

The Author Behind the Story: Holmes University and River Heights School District



BranchED

A Case Study

Table of Contents

The Author Behind the Story:..... 3

Holmes University and River Heights School District..... 3

 Data is the Story. Assessment is the Author. 3

 What’s the Plot? 3

The EPP..... 4

 HU EPP Clinical Teaching Requirements 4

 Challenges 4

 Lack of Alignment of Program Key Assessments 4

 New Teacher Readiness to Meet District Needs..... 5

 Mentor/Cooperating Teacher and Field Supervisor Training..... 5

 Data Quality and Use..... 5

The District 5

 Challenges 5

 Ensuring Equity Across Placements 5

 Reliability of Mentor Teacher Feedback 5

 Impact of Induction and Retention..... 5

Reflection..... 6

Your Charge..... 6

HU EPP Program Sequence 7

HU EPP Curriculum Matrix 8

HU EPP Observation Form..... 9

HU EPP Performance Data 11

Key Assessment Rubric 13

The Author Behind the Story:

Holmes University and River Heights School District

This Case Study is intended to serve as the foundation for a series of assessment-focused activities. It is not designed to offer a solution, but to offer a **realistic scenario** that invites collaborative inquiry. Through interactive analysis and dialogue, we will explore how EPPs and District Partners might:

- Collaborate to ensure key assessments guide teacher candidate success and program improvement.
- Diagnose systemic issues in key assessment implementation and monitoring.
- Establish processes for reviewing and revising key assessments.

The Case Study addresses the following thematic areas:

- Program Alignment
 - What are candidates expected to know and be able to do by the completion of the educator preparation program? What are some strategies available to EPPs and their district partners that can be employed to ensure program alignment?
- Assessment Development and Revision
 - Do the program-level learning outcomes align with the ways learners are being asked to demonstrate their learning? How well are those learning outcomes being assessed?
- Data Informed Continuous Improvement
 - What types of data are most useful for understanding candidate readiness? How can the EPP and district partner ensure that the data is valid and reliable?

Data is the Story. Assessment is the Author.

In educator preparation, **data** tells the story of how well programs are preparing candidates, but the **assessments** are what shape and inform that narrative. If assessments are well-designed, aligned, and implemented consistently, the data creates a **clear, compelling story** about candidate growth, readiness, and program effectiveness.

However, when assessments are **misaligned, inconsistently applied, or poorly understood**, the data tells a **fragmented or misleading story**. The “plot” becomes confusing: graduation rates dip without explanation, readiness varies across candidates, and partners receive mixed signals about program quality.

In short:

- **Assessments** decide what is measured, how it’s measured, and how evidence is collected.
- **Data** reflects the results of those assessments and conveys the outcomes.

To change the story, you must **revisit the author**—your assessments. When assessments are valid, reliable, and aligned to what matters most, they craft a clear and trustworthy narrative. In turn, the data tells the story that programs and partners can read with confidence to make informed decisions.

What’s the Plot?

Holmes University’s Educator Preparation Program (HU EPP) has partnered with River Heights School District (RHSD) for over a decade. The partnership is strong—RHSD hires about 40% of HU’s graduates each year, and the district provides dozens of clinical placements for candidates.

Recently, both the EPP and the district have noticed some troubling patterns:

- Candidates from different cohorts and placement sites show wide variation in teaching readiness.
- Some principals report that new teachers excel in lesson planning but struggle with classroom management.

- Mentor teachers have expressed difficulty in rating clinical candidate performance and providing feedback.
- Candidate and mentor survey data differ significantly around candidates' abilities to manage classrooms effectively and to address the needs of all learners.

During our time together, we will step into this story. Not to fix it, but to **explore it**.

We will:

- **Review and Interpret** HU's EPP to unpack the story of candidate assessment.
- **Analyze and Determine** to what extent the key assessment tells a clear and compelling story.
- **Explore and Understand** the components of an assessment quality review.

The EPP

HU has prepared educators since its establishment in the late 1800s as a teacher training college. The EPP offers undergraduate and graduate-level teacher certification programs, focusing on early childhood, elementary, secondary, and special education. The institution is a federally designated Minority Serving Institution; approximately half of its students in the educator preparation program (EPP) are from diverse backgrounds and the majority are female. The EPP's mission focuses on preparing high-quality, practice-ready educators to serve districts like RHSD.

Although the EPP boasted steady enrollment through the pandemic, there has been a steady decline in graduation with certification over the past **3 years**. There is concern about lower pass rates on certification exams and other key assessments. Further, mentor teachers within the district are reporting wide variation in clinical candidates' performance at critical points in their student teaching experience.

Faculty are committed to preparing high-quality educators to meet the needs of the PK-12 students in the RHSD school sites that are served by the college. They recognize that their continuous improvement efforts have been superficial and focused on compliance. At the most recent college faculty meeting, the issue became critical when data showed a decline in candidates' performance on the summative clinical observation measure, suggesting they lack key skills needed for classroom success.

HU EPP Clinical Teaching Requirements

Prior to clinical teaching, teacher candidates must complete 30 hours of teacher education coursework, maintain an overall GPA of 2.7, and complete at least 30 clock-hours of early field-based experiences. After placement at an RHSD school site, mentor teachers guide teacher candidates in the gradual release model with the student teacher teaching full-time in 6-9 weeks. Mentor teachers are instructed to provide regular, consistent feedback to student teachers, and complete 3 formal formative observations prior to the final summative observation. Mentor teachers selection is done by the district and is based on the state requirements. Mentor teachers meet with field supervisors to coordinate observations and reporting activities which are outlined in the HU Clinical Experience handbook along with their role and responsibilities as a mentor to an HU student teacher. In the past, HU's Director of Clinical Experiences offered an optional Saturday professional development session for mentor teachers but due to low participation these sessions have not taken place for the past 2 years.

Challenges

Lack of Alignment of Program Key Assessments

According to clinical observation data, HU candidates demonstrate strengths in certain areas, such as lesson planning, but are inconsistent in classroom management and in addressing the learning needs of diverse learners. This may suggest that program key assessments may not be aligned, making it difficult for teacher educators to identify candidates' support needs prior to clinical teaching.

New Teacher Readiness to Meet District Needs

In response to a decline in student achievement post-COVID, RHSD prioritized social-emotional learning, as well as the implementation of research-based instructional practices for math and reading. These competencies have not yet been embedded and scaled within HU's coursework.

Mentor/Cooperating Teacher and Field Supervisor Training

One persistent challenge for HU is ensuring that mentor teachers and field supervisors are consistently prepared to support and evaluate candidates in clinical settings. District priorities and lack of systematic preparation and professional development may lead to uneven understanding of observation tools, performance rubrics, and strategies for providing actionable feedback.

Data Quality and Use

Faculty expressed concern about the most recent clinical observation data:

- Candidates' Overall Self-Rating (for current year) = 2.52
- Mentors' Overall Rating (for current year) = 2.13

These concerns intersect with questions around assessment alignment, shared expectations for candidates in clinical settings, and the support systems in place for field experiences.

The District

The schools situated within RHSD represent a spectrum of educational ecosystems, each enriched by distinct contextual assets and community-driven strengths. Many residents are diverse and live at or below the poverty line; however, the community boasts deeply rooted intergenerational ties and a strong culture of mutual support. Despite these strengths, the district faces several challenges. Students are more likely to be taught by novice teachers and those teaching out of their field, resulting in limited access to rigorous coursework.

Many of HU's graduates begin their career at RHSD, but there has been an uptick in attrition rates. While the partnership with HU has historically been strong, they have seen a decline in the number and quality of teacher candidates who take part in early field experiences and/or student teaching. In the past, they have been able to attract new teachers, but they rarely stay longer than 5 years, choosing to change careers or move to a different district due to challenges with student behaviors and testing pressures. The district feels that new teachers do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to manage either of those issues. They are very interested in collaborating with HU as they have seen a misalignment between preparation and practice that is negatively impacting their students. All school site leaders indicate that behavior/classroom management is a consistent challenge for new teachers.

Challenges

Ensuring Equity Across Placements

Across dozens of placement sites, candidates do not always receive the same quality of mentoring, as it has been challenging to provide mentors with the time and incentive to participate in professional development. In some cases, teacher candidates reported in the mentor teacher survey that they were not given opportunities to teach during their clinical placement.

Reliability of Mentor Teacher Feedback

Mentor teachers have expressed that they are unclear on how to rate candidates in some areas of the rubric, which reduces the reliability of the final clinical observation measure and undermines the EPP's and district's ability to identify which candidates are genuinely classroom-ready.

Impact of Induction and Retention

If candidates arrive underprepared in critical areas, such as behavior/classroom management and differentiation of instruction, the district must devote more resources and time to developing those skills during induction. Further, new

teachers who lack readiness are at higher risk of burnout, and turnover costs create a significant burden on already limited district resources.

HU and RHSD are committed to a mutually beneficial partnership, which means working together to prepare and develop teacher candidates and new teachers. To move forward in this work, they must wrestle with some tough questions:

- How well are program coursework and clinical experiences aligned with RHSD’s instructional priorities and classroom realities?
- Are mentor teacher expectations, district needs, and program outcomes clearly communicated and aligned?
- What accounts for the variation in teaching readiness across different cohorts and placement sites?
- Do current key assessments and rubrics accurately capture candidates’ readiness for teaching?
- What professional development and support do mentor teachers need to provide valid, consistent, and actionable feedback to candidates?
- What structures or systems can be established to continuously monitor key assessments and use the results to guide improvements over time?

Reflection

Before taking a deep dive into the following sessions, take a few minutes to jot down any thoughts, assumptions, or questions you may have based on the information provided above.

Reflection

Your Charge

The Dean of HU and the Superintendent of RHSD are united in an essential goal: ensuring every student is taught by an effective, high-quality teacher. Your team has been carefully selected for this work based on your deep expertise, collaborative spirit, and shared commitment to educational excellence.

Your team is charged with examining the HU EPP assessment story. The insights you generate will guide targeted actions with stakeholders, ensuring that assessments are not treated merely as compliance exercises but are leveraged to promote student success and continuous improvement of programs. Equally important is building shared ownership of this work by engaging faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders to foster trust, secure buy-in, and create a culture of collective responsibility all of which are critical to sustaining long-term impact.

Your work aims to drive meaningful improvements in educator preparation and development while positively impacting the academic and social-emotional outcomes for all students. This is purposeful, high-impact work, and your leadership is essential to its success.

HU EPP Program Sequence



Program Sequence Chart

Phase	Coursework/Experiences	Key Assessments	Transition Point
Admission to Program	General education coursework; Intro to Education	Admission Portfolio (includes GPA 2.75, writing sample, faculty interview)	Admission Decision
Early Coursework	30 hours of teacher education coursework; initial field experiences (30 clock hours)	Early Field Observation Reflection; Candidate Dispositions Survey	Advancement to Methods Coursework
Methods Coursework	Content & pedagogy courses; emphasis on lesson planning, instructional strategies, and assessment	Lesson Plan Key Assessment (rubric scored); State Content Licensure Exam	Admission to Clinical Teaching
Clinical Teaching	Student teaching in RHSD schools (gradual release model)	3 Formative Observations; Summative Clinical Observation Rubric (mentor + supervisor scored); Candidate Dispositions Survey	Program Completion
Program Exit	Capstone seminar; teacher induction preparation	Teacher Work Sample / Performance Assessment; State Pedagogical Licensure Exam	Recommendation for Licensure & Graduation
Induction	First-year teaching in RHSD	Employer Satisfaction Survey; Alumni Survey	Continuous Improvement Feedback Loop

HU EPP Curriculum Matrix



Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Early Coursework	Methods Coursework	Clinical Teaching	Program Exit
PLO 1: Demonstrate content knowledge	Intro to Education; Foundations of Teaching	Subject-Specific Methods Courses	Mentor Evaluations	State Content Exam
PLO 2: Apply effective instructional strategies	Lesson planning workshops	Methods Coursework (lesson design, assessment strategies)	Clinical Teaching Observations	Teacher Work Sample
PLO 3: Manage classroom environment	Educational Psychology	Classroom Management Course	Clinical Observations (formative & summative)	Employer Survey
PLO 4: Differentiate for diverse learners	Multicultural Education	Differentiation in Instruction	Mentor Feedback; Candidate Reflection	Alumni Survey
PLO 5: Engage in professional practice & dispositions	Dispositions Survey	Professional Seminar	Clinical Teaching Evaluations	Licensure Recommendation

HU EPP Observation Form



CLINICAL PRACTICE I OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT FORM For use by University Mentors and Cooperating Teachers

This form is an amended version of the Clinical II Assessment that University mentors (and cooperating teachers) use during the Clinical II semester. Reference the attached support rubric for examples of observable and/or documented evidence and descriptions of each learning progression level (Getting Started, On Your Way, On Target).

Please select “not observed/not applicable” if you do not feel you have enough evidence to evaluate this criterion during the observation.

I. PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL PRACTICE		Getting started	On your way	On target	Not Observed/ Not Applicable
1	Respects diversity.				
2	Creates and maintains supportive and positive learning environments that are conducive to learning.				
3	Collaborates effectively with others (cooperating teachers, mentors, colleagues, professionals, or families).				
4	Demonstrates integrity, honesty, and an understanding of professional ethics.				
5	Demonstrates professional roles and responsibilities.				
6	Writes professionally.				
7	Able to recall images, sounds, or objects in memory with extreme precision.				

II. REFLECTION AND CRITICAL THINKING		Getting started	On your way	On target	Not Observed/ Not Applicable
7	Demonstrates emerging reflective practices, such as reflecting on how to use evidence and feedback to improve their teaching practice.				
8	Provides and reflects upon equitable learning opportunities for all students.				

III. PLANNING FOR STUDENT LEARNING		Getting started	On your way	On target	Not Observed/ Not Applicable
10	Candidate's plans demonstrate knowledge of the concepts and principles of the discipline.				
11	Candidate's plans include teaching methods and strategies appropriate to the discipline.				

12	Candidate's plans include measurable learning objectives aligned to standards and assessments.				
13	Candidate's plan incorporates knowledge of students' personal lives and/or backgrounds.				
14	Candidate's plans are developmentally appropriate and inclusive of all students' learning needs.				
15	Candidate's lesson plans included teaching strategies grounded in theory.				
16	Candidate's lesson plans foster critical thinking.				
17	Candidate's lesson plans include informal and formal assessments designed to monitor and assess student learning and progress.				
18	Candidate plans routines, transitions, pace, and procedures to support instruction.				

IV. TEACHING FOR STUDENT LEARNING		Getting started	On your way	On target	Not Observed/ Not Applicable
19	Candidate builds a positive rapport with students during the lesson(s) to support learning.				
20	Candidate implements instruction built on students' prior academic knowledge.				
21	Candidate implements developmentally appropriate instruction.				
22	Implements informal and formal assessments that appropriately monitor and assess student learning and progress.				
23	Candidate implements lessons as planned.				
24	Candidate implements inclusive strategies that supported meaningful and challenging learning for all students.				
25	Candidate models the thoughtful use of digital tools, content, or social networks.				
26	Candidate communicates clearly and effectively to improve learning.				

Overview (Provide a brief summary of the lesson)

What are the Candidate's Areas of Strength?

What are 2-3 Areas of Growth for the Candidate?

HU EPP Performance Data

Table 1: Candidate Performance, Self-Reported

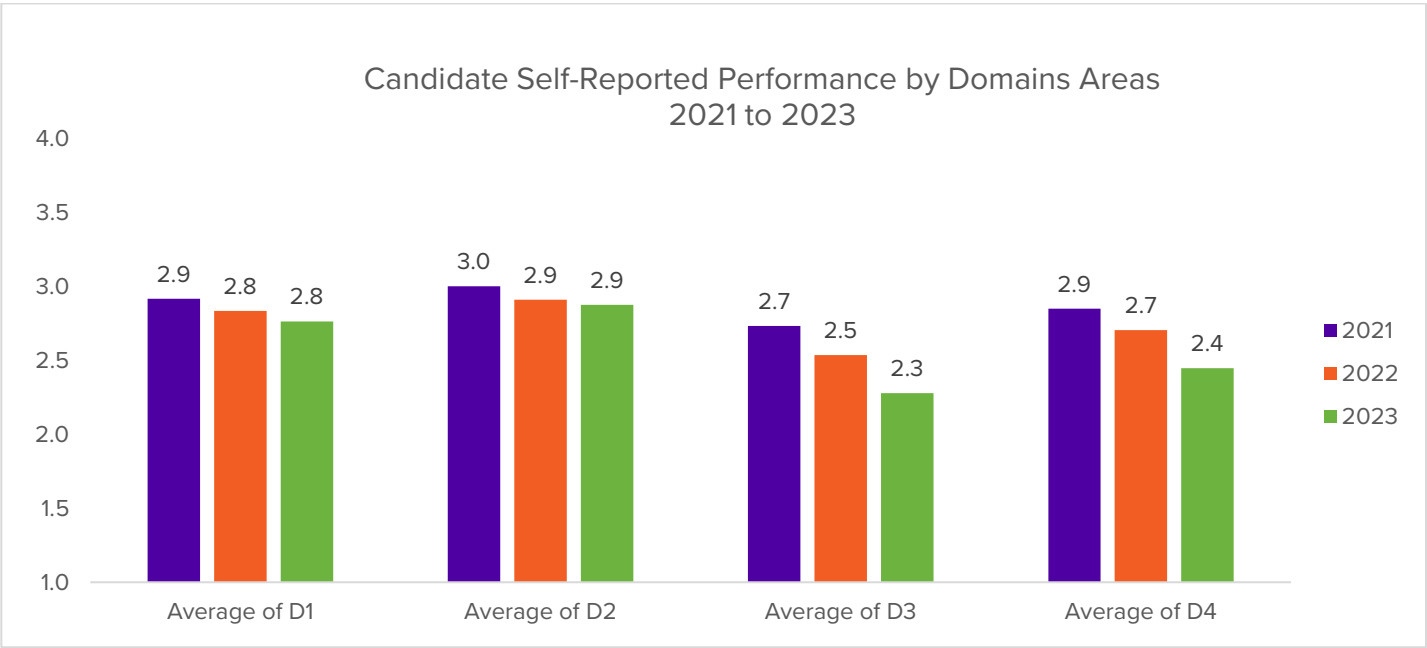


Table 2: Candidate Performance, Mentor Teacher’s Observation

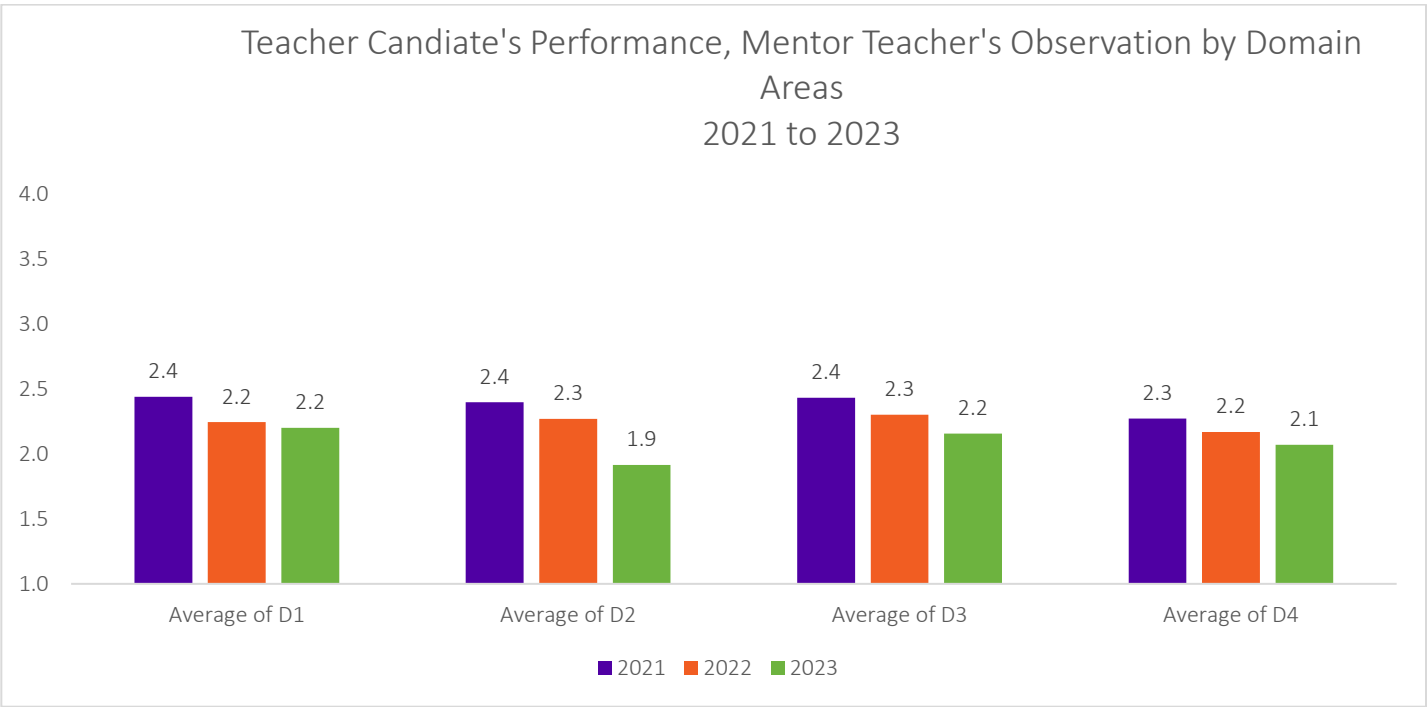
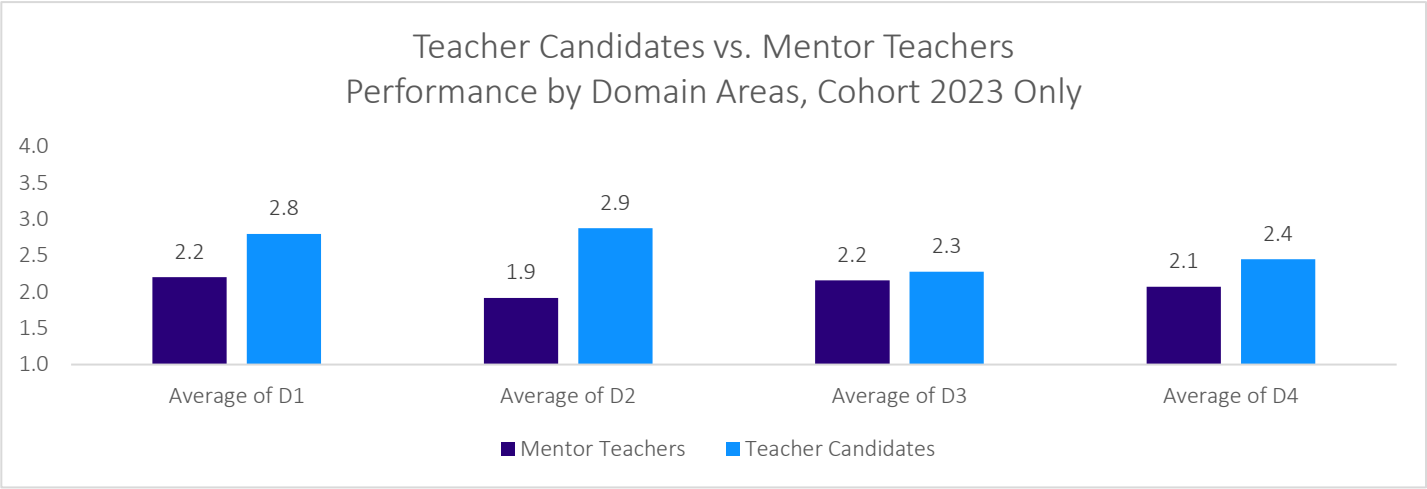


Table 3: Candidate Performance



Key Assessment Rubric

CLINICAL PRACTICE I: Student Teaching Observation Rubric

For use by University Mentor Teachers when using the Observation and Assessment Form to appropriately evaluate clinical Candidates during Clinical I.

Criteria	Getting started	On your way	On target
Candidate builds a positive rapport with students to support learning. Examples of observable or documented evidence: • Approachable and engages students in conversation. • Calls on students by their name to learn about individual students. • Seeks out information from students about personal interests and cultural groups in the class. InTASC 1, CAEP 1.1	Candidate is not yet demonstrating sufficient engagement with students.	Candidate is making visible efforts to engage with students.	Candidate is making visible and sustained efforts to engage with students.
Implements instruction built on students' prior academic knowledge. Examples of Observable or documented evidence: • Content connects to prior lessons or prior assessments of learning. • Students apply prior knowledge when discussing content. • Makes connections across content areas. InTASC 8, CAEP 1.1	It is not clear that the Candidate's lesson is connected to students' prior academic knowledge.	Candidate's lesson begins to make connections between the learning goals to students' prior academic knowledge.	Candidate's lesson clearly connects the learning goals to students' prior academic knowledge.

Criteria	Getting started	On your way	On target
Implements developmentally appropriate instruction. Examples of observable or documented evidence: • Applies Universal Design for Learning (UDL). • Uses visuals such as pictorial models, concept maps, diagrams, and graphs. • Uses low-floor/high ceiling tasks that provide students at various starting points an entry into the learning tasks.	Instruction is not yet sufficiently aligned with \ students' learning needs or is not developmentally appropriate.	Instruction is mostly aligned with students' learning needs but may not be developmentally appropriate for all students.	Instruction is appropriately challenging and attends to the learning needs of the group and/or individual students.