

TEACHERS CAN FACE THE REAL WORLD OF CHANGE WITH RESILIENCY AND COME OUT STRONGER

*Invited CSOTTE Organization Editorial:
Education Deans of Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas*

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The Education Deans of Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas (EDICUT) was originally formulated to provide a collaborative voice of and for leaders of educator preparation programs (EPPs) of Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas (ICUT) institutions. Led by EPP deans and in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders associated with the Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education (CSOTTE), EDICUT strives to share and serve the unique programming and policy needs of Texas independent colleges and universities that offer pathways to teacher certification.

EDICUT provides funding for the purchase of state representative practice certification exams to member institutions, contributes to ongoing efforts of CSOTTE and the Texas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (TACTE), allocates funding for Project Give Back, as well as orders and purchases clinical teacher awards for each member organization annually. In addition, EDICUT advocates for education by engaging with key stakeholders in various ways, such as those related to educational research, educational best practices, TEA, the Texas State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC), and mandates in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC).

As the pandemic began to evolve in Texas in early 2020, all aspects of our lives were increasingly impacted. For those of us who serve in the field of education, most believed classrooms and hallways would be empty for only a brief period of time. Instead, we experienced what could easily be described as the most stressful, grueling year and a half of our careers. In fact, terms such as “Zoom fatigue,”

“quarantining,” “pivot,” “doomscrolling,” and “super spreader” quickly become a part of the daily vernacular for most. Yet, as we reflect on the field of education, and through the lens of EDICUT leadership, we believe the term that best describes our perseverance throughout the pandemic to date, and which represents a beacon of hope for the future of educators, schools, and students, is that of “resiliency.”

While it’s impossible to describe the full extent to which resiliency has helped each of us to navigate the last year and a half, for purposes of this editorial, we choose to highlight the resiliency of K-12 teachers, our preservice clinical teachers, our educational leaders (both in K-12 and higher education), and our EPP faculty, staff, and field supervisors.

Resiliency of Classroom Teachers

The role of a classroom teacher is to offer every child, regardless of age, ethnicity, race, gender, economic level, location of residence, or family structure, a rich, rewarding, unique, and equitable learning experience. At the outset of the pandemic, many teachers felt overwhelmed by a sense of anxiety, fear, and alarm. They mourned the loss of their normal routines and the opportunities to interact with their students in traditional ways utilizing traditional content. Understandably, these feelings caused legions of classroom teachers to make the difficult decision to leave the profession they loved in light of the stress of navigating new technologies, fear of unsafe school environments, and workloads, including both hybrid and concurrent instruction requirements. However, most teachers

demonstrated resiliency as they learned flexibility, practiced changing plans at a moment's notice, and let go of "normal" expectations. They also learned to advocate for their safety and practiced self-care so they could, in turn, care for others.

Classroom teachers are not only essential to the students in their classrooms, but they play a significant role in the preparation of future educators. At a time when teachers were tasked with overwhelming responsibilities and facing monumental unknowns, they continued to open their classrooms to novice educators preparing to join the profession. Though these classrooms took many forms and the clinical experience had to be restructured and re-envisioned to assure a quality preparation for the preservice teacher alongside a quality classroom experience for all students, classroom teachers continued to open their classroom "doors" and hearts and share their knowledge and expertise to assure these future educators would be well-prepared for their classrooms.

When reflecting upon the last year and a half, classroom teachers expressed justifiable feelings of frustration and stress. Still, the majority of teachers revealed learning the importance of grace, their capacity to build connections with students regardless of the instructional format, their recognition of student adaptability and positivity, and their ability to serve as models of hope and resilience to students, families, and communities.

Resiliency of Preservice Clinical Teachers

If the goal of clinical teaching is to provide a mentored apprenticeship that enables the preservice teacher to take on the role of the educator with authenticity and come face to face with daily classroom problem solving, then the year of COVID was trial by fire on a grand scale.

Clinical Teachers were faced with overnight school closures and a new Clinical Teaching Handbook, which included how to teach all courses online, collaborate with your mentor teacher through Zoom meetings, and tutor students while they played with their pets, and siblings yelled in the background. So, were they found to be T-TESS proficient? Were they resilient? The answer is yes, amazingly so.

The first online lesson of resiliency was how to form genuine and trusting relations with students in a 100% online setting. It turns out, as we should have expected, these social media giants had the upper hand in "getting to know you" online.

Clinical Teachers knew how to use appropriate images, music, and photos to make online discussions, study sessions, and learning collaborations personal and free from the "lost in cyberspace" syndrome.

Clinical Teachers created trust in relations by using trust generators through shared stories of challenges through the lens of "what works for me," question post-it boards, and worry drop boxes through private messaging.

Clinical Teachers knew instructional technology strategies... that we taught them! They put those skills to emergency use and trained their mentor teachers how to teach interactively online through synchronous meetings with partners, raised hands, chats, and even gifs and memes for fun.

Resiliency of Educator Preparation and Public School Leadership

We are profoundly proud of the degree of resilience exhibited by clinical teachers. Yet let us not forget the critical role educational leaders in K-12 and EPPs played in securing the underpinnings of their experience by giving the structure and support that ensured clinical teacher success. Much credit goes to the leadership in Educator Preparation programs as well as our EC-12 partner administrators in the public-school systems across Texas.

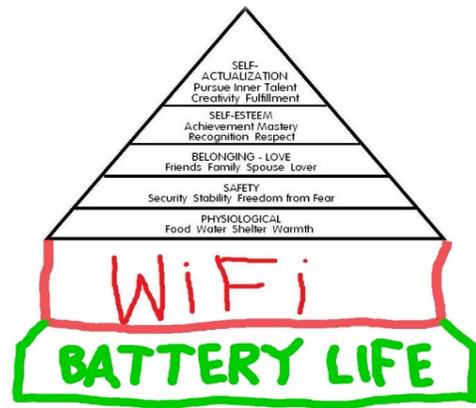
Educational leaders across the state of Texas showed agility in the quick, decisive, and intentional pivots that they led. In many cases, the responsibilities of their leadership were also coupled with difficult budget decisions and delivering this information to teachers, faculty, and staff. With no precedent to which educational leaders could refer, they faced adversity with authentic concern, calm assurance, and decisive action. There was no advanced warning. They led colleges, teams, schools, and districts to expeditious adjustments, often with limited information and inadequate resources.

Resiliency of EPP Faculty, Staff, and Field Supervisors

Last but certainly not least, the amount of teamwork that was required of our faculty, staff, and field supervisors to navigate the 2020-2021 academic year with grace and success cannot be overstated.

EPPs were “all hands on deck” seemingly at all times. Certification officers keenly kept up with emergency declaration updates and waivers, and quickly communicated updates throughout our programs. Faculty navigated the charge to quickly transition to deliver instruction remotely while simultaneously monitoring the mental health of our educator candidates across computer screens, soliciting support from university leadership, campus security, and campus counseling services as needed. Clinical teaching directors and field supervisors traversed varying school district policies regarding observers and clinical teachers and balanced those policies with EPP university policies. Staff engaged in various tasks never before anticipated by the “other duties as needed” line noted on their job descriptions. Everyone simply huddled down, leaned on one another, and slowly, we began to move forward in 2021.

In conclusion, while 2020 often felt like a year of survival, what grew from this struggle was more than our development of survival skills. Our resiliency grew as well. Resiliency is often described in terms of an individual’s ability to bounce back following a difficult event, yet educator resiliency is more clearly examined in terms of an interactive process that occurs between the individual and their environment. Factors specific to both the individual and the environment play a role in educators’ abilities to express resiliency and subsequently thrive within the profession. When confronted by a pandemic that deeply affected educators’ personal sense of self-esteem, self-care, and optimism alongside environmental changes associated with collegial support, workload, and school culture, educators overwhelmingly exhibited resiliency, continued to persevere, and continued to do their best for students.



We did it. Teachers Can: Face the real world of change with resiliency and come out stronger. And, to close our EDICUT editorial, we thought you might appreciate the humor depicted in our addition to Maslow’s hierarchy considering the recent challenges we have all navigated with resolve and grace.