

Redesigning Teacher Education Core Courses to Align With SoLD

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About EdPrepLab

[EdPrepLab](#), an initiative of the Learning Policy Institute and Bank Street Graduate School of Education, aims to strengthen educator preparation by supporting learning and sharing research and practices among programs, school districts, and policymakers. EdPrepLab supports programs and informs policies that incorporate the science of learning and development (SoLD) to enable deeper learning and equity, working to expand these approaches nationally and internationally.

About This Brief

This brief describes how the University of South Carolina's College of Education (COE) redesigned its teacher education core courses to align with SoLD and state-level workforce data. Drawing on interdisciplinary faculty expertise and evidence, the college created an integrated, SoLD-informed curriculum across certification areas and used data on educator working conditions to build a shared program identity, strengthen internal alignment, and position the COE to evolve with workforce needs.

Introduction

Innovative designs in postsecondary education are often difficult to scale. While expanding bureaucratic structures, institutional and discipline-specific accrediting bodies, and—especially in public institutions—state-level oversight help ensure quality and consistency, they can also slow even minor curricular changes. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) are particularly emblematic of such challenges, given broad public (and legislative) interest in their content. Based on these structures and contexts, EPPs are sometimes viewed as intransigent. In reality, EPPs are often open and willing to make changes to program design, even if subject to a slower evolutionary pace.

Against the backdrop of a growing body of literature on the [science of learning and development](#) (SoLD) and robust data on the characteristics and conditions of South Carolina's educator workforce, the University of South Carolina (USC) College of Education (COE) undertook a comprehensive strategic planning process that drew on the expertise of a wide range of education stakeholders. One priority of the new strategic plan was to identify a core identity of the EPP, regardless of certification area, that recognizes synergies that can be uplifted via economies of scale. The following sections outline the approach taken to build identity, strengthen coherence, and position the COE to continue to evolve at a more rapid pace.

USC has a long-standing commitment to educator preparation, research, and partnerships that support schools and communities throughout South Carolina. Drawing on SoLD, as well as

insights from initiatives such as [SC TEACHER](#) and the [Carolina Teacher Induction Program](#) (CarolinaTIP), the COE sought to strengthen program design and align educator preparation with research and the needs of South Carolina's educator workforce. In particular, the COE sought to revise core aspects of its EPPs with the following goals:

- **Integrate coursework for all teacher preparation programs.** As a state flagship campus with large teacher preparation programs, these certification-area programs had become, over time, increasingly siloed from one another. Integration, regardless of grade band or content area, allows for deeper understandings of preceding developmental features, as well as an eye on developmental and content progressions on the horizon. These changes also afford the opportunity for future iterations of the integrated coursework that are inherently and immediately scaled given the structure of what is referred to as the teacher education core—a set of courses appropriately copopulated by students enrolled in all of the teacher education certification-area programs. The teacher education core also provides a sense of a shared identity within the broader educator preparation program and program graduates.
- **Align integrated teacher preparation coursework to SoLD.** By grounding teacher education in the developmental and learning sciences, the entire program becomes a foundational knowledge base that equips teachers to draw on available resources in advancing educational opportunity, equity, and learning for every young person.
- **Leverage what we know from robust, research-driven understandings of state and local data.** Given that the vast majority of teacher candidates will eventually teach in schools within the state, it is also essential to leverage our understanding of the experiences of educators within South Carolina schools. There are two primary sources for these data: (1) SC TEACHER, a research consortium housed in the COE that provides comprehensive research about South Carolina's educator workforce. These reports inform both policy and practice and include data on teacher working conditions, SC Teacher Exit Survey responses, preparation pathways, teacher and student demographics, and teacher performance; and (2) CarolinaTIP, an innovative university-based teacher induction program designed to support teachers in their first 3 years in the profession. Data from CarolinaTIP provide insights into the experiences, needs, and challenges of beginning teachers, which helps inform efforts to strengthen teacher preparation, induction, and retention across the state.
- **Align school leadership preparation and teacher leadership pathways to advance the structures of schools and schooling.** Successful schools recognize the power of collective leadership, in which principals collaborate with instructional staff to shape organizational structures, set goals, and analyze key student data to inform future

improvement. Yet many postsecondary leadership preparation programs fall short of integrating those who are preparing for formal leadership roles with those developing the skills to lead from the classroom. As a result, these programs miss opportunities to prepare educators for the full range of leadership roles that influence both individual classrooms and the broader school community.

When EPPs have layers of data available to them to refine their programs and ensure relevance and responsiveness, they must act. Within the COE, the faculty synthesized a new teacher education core framed by SoLD and informed by state-level data. As a priority in the college's new strategic plan, an interdisciplinary faculty committee was formed, drawing upon expertise in child and adolescent development, motor and behavioral development, language acquisition, school counseling, teacher preparation, leadership development, learning design and technologies, and special education. The committee met over the course of 1 calendar year, provided drafts and revisions of programming to faculty within their disciplines, and ultimately organized the teacher education core as outlined in this brief.

The following sections describe the organizing features of the revised teacher education coursework, referred to as the teacher education core, designed to capture each of the central aspects of the SoLD principles. This development work is then layered with state-level, data-driven insights into the educator workforce to ensure relevance and responsiveness. Together, these efforts establish the foundation for a more coherent and adaptable EPP—one positioned to evolve with the field and support the timely and comprehensive adoption of future innovations.

SoLD as a Framework for Core Courses

The SoLD principles provide an interdisciplinary lens for understanding how people learn and develop, integrating insights from cognitive science, neuroscience, developmental psychology, and related fields. They emphasize the importance of holistic development by recognizing the interconnectedness of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. At the same time, the principles underscore the need to account for individual differences. By bridging research and practice, the SoLD principles offer a framework for creating environments that support equitable, effective, and lifelong learning.¹

To translate these principles into practice, the COE convened a committee of faculty representing teacher preparation, developmental psychology, learning design, counseling, educational leadership, motor and behavioral development, neurodivergence, and educational measurement as a first step in addressing the priority established in the new strategic plan. Drawing on their combined expertise, the committee examined the SoLD framework and

identified core areas of study that reflect its key dimensions. From this foundation, they developed broad learning outcomes that are informed by, rather than directly aligned with, the SoLD principles, capturing essential elements of the framework while allowing flexibility in interpretation and application. This approach ensures that the teacher education core is grounded in developmental science while remaining adaptable to the varied needs of candidates and the students they will serve, also enabling more efficient curricular adaptation as new evidence-based knowledge emerges.

To guide the development of the teacher education core, the committee identified central areas of study and defined corresponding broad learning outcomes. [Table 1](#) provides a sample of the areas of study and associated learning outcomes, illustrating how the framework is organized. The full set of areas and outcomes is provided in the [Technical Supplement](#).

Table 1. Sample Areas of Study and Learning Outcomes Informed by SoLD

Area of study	Illustrative learning outcomes informed by SoLD
Learning and development	Developmental stages; social, emotional, and cognitive processes; student well-being; application of developmental science
Equity and inclusion	Culturally responsive pedagogy; systemic inequities; multilingual learner supports; Universal Design for Learning
Instruction and learning design	Learning theories; instructional strategies; classroom management; technology integration; data-informed teaching
Professional practice and collaboration	Family and community engagement; teacher leadership; collaboration; ethical and policy-informed practice

Source: Provided by authors. (2026).

Following this process, the committee examined existing courses within the COE to determine where similar learning outcomes were already being addressed within each of the nine individual EPPs. Based on faculty review, the committee recommended a combination of course inclusions, targeted modifications, and the development of new offerings. Core learning outcomes were finalized, and subsequent courses were developed to address these outcomes. As the committee's work unfolded, faculty across program areas provided feedback on early drafts, and committee members incorporated that feedback into their work. The committee then shared the core curriculum with individual program area faculty, who made decisions regarding how to adapt their curriculum to accommodate core courses, including revising and eliminating misaligned and duplicative content. The goal was to create a coherent structure that aligned learning outcomes with developmental

progressions for teacher candidates while also grouping related outcomes within courses that naturally fit together. The proposed teacher education core, outlined in [Table 2](#), reflects these recommendations.

Building on the foundation of the teacher education core, faculty from individual certification areas revised academic programs to incorporate the new structure, updating program-specific course content and sequencing. Guided by the principles of SoLD, the resulting academic programs reflect a shared understanding and commitment to core elements of effective teaching that can evolve over time, while leaving space for certification areas to provide grade-level and content-specific preparation.

Table 2. Proposed Teacher Education Core

Course title	Existing, modified, or new	Course descriptions
Social and Historical Foundations of Education	Existing	Analyze social, political, and historical aspects of diverse educational institutions in American culture, with an emphasis on families, schools, and communities
Issues and Trends in Teaching and Learning	Existing	Introduce and examine current issues and trends in teaching and learning
Introduction to Special Education	Modified	Examine the field of special education, including legal aspects, characteristics of students with exceptionalities, and instructional strategies
Introduction to Educational Psychology	Modified	Apply learning theories to the classroom environment, including evidence-based instructional, assessment, and classroom management strategies
Child and Adolescent Development	Modified	Explore foundational concepts and patterns in physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development and mental health across childhood and adolescence
Pedagogical Approaches for All Learners	New	Cultivate inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms that support the success of all learners

Course title	Existing, modified, or new	Course descriptions
School, Community, and Family Partnerships	New	Develop an understanding of the critical role of family, caregivers, and community partnerships in fostering student success and well-being within classrooms. Build culturally responsive relationships, advocate for inclusive practices, and collaborate across disciplines
Instructional Technologies and Pedagogy	New	Apply instructional technologies and pedagogical approaches to design inclusive, engaging, and innovative learning experiences with an emphasis on digital citizenship, accessibility, learning theories, computational thinking, and collaboration

Source: Provided by authors. (2026).

Using State-Level Data to Drive Innovation

Not only was the teacher preparation core driven by SoLD principles, but it was also directly informed by state-level data collected and aggregated for systemic improvement. SC TEACHER is an education research consortium that produces statewide surveys and reports to help leaders understand and strengthen South Carolina's educator workforce. Anchored by a longitudinal, state-centric data infrastructure that links educator-, school-, district-, and community-level indicators, SC TEACHER provides a coherent evidence base to inform teacher preparation design and support continuous improvement in both policy and practice. SC TEACHER leads the legislatively commissioned South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS), a biennial statewide instrument grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework. Additionally, each year, the consortium administers the SC Teacher Exit Survey to teachers who are not renewing their contracts, offering insights into why educators move or leave and what conditions might encourage them to return. In 2025, the survey reached 24,894 teachers across 1,034 schools, representing nearly half of the state's classroom educators.² Together, these linked surveys and datasets, alongside induction initiatives such as CarolinaTIP, provide districts, the state, and institutions of higher education, including USC, with actionable insights to improve teacher experience, strengthen retention, and inform systemic reform.

Findings to Build Into USC's Program Design

Findings from the SCTWCS reveal that all six job resources (administrative support, autonomy, professional development support, parent support, coworker support, and shared governance) and all four job demands (workload, student engagement, student behavior, and organizational demands) are significantly related to both job satisfaction and intent to remain in the profession.³ Among resources, coworker support is the most widely available, while student engagement is the most frequently reported demand. The strongest positive contributors to job satisfaction are administrative and parent support, whereas student engagement and behavior are the job demands most strongly associated with lower job satisfaction. When examining intent to stay, administrative support again emerges as the strongest positive correlate, while workload is the strongest negative correlate. Overall, with the exception of coworker support, resources demonstrate stronger associations with outcomes than do demands, underscoring the value of cultivating supportive conditions for teachers.

For USC's coursework and clinicals, three implications emerged from analyzing these data (see [Table 3](#)):

1. **Lead and be led well.** Candidates should be prepared to actively seek, use, and respond to administrator feedback and to align with schoolwide systems (e.g., discipline and behavior frameworks). Because administrative support is the strongest correlate of both satisfaction and intent to stay (and parent support is a leading factor in satisfaction), programs should explicitly teach leader-facing communication routines and two-way family partnership practices, such as goal-setting conferences, proactive outreach, and structured follow-up.
2. **Design for collaboration.** Preparation should emphasize routines for productive peer teaming and shared decision-making. Although coworker support is widely available, it is less predictive of outcomes than other resources. Embedding routines for shared decision-making and professional teaming, such as common planning protocols, data meetings with clear decision rules, and peer observation and feedback cycles, can strengthen candidates' abilities to contribute to collaborative school cultures and shared governance.
3. **Tame the demands.** Coursework and clinicals should explicitly address the challenges of student engagement, behavior, and workload management, which are among the strongest negative correlates of satisfaction and intent to stay. Candidates can be equipped with classroom organization and behavior systems, alongside strategies for managing workload through planning efficiencies (e.g., backward design, grading workflows, material reuse) and time-protection practices. Embedding these skills into clinical expectations and feedback prepares teachers to sustain their practice over time.

Table 3. Key Implications for USC Teacher Education Core

Implication	Impact on teacher education core
Lead and be led well.	This implication is addressed across multiple courses in the teacher education core, including School, Community, and Family Partnerships; Pedagogical Approaches for All Learners; and Introduction to Special Education. Within these courses, candidates develop skills for engaging in leader-facing communication, building effective family partnerships, and aligning classroom practice with schoolwide systems. Beyond the core, certification-area coursework and clinical experiences reinforce these competencies by situating candidates within real school leadership structures, supporting sustained practice in professional collaboration with administrators and families.
Design for collaboration.	Foundational concepts related to collaboration and shared decision-making are introduced in Issues and Trends in Teaching and Learning, which establishes expectations for professional learning communities, data-informed teamwork, and collective responsibility. These concepts are revisited in other core courses, such as School, Community, and Family Partnerships and Introduction to Special Education, where candidates learn about structured collaboration and shared problem-solving practices. Certification-area coursework and clinical placements further extend this learning by providing opportunities for candidates to participate in grade-level teams, interdisciplinary planning, and peer feedback cycles, strengthening their capacity to contribute to collaborative school cultures and shared governance.
Tame the demands.	The teacher education core directly addresses high-impact job demands through courses such as Pedagogical Approaches for All Learners, Introduction to Educational Psychology, and Child and Adolescent Development. Across these courses, candidates learn evidence-based strategies for student engagement, classroom organization, behavior support, and developmental responsiveness. Certification-area coursework and clinical experiences extend this preparation by attending to workload management through planning frameworks, assessment design, and instructional efficiency. In addition, candidates are situated in grade-band-specific contexts, where they apply and refine classroom management systems and workload strategies aligned with their instructional responsibilities, supporting long-term sustainability in practice.

Source: Provided by authors. (2025).

Evidence from the SCTWCS also highlights the importance of high-quality mentoring for novice teachers. Among early-career teachers, both instructional and noninstructional mentor support are moderately associated with higher job satisfaction, underscoring the role of structured induction during the first years of teaching. These findings align with CarolinaTIP, USC's university-based induction program, which provides personalized, nonevaluative coaching across teachers' first 3 years in the profession.⁴ Evaluation data from CarolinaTIP indicate increased teacher retention, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and capacity to cope with job stress among participants. Together, these data suggest that clinically rich, discipline-aligned mentoring can help stabilize early-career teacher experiences, even as broader working conditions continue to shape long-term retention decisions.

Findings from the SC Teacher Exit Survey provided a complementary perspective by capturing the experiences of those leaving their classrooms. Teachers who transfer laterally most often cite personal reasons (such as location) and resource constraints (e.g., limited administrative support), while those leaving the profession most frequently point to job demands (e.g., workload) and policy-related issues such as salary schedules.⁵ Differences illuminated by the data can guide targeted supports in student-teaching and early-career placements. Notably, a strong majority of teachers who exit the profession report being open to returning if conditions improve, with smaller class sizes, protected planning time, and salary increases cited as the most compelling incentives.

Where Leadership and Collaboration Come In

Across both surveys, leadership and collaboration emerged as central conditions shaping teacher experiences, findings that both reinforced and shaped the content embedded in USC's teacher education core. The SCTWCS consistently links administrative support and collaborative structures, such as parent support and shared governance, to higher job satisfaction and stronger retention, underscoring the importance of preparing candidates to communicate effectively with school leaders and to participate in data-informed teams.

CarolinaTIP extends this leadership preparation continuum by providing external coaching relationships that allow novice teachers to process leadership dynamics and classroom challenges in a confidential, nonevaluative setting, thereby strengthening their ability to engage productively with school leaders. Looking ahead, the 2026 Administrator Working Conditions Survey pilot, modeled on the SCTWCS, will enable cross-role comparisons and sharpen alignment between teacher preparation and leadership practice statewide, reinforcing integrated approaches to school leadership and teacher leadership development.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of designing teacher preparation programs that are both evidence-informed and aligned with SoLD. SC TEACHER's surveys provide a clear picture of the conditions that most influence teacher satisfaction, retention, and effectiveness, while SoLD offers a developmental framework for understanding why supportive relationships, collaborative environments, and manageable demands matter for teachers and students. Embedding these insights into coursework, clinical practice, and induction allows preparation programs, such as USC's, to connect state-level evidence with SoLD-informed design, ensuring that the teacher education core cultivates the knowledge, skills, and dispositions educators need to thrive. In this way, educator preparation serves not only as a pathway into the classroom but also as a foundation for long-term professional growth and stability in schools.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the Teacher Education Core

The success of the redesigned teacher education core will be assessed through multiple aligned measures. During preparation, candidate feedback will be collected through course evaluations and targeted program surveys to assess perceived coherence, relevance, and preparedness across the integrated core. Once graduates enter the profession, their experiences will be examined through SC TEACHER's longitudinal data infrastructure. By linking preparation pathways to statewide working conditions and retention data, USC will be able to examine how program completers perceive administrative support, collaboration, workload, and other key conditions and whether they remain in the profession. This closed feedback loop allows the COE to evaluate preparation effectiveness not only at the point of graduation, but across early-career teaching, ensuring continuous refinement grounded in real-world educator outcomes.

Conclusion

By integrating SoLD principles with state-level data, USC's COE has created an approach to educator preparation that is both innovative and responsive. The redesign of the teacher education core demonstrates that SoLD is not just a theoretical framework, but also a practical guide for structuring coursework, aligning developmental progressions, and strengthening the conditions that support teacher and leader success. At the same time, data from initiatives such as SC TEACHER and CarolinaTIP provide critical insights into the realities of South Carolina's teacher workforce, ensuring that program revisions are grounded in the lived experiences of educators across the state.

This dual emphasis on developmental science and context-specific data offers programs a model for advancing rigorous preparation that can evolve in response to complex and changing demands. By bridging research, practice, and policy, USC's work highlights the promise of SoLD-informed preparation to shape educators who are deeply attuned to students' holistic development, equipped to navigate the evolving challenges of schooling, and positioned to strengthen equity and opportunity across classrooms and communities.

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Endnotes

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