BRIEF:
Equitable Experiences

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

INTERSECTIONAL CONTENT

PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH

QUALITY FRAMEWORK

EQUITABLE EXPERIENCES

INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION

DATA EMPOWERMENT

TARGETED IMPACT

A Higher Standard

Branch Alliance *for* **Educator Diversity**

Suggested Citation:

Canales, L., Alvarez McHatton, P., & O'Meara, J. (2022). *BranchED Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators: Equitable Experiences.* Peachtree City, GA: Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity.

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Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED)

Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity, or BranchED, is the only non-profit organization in the country dedicated to strengthening, growing, and amplifying the impact of educator preparation at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), with the longer-range goals of both diversifying the teaching profession and intentionally addressing critical issues of educational equity for all students. Our vision is for all students to access diverse, highly effective educators.

This goal is accomplished through application of our *Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators.*[1] (the Framework), which outlines a roadmap to create teacher preparation programs that meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student body. The Framework seeks to build equity-oriented educator preparation programs that prepare educators to reflect, respect, and reify the value of the diversity of America's PK12 school children. It offers educator preparation providers (EPPs) a common vision of what high quality, culturally sustaining educator preparation is, and a coherent and sustained approach to implementing evidence-based practices that accomplish vitally important educational equity work.

BranchED Framework for Quality Preparation of Educators

BranchED created the first and only evidence-based framework for the quality preparation of teachers which addresses diversity as a fundamental component of quality. While we assert that each institution has a unique context, we believe that certain key elements are fundamental across all programs, such as: mutually beneficial partnerships with PK-12 and community stakeholders; a coherent, content-rich curricula; culturally and linguistically relevant and sustaining pedagogy; scaffolded and authentic opportunities for practice; genuine community engagement, and equitable opportunities for students to thrive. BranchED's framework is the lens through which we support EPPs' continuous improvement and innovation efforts. It is the bedrock of all the organization's activities.

The Framework was developed through a multi-state process that began in the summer of 2016 and proceeded through the end of 2018. This included a review of the literature on existing practice in teacher preparation and an array of one-on-one interviews with over 50 faculty and leaders of EPPs, representatives of advocacy organizations, teacher groups, and state program approval and licensure department personnel. Subsequent focus groups helped to clarify and strengthen the Framework and its principles. A Charette and a Critical Friends Group, both consisting of prominent thought leaders in teacher education reform within and beyond MSIs, were leveraged to garner specific feedback on the Framework and its RoadMap documents.

BranchED's Framework is unique, in that it does not focus on candidate competencies nor philosophical orientation. Rather, it focuses on six design principles that high-quality educator preparation programs implement to ensure graduates are competent and confident educators able to leverage, not fear or ignore, the differences among their students. Two of these design principles (*Community of Learners* and *Data Empowerment*) provide the foundation for the remaining design principles: *Practice-Based Approach*, *Inclusive Instruction*, *Equitable Experiences*, and *Intersectional Content*.

Each of the design principles was based on contemporary mixed methods research in the fields of teaching and teacher education.[2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12] Each is defined in terms of the critical shift it calls EPPs to make and is operationalized by a set of indicators that help to guide continuous improvement efforts. The Framework is asset-based, formative, and designed for the purposes of continuous improvement, rather than compliance. It is not a one-size-fits-all model; rather, its' design principles serve as critical focus areas in which providers can concentrate their improvement efforts.

Design Principles

Quality educator preparation is catalyzed by a broad-based **Community of Learners**. The Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) establishes a community of learners through leadership, shared responsibility for candidate learning, and professional collaboration.

Quality Educator preparation is **Data Empowered**. The EPP has an active culture of inquiry, utilizing an authentic and ongoing cycle of evidence-based improvement that begins with asking thoughtful questions, moves through organizational learning and action, and ends with an evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken.

Quality educator preparation is grounded in **Intersectional Content**. Before program completion, candidates demonstrate mastery of content related to learners, learning, subject matter, content knowledge for teaching, pedagogical knowledge, assessment, and engagement with families and communities. Such knowledge is dynamic, constructed, and overlapping.

Quality educator preparation is experiential and incorporates a **Practice-Based Approach**. The EPP purposefully engages candidates in direct experience of teaching (practice) and focused reflection, in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop the capacity to contribute to diverse communities.

Quality educator preparation fosters **Inclusive Instruction**. Inclusive pedagogy minimizes or removes barriers to learning or assessment and supports the success of all learners, while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished. Such pedagogy includes the integration of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, social and emotional learning, cognitive science, and trauma-informed care.

Quality educator preparation ensures **Equitable Experiences** for all candidates. The EPP provides a multi-layered, holistic system of candidate-specific research-based supports, just-in-time interventions, and enrichment experiences that are informed by data and identification of candidate-specific needs. These academic and social supports are regularly provided and actively monitored to determine whether activities are effective in meeting candidates' needs and enabling their achievement.

Quality educator preparation achieves **Targeted Impact**. The EPP demonstrates the overall impact and value of its preparation program on its candidates and graduates such that they are competent and confident in their ability to bring about positive academic gains for PK-12 students, especially students of color and low-income students.

Introduction to the Brief

🔴 *Overview of the Brief*

This brief is one in a series in which we revisit each of the design principles to ensure continued relevance to quality educator preparation and provide additional information on each based on a review of the literature. In this brief we highlight the design principle titled: *Equitable Experiences*, as defined by BranchED. We believe quality educator preparation provides a multi-layered, holistic system of candidate-specific research-based supports, just-in-time interventions, and enrichment experiences that are informed by data and the identification of candidate-specific needs. These academic and social supports are regularly provided and actively monitored to determine whether activities are effective in meeting candidates' needs and enabling their achievement. We begin by providing an overview of what comprises equitable experiences based on the literature. Next, is an examination of each of the indicators that are integral to this design principle followed by a description of how one EPP embeds the constructs of *Equitable Experiences* into its practices.

🔴 *Intended Users*

This brief is intended for EPP leaders and teacher educators, whom we define as individuals who play a role in the preparation of teacher candidates by providing instruction or guidance. Teacher educators may hold roles such as: Teacher Education faculty and Arts and Sciences faculty employed by a university, site coordinators, coaches/clinical instructors, PK-12 school-based teachers (e.g., mentor, coordinating teacher), and PK-12 administrators. Pk-12 educators may find this brief applicable to their own practice.

Equitable Experiences

Rendon's (1994)[13] validation theory speaks to the importance of intentional in-class and out-of-class student success actions and strategies to support low-income, first-generation students.

> " *As originally conceived, validation refers to the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) in order to: 1) validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community and 2) foster personal development and social adjustment (p. 12).*[14]

Although research continues to point to the need for EPPs to establish intentional strategies to support students, Rita Kohli and colleagues argue that Teacher Candidates of Color continue to be negatively impacted by structural barriers embedded within educator preparation program policies and practices.[15] While many institutions have implemented strategies to support teacher candidates from underrepresented groups, most of these strategies are not done at scale and only impact the few students engaged in the strategy.[16, 17]

Quality EPPs understand that teacher candidates possess assets including funds of knowledge that can serve as a foundation upon which to build the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary as a high-quality equity focused educator. They also understand that teacher candidates enter their program(s) with unique needs and circumstances. Thus, EPPs must implement assessment processes and supports that ensure strong *Equitable Experiences* for teacher candidates. The following sections provide insights into these indicators.

Indicators of Equitable Experiences

A high-quality educator preparation program ensures teacher candidates have access to quality preparation and just-in-time supports to ensure successful program progression and graduation as well as entry into the profession. The following table details the indicators associated with an EPP that provides strong *Equitable Experiences*.

Ethic of Care	The EPP embraces an ethic of care for all candidates by giving priority and attention to the needs of those that they serve.
Recruitment and Selection	The EPP recruits, selects, prepares, and retains diverse, high potential candidates that possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the needs of diverse PK-12 students.
Advising	The EPP positions advising as more than course selection and reciting university policy, but also as an act of advocacy in helping candidates bridge the demands of their academic and personal lives.
Strong Relationships	The EPP takes intentional steps towards ensuring that all candidates have an opportunity to develop personal bonds with faculty and candidates that decrease feelings of isolation, serve as a social support system, and promote persistence.
Induction Support	The EPP facilitates candidates' smooth transition from pre-service to in-service by offering graduates induction support throughout the first three years of teaching.

● *Ethic of Care*

The relationship between teacher and student is the central premise of the Ethic of Care, which comes from Noddings' Theory of the Ethic of Care.[18] EPPs who exemplify and are committed to promoting an ethic of care go beyond positive interpersonal relationships[19] and ensure that it is embodied in the curriculum through shared construction. Faculty model an ethic of care for teacher candidates and provide opportunities for them to apply their learning in authentic settings through a practice-based approach. An ethic of care is reflected in honest, open dialogue that exemplifies listening and not simply hearing. Critical self-reflection is a vital component of the program, allowing for reflection-in-practice and -of-practice. An EPP that is committed to an ethic of care also ensures continuity of practice, meaning that teacher candidates have

extended opportunities to work with the same learners and families for an extended period. Finally, acts of caring are confirmed, in other words, caring actions are acknowledged and reaffirmed.

Teacher candidates and alumni often can name a faculty and/or staff member that not only provided support but also served as an advocate when needed. During focus groups conducted by BranchED, teacher candidates and alumni often use the term "family" to describe the culture of their EPP. When probed for additional information, they provide concrete examples of how a faculty member or staff member supported them. Evidence of a strong Ethic of Care can be heard through the stories that teacher candidates and alumni share about their lived experience within the program. The same can be said for teacher candidates and alumni who do not experience a strong Ethic of Care. They share concrete stories of feeling isolated, not cared for, and not belonging.

Recruitment and Selection

EPPs across the country face many challenges with recruitment, selection, and retention of teacher candidates. This is especially true for Teacher Candidates of Color.[20] Research suggests there are multiple factors at play that keep prospective Teacher of Color candidates *out* of the teacher workforce and *push* them *out* once they are in teacher preparation programs and careers.[21] Examples of these are high-stakes exams (i.e., professional readiness exams, licensure exams, etc.) and toxic environmental conditions during field and in-service experiences.[22]

Laura Goe and Amanda Roth state EPPs should be intentional in building strategies for collaborating with both school districts and community colleges focused on early recruitment of Students of Color.[23] Authentic partnerships that move beyond field placements can be leveraged to build a deeper understanding of the community(ies) that are served by the EPP. This includes working closely with the school district partners and community colleges to build strong pathways/pipelines. They go on to suggest that MSIs are well positioned to explore their existing partnerships to increase the pool of students that might consider teaching as an option.[24] Ultimately, EPPs committed to diversifying the teacher workforce will have to move beyond exploring the obstacles that are keeping and/or pushing Teacher Candidates of Color out of the profession to making substantial changes that require an honest effort to change policies and practices at scale.

Advising

According to NACADA (National Academic Advising Association)[25], there are three common approaches to organizing academic advising in institutions of higher education.

- ◆ **Centralized:** where professional and faculty advisors are housed in one academic or administrative unit
- ◆ **Decentralized:** professional or faculty advisors are located in their respective academic departments
- ◆ **Shared:** where some advisors meet with students in a central administrative unit, while others advise students in the academic department of their major discipline

It is generally agreed that academic advising can best be described as the "intentional interactions between students and higher education representatives (including both faculty and staff members) (p. 213).[26] There are multiple approaches to academic advising. The table below provides an overview of approaches and their purposes.

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Information Based or Prescriptive Advising	Based on an expert on institution and/or program requirements providing specific information such as course sequence, policies and procedures, graduation requirements, etc. This information can be shared via handbooks, videos, or other types of information sessions rather than through 1-to-1 format.
Intervention Based or Proactive Advising	Provides target support to ensure successful progression and completion. It should begin early in a student's trajectory and is predicated on building strong relationships with students.
Holistic Development or Developmental Advising	Includes both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects. Employs a development approach with student growth, change, and development as desired outcomes. This type of advising is also predicated on having strong relationships with students and utilizes effective teaching strategies that engage students as active participants.
Strength and Asset Building – Strengths-Based/Appreciative Advising	Student strengths and assets are identified as key factors in success and used as the foundation upon which to build resiliency and help students achieve their potential and meet their goals.

Source: He, Y. & Hutson, B. (2016). Appreciative assessment in academic advising.[27]

Further, research notes that advising should be sustained overtime and services differentiated based on student needs—academic and affective.[28] Advising must also be culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining.

The model/approach to advising will vary based on the context of the institution. Quality advising programs can be found in institutions that have thought out their advising approach at the institution, college, department, and faculty level.[29] In a time of scarce resources and economic uncertainty, EPPs must work closely with the institutional advising unit to map out an approach to better support students throughout their educational experience. This includes collaborating to define roles and responsibilities of professional advisors and faculty; creating spaces where professional advisors and faculty continuously share information and experiences; and cultivating a culture where professional advisors and faculty leverage data for continuous improvement.

Strong Relationships

Strong relationships between teacher candidates and EPP faculty/staff provide the foundation for student engagement, belonging, and learning.[30] Beyond academic interactions, out of class and informal interactions are critical to forming strong relationships.[31] The ability to build strong relationships was tested by the pandemic. The move to remote learning required educators to purposefully integrate strategies to build positive relationships (teacher-student as well as student-student) in a digital environment. We found that strong relationships and an ethic of care became even more important during this time when many students and families were faced with food and housing insecurities and/or lacked the technology to access instruction. The ways in which educators responded during the pandemic provided teacher candidates with a model exemplifying how to maintain and foster strong relationships with students during challenging times.

● *Induction Support*

Harry Wong describes the difference between induction and mentoring as follows:

> **"** *Induction is a process—a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process—that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers and seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program. Mentoring is an action. It is what mentors do. A mentor is a single person, whose basic function is to help a new teacher. Typically, the help is for survival, not for sustained professional learning that leads to becoming an effective teacher. Mentoring is not induction. A mentor is a component of the induction process (p. 42).*[32]

Induction programs are put in place to provide comprehensive supports for new, inexperienced teachers who are beginning their teaching career. Although comprehensive induction programs vary in design based on institutional context, there are essential elements that should be a part of any induction program. These include: "...a high-quality mentor program; ongoing professional development; access to an external network of beginning teachers; and standards-based evaluations of beginning teachers as well as the program itself (p. 1)."[33]

The responsibility of preparing high-quality equity minded teachers does not end when candidates graduate and become certified. Research is clear on the impact of EPP support provided during the induction years. EPPs are well positioned to support teacher candidates beyond graduation in collaboration with partner districts.[34] This holds true for EPPs who attend to the indicators outlined in the previous sections of this brief. An effective EPP that establishes a commitment to building strong equitable experiences for teacher candidates can leverage the strong relationships built not only with faculty but with the EPP itself to build intentional strategies to support graduates into their first three years of teaching.

What is Looks Like in Practice

CASE STUDY IN THE FIRST PERSON

Texas A&M International University

Texas A&M International, a Hispanic Serving institution located in the US-border town of Laredo Texas, strives to ensures *Equitable Experiences* for all candidates. Our efforts are guided by the three key principles of *Adelante, Juntos, and Sí se puede!*, that are explained below. Our candidates reflect *Adelante* (immigrant spirit) in the ways they create opportunities to access our program, work hard to ensure success in our program, and bring a can-do attitude when addressing the challenges of being a first-generation college student in our program. Our faculty and students model *Juntos* by sharing a shared vision of success,
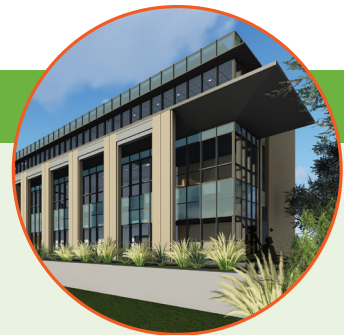
respecting language and culture, embracing shared responsibility for all, and promoting a step-by-step (paso-a-paso) approach where each success reinforces the abilities and confidence of our candidates. Our faculty, students, and advisors champion the belief in *Sí se puede!* (Yes, we can!) by fostering a sense of belonging to decrease feelings of isolation, increase levels of support, and promote persistence among our candidates. Collectively these three principles inform our efforts to provide culturally and linguistically informed **Equitable Experiences** for all candidates.

The richness of '*Adelante*' spirit within our communities fuels our efforts to recruit, prepare and retain diverse candidates with the potential and dispositions to meet the needs of diverse PK-12 students. Texas Association of Future Educator (TAFE) Chapters located on campuses across the city provide the college with a robust pipeline of future educators keen to improve the mobility of their families and the learners they serve. Members of our TAFE Collegiate Chapter serve as pedagogical partners for our faculty and peer mentors for our candidates to ensure the success and retention of our future teachers. The quality of this pipeline is reflected in the six national Educator Rising Collegiate Champions from TAMIU who began their journey in their local TAFE chapter.

The commitment to '*Juntos*' by faculty and students represents a unique ethic of care to ensure access, success, and mobility for all our candidates. Our vision of success begins with reaching back into local school districts to promote access for all. We respect and acknowledge the value of language and culture by lining our corridors with the wisdom, or dichos, of our elders to provide our candidates with constant reminders of how to achieve the success they desire. Our community of faculty and students embrace a shared responsibility for all to the level of knowing every candidate by name and need. We adopt a step-by-step (paso-a-paso) approach and 'lead at the speed of trust' to promote candidate success and confidence along the way. The success rates of our candidates (90+%) far exceed the state benchmarks (75%) and have resulted in state commendation for the last three years.

Our faculty, students, and success coaches champion the belief in *Sí se puede!* (Yes, we can!) by fostering a sense of belonging to decrease feelings of isolation, increase levels of support, and promote persistence among our candidates. Our TAFE members meet with future teachers from day one to decrease feelings of isolation among candidates coming from underrepresented locations within our service area. Our Faculty provide enrichment activities to extend learning opportunities beyond the regularly scheduled class time. Our success coaches promote persistence among our Sí Se Puede! Scholars by providing them with the structure, strategies, and sanctuary they need to experience success from admission through to graduation.

The principles of *Adelante*, *Juntos* and *Sí se puede!* inform our efforts in ensuring **Equitable Experiences** for all candidates. '*Adelante*' fuels recruitment and preparation efforts. 'Juntos' represents our unique duty of care for ensuring access, success, and mobility for all our candidates. *Sí se puede!* is the belief that elevates persistence levels among our candidates. As the diversity of the BranchED Community continues to grow, we look forward to learning about the culturally and linguistically informed principles that we can draw on to further improve our efforts in providing culturally and linguistically informed **Equitable Experiences** for all.
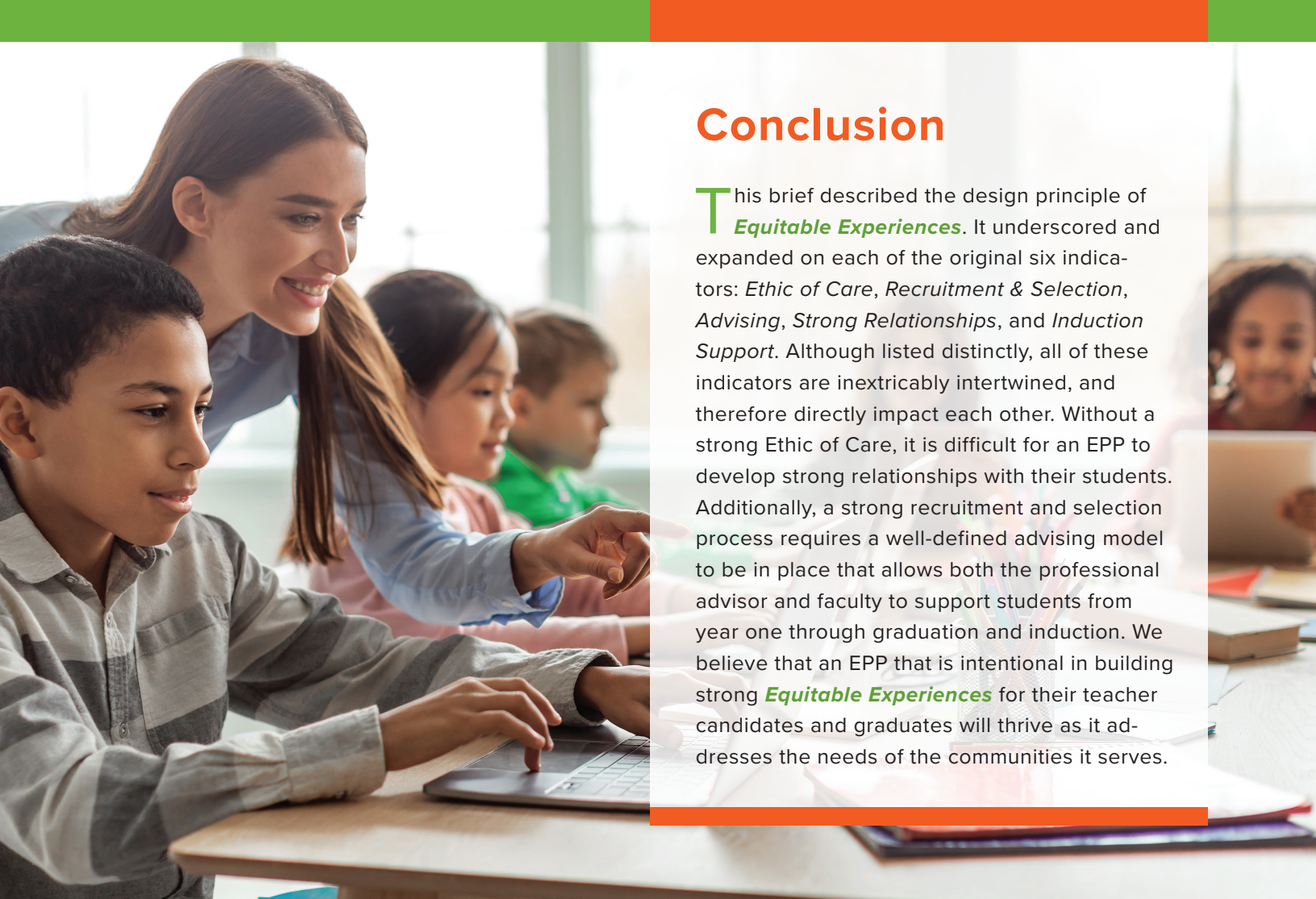
Conclusion

This brief described the design principle of *Equitable Experiences*. It underscored and expanded on each of the original six indicators: *Ethic of Care*, *Recruitment & Selection*, *Advising*, *Strong Relationships*, and *Induction Support*. Although listed distinctly, all of these indicators are inextricably intertwined, and therefore directly impact each other. Without a strong Ethic of Care, it is difficult for an EPP to develop strong relationships with their students. Additionally, a strong recruitment and selection process requires a well-defined advising model to be in place that allows both the professional advisor and faculty to support students from year one through graduation and induction. We believe that an EPP that is intentional in building strong *Equitable Experiences* for their teacher candidates and graduates will thrive as it addresses the needs of the communities it serves.

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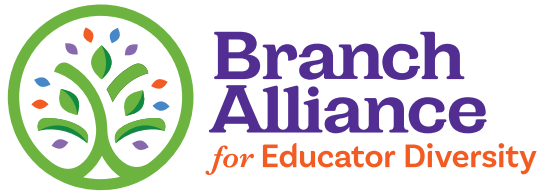
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