

Examining Perceived Barriers to Access and Success in Higher Education

Issue Brief 3: Requirement that Practicum be Completed Outside the Student's Current Workplace

Background

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood (T.E.A.C.H.) initiative, operating in more than 20 states, provides [comprehensive scholarship support](#) to help the incumbent early childhood workforce take courses leading to two- and four- year degrees in early childhood education. Scholarship recipients are early childhood educators working with children from birth through 5 years of age, often making poverty-level wages, who represent the diversity of young children in our nation, may be the first in their family to go to college and work full time while going to college part time. Each T.E.A.C.H. recipient is supported by a T.E.A.C.H. counselor who helps them navigate college, work and family commitments and helps them meet the expectations of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship.

In fall 2018, the [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center](#) (National Center) began a three-part study to examine what T.E.A.C.H. counselors, T.E.A.C.H. associate and bachelor's degree scholarship recipients and their faculty in community colleges and universities believe are the biggest barriers to access and success. Respondents include 61 counselors, 2,071 scholarship recipients and 170 faculty members. Surveys were offered in Spanish and English to scholarship recipients. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which 49 different items were perceived as difficult. These items covered six basic categories: College Application and Admission Processes; T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Application Processes; Meeting College Expectations for Coursework and Degree Completion; Services for English Language Learners; Special College Requirements or Accessibility Issues; and Work/Life/School Balance. Questions about college affordability were not included on this survey, because recipients are all receiving scholarship support that allows for graduation from college with no debt.

Issue: Requirement that Practicum Be Done Outside Current Workplace

Most colleges or universities require students to complete a specific number of field placements or student teaching/practicum hours at a different workplace and often with different ages of children. Faculty typically believe that such experiences expand the student's understanding of various work settings and their skills in managing classrooms and meeting the diverse developmental needs of children. However, practicums are often unpaid since they are a part of course curriculum. The majority of T.E.A.C.H. recipients are non-traditional students with full-time jobs in an early care and education setting who need that income to support themselves and their families. Leaving their site to do a practicum often means a loss of income. Sometimes when the practicum is only three hours over a semester, students can work with their employers to flex their schedules. However, when student teaching requires a six-hour per day placement over a full semester, this is not possible.

Findings

While the percentages vary (counselors, 78%; faculty, 61%; and T.E.A.C.H. recipients 39%), the requirement that all student practicums must be done outside the student's current workplace was identified in the top barriers for all three survey populations.

"It has been very difficult to get time off work for required field experience days for my courses."

Alabama T.E.A.C.H. Recipient

Promising Practices

Higher education faculty identified practices being used to address barriers for T.E.A.C.H. recipients. This issue brief identifies three such strategies.

"I was allowed to do my practicum at my workplace, which made it so much easier and realistic being a single mom working full time and going to school."

Indiana T.E.A.C.H. Recipient

Strategy #1: Allow students to complete at least part of their practicum at their workplace. Some colleges use onsite or videotaped observations to allow students to complete practicum hours at their workplace. By completing practicum hours at their own workplace, scholarship recipients maintain financial stability and improve their practice with the children they are teaching every day. This also reduces disruption for both children and employers who must find substitutes. [Northeast WI Technical College](#) allows students to complete one of their practicums at their current workplace as long as it is 3+ years old, hasn't violated licensing codes and has staff with degrees in ECE (email Mary Beth Boettcher, the program lead instructor at NWTC, at marybeth.boettcher@nwtc.edu for more info). Other colleges such as the University of Nevada-Reno also allow students to complete practicum hours at their current workplace.

Strategy #2: Allow students to do student teaching over two semesters instead of one. Dr. Dawn Mollenkopf (mollenkopfdl@unk.edu), an ECE Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, allows students to [extend student teaching across two semesters](#), which permits them to maintain full employment in their center or home. If this was not the case, students would be required to complete practicum hours in one semester, making it difficult to maintain even part-time employment status and causing major income loss.

Strategy #3: Offer T.E.A.C.H. Practicum Only scholarships. A T.E.A.C.H. Practicum Only scholarship allows ECE students the flexibility of completing their practicum hours at another location while maintaining employment in their own center/home. This scholarship gives the recipient a financial stipend for the semester (approximately \$3,000) and offers the center/home reimbursement for substitute costs for the semester. This stipend provides the recipient time off to complete practicum requirements while still receiving income, and supports the costs of substitutes for the employer. This model also requires recipients to work 10 hours a week with their employers, maintaining some continuity for children and families. This provides a strategy when a college absolutely requires practicums to be completed in another site. By offering a Practicum Only scholarship, employers have more capacity and incentives to support their T.E.A.C.H. recipients.

The National Center is *creating an expanding [list](#) of additional resources that address specific barriers in higher education.*



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