

# Educator Preparation Programs Acknowledge Key Transformations Leading to Recognition in ELAR First-Time Pass Rates

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## Abstract

*In spring 2023, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) commended eight Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) for their exceptional performance, notably achieving high first-time pass rates in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR). Six of these programs have collaborated to share insights on program adjustments, coursework revisions, and additional resources that contributed to their success. This article examines transformative changes within these six programs and discusses common trends among the featured programs. By identifying and leveraging these patterns, other EPPs can enhance collaboration, inform strategic decisions, and maximize effectiveness, ultimately improving educational outcomes.*

Keywords: *teacher certification, English Language Arts and Reading, Educator Preparation Programs*

**T**exas has a tradition of utilizing assessments to gauge knowledge, and the journey toward becoming a teacher in the Lone Star State adheres to that practice. As mandated by the State, aspiring teachers must successfully pass the pedagogy and professional responsibility (PPR) exam, along with a content exam tailored to their specific area of expertise (SBEC, 2022). Furthermore, House Bill 3, enacted during the 86th Texas Legislature, introduced an additional requirement for teacher candidates instructing students in grades Pre-K-6. The stipulation necessitates proficiency in the science of teaching reading (STR) through a newly introduced, standalone certification exam (TEA, 2022c). This legislative order not only highlights the state's commitment to elevating literacy instruction but also places a significant responsibility on educator preparation programs (EPPs) to adapt their curricula to effectively

equip teacher candidates for success in the classroom and on the STR certification exam.

The STR exam requirement took effect on January 1, 2021, leading to significant changes in the knowledge and skills expected from teacher candidates. Major shifts include a focus on Structured Literacy (SL) and reading research, the application of theoretical models such as Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001) and The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), and proficiency in using assessment data to design individualized instruction reflective of reading research. New practices and materials introduced under the SL framework, like sound walls, heart words, direct teacher-student instruction, and decodable texts, mark a departure from the traditional Balanced Literacy practices that have largely been taught in EPPs. EPPs have had to realign literacy coursework to the Texas STR competencies, curate

additional resources, revisit program policies and practices, and incorporate benchmark assessments and formative assignments reflective of the Texas STR competencies.

In the wake of these significant changes, in the spring of 2023, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) recognized eight EPPs for their rigorous and robust preparation, specifically citing high first-time pass rates in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) (TEA, 2022b). These EPPs were acknowledged for surpassing the Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP) annual performance standards. Acknowledging the hurdles faced by EPPs in adjusting their programs, six out of the eight recognized programs have joined forces to disseminate essential insights into the pivotal shifts within their programs, revisions to coursework, and additional resources that have contributed to their notable successes. This article delves into the essential transformations within the six highlighted programs, organized by university names. Subsequently, a discussion of shared shifts across the six featured programs is presented so they can better leverage the identified patterns and insights to inform strategic decision-making, enhance collaboration, and optimize resource allocation, thereby maximizing the overall effectiveness and impact of EPPs.

**The Programs**

The recognized programs (TEA, 2022a) were Abilene Christian University, Baylor University, East Texas Baptist University, Hardin-Simmons University, Prairie View A&M University, Region 07 Education Service Center, University of the Incarnate Word, and University of Texas-Dallas. In the summer of 2022, faculty members from six of the eight recognized programs convened to deliberate on the crucial shifts they identified as instrumental in achieving their impressive pass rates. The ensuing subsections delve into a detailed exploration of these key shifts, while Table 1 summarizes the common key shifts among the programs.

**Table 1**

*Key Shifts Among the Six Programs*

<b>Key Shifts</b>	<b>Description</b>
Alignment with State Standards	Programs adapted their EPPs to meet TexES STR certification exam requirements, focusing on evidence-based literacy instruction.
Integration of Competencies	Programs integrated STR competencies into their curriculum to ensure teacher candidates are proficient in research-based literacy practices.
Exam Readiness Strategies	Emphasis on strategic preparation, including practice questions, diagnostic exams, tutoring sessions, and exam format mirroring, aimed at boosting pass rates and readiness.
Data-Driven Decision Making	Programs implemented routine data meetings to monitor student progress and refine curricular offerings based on student needs and outcomes.
Mock Constructed Response Practice	Integration of mock exam scenarios served to familiarize candidates with the constructed response format, providing targeted feedback to enhance writing skills and competency understanding.

***Abilene Christian University***

Literacy instruction at Abilene Christian University is the cornerstone of our elementary education program. Literacy drives instruction in all classrooms and content

areas. For this reason, there are six courses in our elementary education literacy sequence. These courses include the following: *Children's Literature, Early Language and Literacy, Foundations of Reading, Reading Assessment and Instruction, The Reading and Writing Connection, and Problems in Reading*. The team of professors teaching these courses works diligently to make sure that the courses spiral in curriculum and move through the gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) in a way that makes sense for undergraduate students. In the first course in the sequence, *Children's Literature*, the focus is on exposing the youngest students in the School of Education to quality literature and to model best practices in literacy instruction in the university classroom. Using diverse, quality children's literature, the professor in this course models through the instruction best practices in literacy instruction. Students process how what is happening in the university classroom is similar or different to the literacy instruction they experienced in schools and why this is significant. In this way, they are preparing to enter into the junior level reading courses with new understandings and experiences with literacy learning.

As students enter into the next two courses, *Early Language and Literacy* and *Foundations of Reading*, they begin to learn about various theories of literacy instruction. Taking the stance that literacy educators must be well-informed literacy leaders, we believe our students need to be informed by the theory and research of the field so that they can respond appropriately to the current conversations pertaining to reading instruction. While conversations surrounding reading instruction often fluctuate, it is important for literacy educators to know what the research says about reading instruction so that they can successfully integrate it in meaningful ways into their classroom instruction. "Reflective practitioners not only ponder why what's working is working or why it's not, but know why they are doing what they are doing in the first place" (Layne, 2015, p. 11). These courses also focus heavily on the foundational strategies and skills needed to teach literacy well including the Big Five: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The final two courses in the literacy sequence, *Reading Assessment and Instruction* and *Problems in Reading*, see the students in field placements where they enact the literacy principles they have been learning in

courses with elementary students in schools. In *Reading Assessment and Instruction*, the students work with intermediate students in small groups. In *Problems in Reading*, they work individually with primary students. The emphasis of both courses is using assessment to drive instruction. Both courses prepare students for the constructed response portion of the STR certification exam by asking students to use and interpret data for instructional purposes for an authentic audience. In *Problems in Reading*, students use their assessment data to inform their instructional planning for their time with the students. At the end of the semester, they prepare a poster presentation, to share with their peers and literacy instructors in the program, defending their instructional decisions throughout their field placement. In *Problems in Reading*, students prepare an assessment portfolio reflecting on their work with one student throughout the semester. The written reflections and portfolio serve as the basis for the conference with the student's classroom teacher at the end of the semester. During this conversation, the university students are responsible for communicating with the classroom teacher the assessments given; how the data was used to inform instruction; and the growth of the student during the intervention period. In this way, the university students practice the needed skills to articulate how assessment data informs instruction, thus preparing for the constructed response portion of the STR certification exam.

During their final course in the literacy sequence, *Problems in Reading*, students take the practice STR exam. They take the practice exam at the beginning of the semester. In this way, the data from the exam can be used to inform the instruction of the course throughout the semester. Using the disaggregated data from the practice exam, the instructor of this course also does whole class tutoring on concepts that need reinforced. Students who score less than 75% on the practice STR exam are required to arrange tutoring with a literacy professor of their choice. In this way, students can select the instructor who they feel best meets their needs. If more than individual tutoring is needed, students are given access to computer-based tutoring programs that best meet their individual needs. Students rarely need more support than the interventions described here.

### ***Baylor University***

The literacy faculty within the School of Education at Baylor University undertook a comprehensive approach to address the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) adoption of the STR standards within the elementary education degree program. Specifically, the integration was focused on the four courses within the English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) curriculum required for elementary education (EC-6) candidates. These courses encompass *Early Literacy*, *Language Arts in the Elementary School*, *Literacy Instruction in the Elementary School*, and *Comprehension of Expository Texts*. Alignment between the STR competencies and course content was rigorously pursued across all four courses.

The STR competencies delineate research-based practices for effective literacy instruction, constituting a cornerstone of Baylor's pedagogical approach for education majors. Each course now systematically integrates these competencies with its respective content. During instruction, practice questions are deliberated upon collaboratively and individually, with a keen focus on elucidating the rationale behind correct answers in alignment with the competencies and content being taught. In anticipation of the constructed response question on the Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES) STR Certification Exam, essay questions on course exams within two ELAR courses are structured to mirror the format and complexity of the official exam. These questions progressively increase in difficulty to correspond with students' advancing literacy knowledge and content mastery.

Furthermore, Baylor's literacy faculty and staff implement various supplementary approaches to reinforce STR competencies and ready students for the official exam. These include guidance from the Associate Director of Assessment and Professional Development throughout the testing journey. Students are also guided through TEA Diagnostic Exams to identify areas necessitating further preparation and to inform faculty instruction. Faculty and staff organize STR Reviews to enhance comprehension and readiness while integrating *240 Tutoring* resources into both instruction and exam preparation. Additionally, individual tutoring sessions with literacy faculty are accessible to students as required, ensuring personalized support. Moreover, students exchange peer-derived success

strategies as they navigate the exam process, fostering a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Beyond exam readiness, Baylor's literacy faculty endeavors to cultivate a deep understanding of contemporary literacy research among students, empowering them to apply this knowledge effectively in professional settings. Through these concerted efforts, the School of Education at Baylor University is shaping educators equipped to enact positive change in the educational landscape and enrich the lives of students.

### ***East Texas Baptist University***

East Texas Baptist University's School of Education holds routinely scheduled data meetings to review student progress in all areas. All faculty participate in this collaborative, standards-based review. In the first year of implementation of the STR certification examination, our team identified a trend of concerns early on. Students were not demonstrating mastery of the standards at the level of expectation. Upon desegregating the data, the specific areas of weakness became clear: 1) multiple competencies, including 003, 004, 005, 007, 008, and 011, and 2) the constructed response portion.

A short-term goal of supporting individual students who were nearing the end of the program was established. To accomplish this, specific STR Seminars were developed. These seminars provided an overview for the entire exam but concentrated in greater depth on the specific standards and skills needed in the three identified areas. Students were required to attend five one-hour seminars that were led by faculty with expertise in each area. Formative assessment was embedded in the seminars, and additional practice was required of students between sessions. Students were responsive due to the sense of urgency and showed progress within the first two sessions. Individual students who did not show progress received individualized tutorials until adequate progress and mastery were demonstrated.

A long-term goal was set to address program-wide curricular issues. Vertical alignment studies were conducted. Gaps and overlaps in standards among courses were identified and addressed. Changes that the team made were implemented immediately. Formative assessment in these areas was also increased with progress monitoring continuing for all students.

Since that time, student cohort data has been reviewed in real-time as we conduct student-level data reviews. Students who took the affected courses prior to the curriculum changes being made continue to require the targeted STR Seminars. While the sessions are altered as needed based on each set of cohort's needs, the sessions have become generally consistent in content and delivery and are now led by one professor. The sessions are also held in place of regularly scheduled clinical teaching seminars, when possible, to prevent adding even more to our students' responsibilities during their clinical teaching semesters.

Alternately, students who have taken the affected courses after the curricular adjustments were made are now demonstrating mastery earlier in the program. We currently anticipate that our final cohort requiring support beyond the required curriculum will graduate in the spring of 2024. This indicates that the changes made at the curricular and programmatic level have been effective.

The collaborative, data-driven approach described above is the work of a professional learning community (Brown, et. al., 2018). One observation that might be made is that higher education historically works in more isolated ways than collaboratively. Hiring collaborative faculty who are passionate about student success might lead to greater success across entire institutions of higher education.

### ***Hardin-Simmons University***

Due to the implementation of STR (TEA, 2022c), faculty members responsible for teaching reading courses at the Irvin School of Education (Irvin SOE) in Hardin-Simmons University (HSU) undertook a thorough analysis and revision of the reading curriculum for EC-6 Interdisciplinary Generalists and 4-8 English Language Arts Reading/Social Studies (ELAR/ELARS) majors. These faculty members from the Irvin SOE actively participated in the Texas Reading Academy training, sponsored by the Texas Education Agency in Austin, TX, as well as a comprehensive year-long online training program. Modifications to the literacy curriculum were made to specifically target grades K-3 and 4-6 in designated reading courses.

Regular meetings among the reading faculty members facilitated discussions on the practical applications of content in real-world situations with K-5 students. Progressing from one-on-one tutoring to small-

group instruction and eventually to class literacy instruction, HSU education majors were able to apply the ELAR Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in field experiences within the local school district. All field experiences mandated that education majors identify areas for intervention and employ the most suitable research-based reading strategies that align with TEA-approved ELAR standards/competencies.

Furthermore, the reading faculty members mandated that EC-6 and 4-8 ELAR/ELARS education majors complete pre- and post-TEXES STR and ELAR Core Subjects Practice exams in two reading courses. This practice aimed to identify areas of strength and weakness in the ELAR standards/competencies, providing valuable insights for improvement.

The commitment of the faculty members at the Irvin School of Education in implementing STR has resulted in a transformative approach to reading courses at Hardin-Simmons University. The rigorous analysis, participation in specialized training, and the refinement of literacy curricula underscore their dedication to providing an enriched educational experience for EC-6 Interdisciplinary Generalists and 4-8 English Language Arts Reading/Social Studies majors. Through real-world applications and the strategic adaptation of teaching methods, faculty have empowered HSU education majors to navigate the intricacies of ELAR Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills with confidence. The integration of pre- and post-TEXES assessments further ensures that HSU graduates possess a comprehensive understanding of ELAR standards, paving the way for their success in fostering literacy skills among K-5 students. This ongoing commitment to excellence positions HSU education majors for impactful contributions to the field of reading instruction.

### ***University of Texas-Dallas***

Upon the adoption of the Science of Teaching (STR) standards (TEA 2022c), the reading faculty of the Teacher Development Center (TDC) at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) undertook a deep examination of the STR standards. This examination led to a review of the content and objectives of the three reading courses required for students seeking certification in Core Subjects Early Childhood–Grade 6, Core Subjects Grades 4–8, and English Language Arts and Reading Grades 4–8. Reading faculty compiled a matrix to determine which standards

were being taught in each course along with any standards not being taught. The existing vertical alignment of courses was essential in determining placement of new standards and allowing new information to be successfully integrated into reading courses. Reading faculty undertook further investigation regarding how standards were addressed in each course, charting specific assignments, assessments, and readings that explored each standard. During this process, course objectives were revised to reflect a focus on the science of teaching reading and assignments, assessments, and readings that did not address STR standards were removed. These revisions led to substantial changes in each of the three reading courses.

*Reading I: Learning to Read* is the first reading course taken by TDC students. The primary goal of Reading I is to provide a solid understanding of the foundational skills of reading. The course focuses on the STR standards and provides insight into the elements of the STR exam. Throughout the course students participate in group activities to solidify their understanding of material presented via readings and discussions. Students in Reading I begin their preparation for the constructed response portion of the STR exam by learning how to interpret assessments of foundational reading skills and how to use that information to guide instruction. Students apply what they learn by working in groups to develop a differentiated instructional plan based on foundational reading skills assessments. The culminating activity regarding foundational reading skills is a foundations of reading assessment designed to mirror the selected-response portion of STR in both rigor and questioning style. This assessment provides students with the opportunity to complete and discuss selected-response questions comparable to those on the STR. Upon completion of Reading, I students should have a firm foundation in the foundational skills of reading.

*Reading II: Reading Methods* is the second reading course taken by TDC students. The role of reading and its reciprocal language arts processes is expanded to encompass the STR as well as the other state certification exams. Specifically, as it relates to STR, the structure of STR question types is modeled in quizzes and quiz preparation. The students' assessments include opportunities to complete and discuss selected-response questions approximating those on the STR. Throughout this course, the students receive in class instruction on

strategies for taking the exam and writing constructed responses. In their journal assignments, students are required to record scientifically based reading research ideas for instruction addressing the needs of foundational reading skills and comprehension. Obviously, this listing will not be with them when they take the exams, but students are encouraged to study these scientifically research-based ideas in preparation for the exams. Another strategy students learn in Reading II will be used while taking the STR. Students are taught to make a chart as they view the video and explore all evidence present. Students can quickly create four columns for the four types of evidence. Observations of reading behavior gleaned from each video, in particular weaknesses, are jotted down in the columns. Before responding to the constructed response prompts, students identify common areas of weakness evident across the four columns, as well as specific areas of need related to foundational skills and comprehension. They subsequently note ideas/approaches to instructional strategies and learning activities addressing these identified needs, mentally referring to the bank of instructional strategies and activities they developed throughout Reading II. While students are still developing and deepening their understanding of the science of teaching reading in this course, they are additionally learning sound practices and pedagogy for future classroom application.

*Diagnostic Reading* is the third and last reading course sequence taken by TDC students. To address the STR standards and the STR exam, students receive both electronically linked and printed resources to support preparation for the STR. The primary manner in which TDC students prepare for the STR is by authentically deepening their understanding of the critical role assessment plays in identifying reading strengths and weaknesses in students they teach. TDC students authentically administer assessments of foundational skills and comprehension and analyze results. Understanding assessments and applying that knowledge to inform and guide instruction are the best ways to prepare for the STR. The students continue to deepen their understanding in the seven areas of the TEKS, and they learn how assessments drive instructional plans. Their course assessments include STR style questions while other course assessments require students to write explicit plans and design learning activities to address students' needs. A constructed

response is completed in class, and peer discussions focus on assessment results and implications for instruction. Most students take the STR exam either toward the end of the semester they take Diagnostic Reading, or shortly thereafter. Consequently, Diagnostic Reading is crucial in preparing students for success on the STR.

In addition to revising existing courses, UTD reading faculty also developed an STR preparation workshop. All students are strongly encouraged to attend this free workshop prior to taking the STR exam. During the interactive workshop, students receive information about the composition of the STR along with practical suggestions for preparing for the exam. Students and faculty work together to examine sample selected-response questions, including clustered questions. Furthermore, students are guided to use a 4-column chart outlining findings from the four evidences of reading behaviors (e.g., video of a running record, oral reading fluency assessment, high frequency word reading assessment, and oral reading retelling or a comprehension quick check) for a sample constructed response. As a final step in student preparation for the STR, all students are required to take Pearson’s practice STR exam as a study tool. Upon completion of the practice exam students are given “approval to test.”

All-in-all, the Science of Teaching Reading state certification exam has prompted a focus on scientifically based reading instruction that will prepare our teacher education students to more effectively teach reading and its reciprocal language arts processes. Significant changes in course content and pedagogy have resulted from the curriculum re-alignment and collaboration among the faculty to meet the needs of our students to prepare for the STR and to be effective teachers.

### *University of the Incarnate Word*

Shortly after the adoption of the STR standards (TEA 2022c) by TEA, the literacy faculty at the University of the Incarnate (UIW) took proactive measures, initiating a curriculum mapping process. This involved the creation of four Word Documents, each dedicated to one of the four Domains outlined in the STR standards. Within each document, a four-column table was crafted. The first column contained a list of all the STR competencies in the given Domain. The table was arranged so that each row featured one competency. This allowed for a systematic and organized breakdown of each STR competency with

the specified Domain. By structuring the table with competencies in the first column and dedicating a row to each, the curriculum mapping process facilitated a comprehensive examination of key elements such as vocabulary, research connections, associated Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and assessment questions. This meticulous arrangement enhanced clarity and accessibility, providing a valuable resource for literacy faculty to align their curriculum with the newly adopted STR standards from the TEA.

In the second column, the competencies were methodically deconstructed, enhancing the learning experience by providing a detailed analysis of key components essential for comprehensive understanding. This deconstruction involved the identification and listing of key vocabulary, offering students a clear grasp of the fundamental terms associated with each STR competency. Additionally, supporting vocabulary was outlined, providing learners with a broader contextual understanding and facilitating the connection of concepts across related areas. Furthermore, research connections were intricately woven into this deconstruction, offering students insights into the theoretical underpinnings and empirical foundations of each strand. This systematic breakdown in the second column not only assists students in grasping the intricacies of the STR competencies but also cultivates a more profound and interconnected understanding of the subject matter, thereby contributing significantly to the depth of their learning experience.

In the third column, the TEKS were thoughtfully listed, serving as a crucial bridge between research and practical application for students in the teacher education program. By aligning the STR competencies with the specific TEKS, students gained a nuanced understanding of how education theory translates into actionable teaching strategies with the state framework. This direct association implementation enables students to navigate and apply pedagogical insights in accordance with the educational standards mandated by the state. This intentional connection to the TEKS not only reinforces the relevance of the curriculum to real-world teaching scenarios but also empowers students with the tools to effectively integrate research findings into their future educational practices, fostering a more holistic and informed approach to teaching.

In the fourth column, a set of assessment questions crafted by the faculty were listed. These questions were purposefully designed to mirror the structure and complexity of the released certification questions (cite), providing students with a valuable resource for honing their examination readiness. This strategic alignment serves to familiarize students with the format and expectations of the actual certification assessment, promoting a more targeted and effective preparation process. By engaging with these faculty-made questions, students gain not only a deeper understanding of the subject matter but also valuable insights into the nuances of the certification examination. This deliberate approach aids students in developing the critical thinking skills and confidence needed to navigate and excel in assessment, thereby ensuring a more robust and comprehensive preparation for their future roles as educators.

Another series of proactive measures include the implementation of theory application assignments in our literacy courses that align to the STR competencies. Our EPP program includes a literacy minor which consists of 15 hours of coursework, or five courses, dedicated to the various aspects of literacy instruction. Each course implements at least one constructed response that asks students to apply their theory knowledge to case studies or data sets. The case studies present a description of the child's, or children's, background and reading behaviors. This can be a standalone project or as part of a test which determines the complexity of the question and its answer. In any case, students are asked to name the behaviors and identify areas of strength and areas for growth. Then students are asked to create a plan or outline that will target what they previously identified.

Some courses have a field component where students have an opportunity to transfer theory knowledge to practice. This is where one or two sessions of the course occur in the field where students are able to work with one to three students. The goal of the initial meeting is to plan interactions, activities, assessments, or lessons aligned with the literacy course that will allow students to gather qualitative and quantitative data. In preparation for the second session, students reflect on their first session and carefully analyze the data to tailor a plan for the second session. There are reflective and analytical opportunities after the second session.

## **The Shared Shifts**

The highlighted programs in this article, including Abilene Christian University, Baylor University, East Texas Baptist University, Hardin-Simmons University, University of Texas-Dallas, and University of the Incarnate Word, showcase a collective commitment to adapting their EPPs in response to the state-mandated changes in literacy instruction standards. Faculty members from these programs have convened to deliberate on crucial shifts necessary to meet the demands of the Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES) STR certification exam. These discussions have led to a detailed exploration of key adjustments, reflecting a shared understanding of the importance of preparing teacher candidates to effectively implement evidence-based literacy instruction practices.

Among the common themes observed across these programs is a rigorous alignment of curriculum with the STR competencies outlined by the TEA. Institutions like Baylor University have systematically integrated these competencies into their coursework, ensuring that teacher candidates are well-versed in research-based literacy practices. Moreover, there is a concerted effort to enhance exam readiness through strategic preparation strategies, such as practice questions mirroring the format of the certification exam and supplementary resources like diagnostic exams and tutoring sessions. This comprehensive approach underscores a commitment not only to ensuring high pass rates on the certification exam but also to equipping future educators with the knowledge and skills needed for success in the classroom.

Additionally, the emphasis on data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement is evident across the highlighted programs. Institutions like East Texas Baptist University have implemented routine data meetings to monitor student progress and identify areas of concern. These programs have developed short-term and long-term goals aimed at addressing student needs and refining curricular offerings. By adopting a collaborative and proactive approach, these institutions demonstrate a commitment to excellence in educator preparation and a recognition of the importance of ongoing reflection and adaptation to meet the evolving needs of students and the educational landscape.

A third prevalent trend among the highlighted EPPs was the integration of opportunities for teacher candidates to practice and receive feedback on mock constructed



responses. This strategic approach aimed to familiarize candidates with the format and expectations of the constructed response portion of the STR certification exam, ensuring their readiness to effectively demonstrate their knowledge and skills. At institutions such as the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW), faculty members implemented structured practice sessions where candidates could engage in mock exam scenarios and receive targeted feedback on their responses. These sessions provided valuable opportunities for candidates to refine their writing skills, deepen their understanding of the STR competencies, and address any areas of weakness identified through feedback. By incorporating these practice opportunities, UIW empowered candidates to approach the certification exam with confidence and proficiency, ultimately enhancing their overall readiness for success in the field of literacy instruction.

### **Closing Thoughts and Additional Resources**

Texas's commitment to elevating literacy instruction through legislative mandates has prompted significant transformations in EPPs across the State. The introduction of the STR certification exam has spurred EPPs to realign their curricula, refine instructional practices, and enhance student support mechanisms. This article has explored the proactive measures undertaken by six recognized EPPs to ensure teacher candidates are well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of literacy instruction. Through collaborative efforts, data-driven approaches, and a commitment to excellence, these institutions are shaping educators poised to make meaningful contributions to literacy development and educational success in Texas and beyond. As the landscape of teacher preparation continues to evolve, embracing collaborative and data-informed practices will be essential in fostering continuous improvement and ensuring the success of future educators and the students they serve.

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