL are incorporated throughout all aspects of a candidate's training.

While the implementation of the TIL Coaching Model is still fairly new, the long-term impact of this implementation is illustrated in the data presented and in the powerful narratives provided by various stakeholders. As Dr. Darryl Flusche from Canyon ISD stated, this initiative is impactful because the university EPP is preparing candidates throughout the arc of the program from coursework to field experience and into their classrooms as Clinical and First Year teachers. They understand the culture of coaching and the common language being used. This will allow full and seamless integration from EPP to LEA, which will impact EC-12 student learning and growth (Garcia & Clifton, 2022). Additionally, WTAMU's EPP has a strategic plan to continue the TIL implementation to ensure that all faculty

teaching in the EPP have training in TIL and that continuous calibration and coaching are built into the program with the continued partnership and support of Region 16 ESC. This will ensure the longevity and sustainability of this innovative initiative.

### Conclusions

As the data presented indicates, the implementation of the TIL Coaching Model was highly effective. Initially, field supervisors believed they were providing high-quality feedback to candidates; however, they were unsure why candidates were not showing immediate and lasting growth within the classroom. After, implementation of the TIL training, field supervisors realized that they had provided a great deal of feedback; however, they were acting in the role of a "cheerleader" instead of a "coach." This shift in mindset allowed them to effectively coach candidates and not only provide "the what" on improvement strategies but also "the how" in specific, "bite-sized," actionable steps. Candidates no longer invited field supervisors to visit their strongest classes, but they began asking their field supervisors to come observe their most challenging content areas and classes of students as they realized the coaching that they received made significant impacts on their teaching and their students. No longer did they attempt to highlight their strengths, but they sought coaching on areas they knew needed to improve. This created a more trusting and positive relationship and allowed for candidate growth that impacted EC-12 student growth very quickly. The EPP did not have to wait until the end of the semester to see growth in a candidate, but it was evident after the first coaching session. Additionally, LEA district partners have spoken about the positive impact this initiative has created due to the training and university teaching on these concepts from coursework through field-based experience; then it transfers into the classroom as the candidates accept first teaching positions as "Day 1 Ready" educators who are able to effectively and independently teach.



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