

**Northwestern School of Education and Social Policy**  
**Teacher Education Program**  
**Guiding Commitments, January 2021**

We are at a moment in history where education in general and teacher education more specifically needs to evolve to more effectively. Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy (SESP) Teacher Education programs are committed to nurturing ways of thinking about learning and teaching that can help all students to not only survive within systems of oppression but thrive within free and democratic life. The well-being of students, families, communities and ecologies has too often been secondary to these purposes. We believe that making the well-being of all learners primary in theory and practice within education is necessary to help to form new social and cultural realities for people who have been historically underserved by education and to enhance the contributions of those who have been historically privileged by education to create a better world. The world now needs teachers who can weave together the assets of students' past, present and future experiences across settings to help them develop into strong leaders of subject-matter who strive to address inequities and power relations of systemic racism, sexism, socioeconomic classism, heteronormativity, ableism, and other forms of human oppression.

Northwestern University's teacher education programs are in the process of re-envisioning coursework and field-based experiences to focus on a vision of transformative teaching and learning that responds to the needs of individual and collective experiences within our current climate towards more equitable futures. By drawing on SESP's expertise in fields of learning sciences, human development and learning, and social policy, we aspire to develop educators—including our teacher education candidates, teacher leadership candidates, and teacher educators—who are committed and well prepared to advance equity and social justice-based learning environments, engage within and across communities, understand learning and development, and foster subject matter sense-making. Many teacher education programs value the ideas and practices that are embodied in these threads. For example, equity and social justice are well articulated goals within most programs. At Northwestern, we have taken on the challenge to work at the intersections of these threads of thought and action to form a praxis that holds the necessary complexities of each thread simultaneously. We aim to contribute to the leading edge of teacher education by centering the goal of developing and studying a praxis of teacher learning that productively intertwines all of these threads. The redesigned priorities will be enacted through the development of a new level of curricular complementarities and program strategies. We believe these program priorities, when translated meaningfully into learning opportunities across coursework, will place our program design at a productive cutting edge of current practice and research in teacher development.

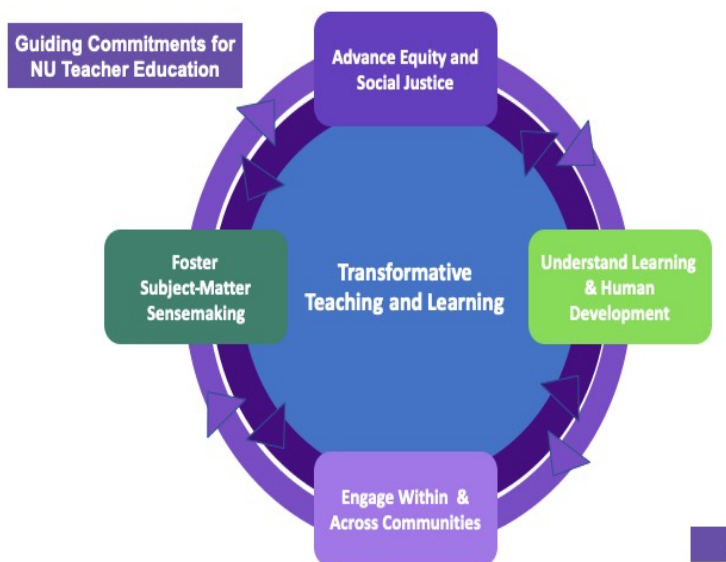
Re-envisioning the work of educator development is no small task and can best be accomplished in partnership with key stakeholders. Key to this work at Northwestern is creating explicit collaborations and consultations with SESP faculty colleagues. These ideas will also be shaped by expanded work with instructors, professors, mentor teachers, supervisors, school partners, job placement sites, as well as our current MSED students and alumni. Their unique perspectives will be engaged throughout the development of our vision statement and related strategic plans. We will also engage with research and practice within the field of teacher education and other fields that are relevant to our growth including subject-matter learning and teaching, SEL, community-based learning, and technological tools for learning.

**VISION: DEVELOPING EDUCATORS TO ENGAGE IN TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING** Northwestern University Teacher Education is committed to developing a community of educators—including aspiring teachers, faculty/staff, instructors, supervisors, mentor teachers, and teacher leaders-- of the highest caliber who see teaching as a scholarly, complex endeavor that requires an understanding of the intertwined nature of theory and practice. Our vision of transformative teaching and learning holds aspirations to develop educators who can nurture the learning of all of their students through valuing the multiple knowledges, identities and experiences that they bring with them to class and by utilizing learner-centered pedagogies. Our vision also includes the development of

educators who have the capacity to design transformative educational experiences that prepare their students to contribute to social and cultural transformation. Our program helps to develop teachers who are able to nurture empathetic and productive relationships with their students, families, communities, and colleagues.

We will achieve our vision of developing transformative educators by collaborating with our educational community to advance a set of intersecting themes, which we refer to as our Guiding Commitments. The purpose of our Guiding Commitments is to provide the conceptual building blocks to develop a teacher education program that nurtures beliefs in educational dignity and equity along with the ability to create classroom interactions that enact those beliefs. The building blocks form a structure where **transformative teaching and learning** is constructed by the intersecting ideas of equity & social justice, subject-matter sensemaking, learning and human development, and engagement within and across communities. These themes and their relationship to one another are articulated through the bullets below, accompanied by the graphical representation that follows.

### Northwestern Teacher Education: Guiding Commitments for Developing Educators to Engage in Transformative Teaching and Learning



Northwestern Teacher Education Guiding Commitments as:

- A statement of values about education for dignity, theories of learning as a social, cognitive, ethical and cultural process, and belief in the power of practices that create culturally sustaining and anti-racist learning environments
- Tools for strengthening our cultural life living through Course, “Discipline”, Program, Community
- Opportunities to build knowledge, enact practices/ performances, cultivate dispositions

**ADVANCE EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE** Great educators have both a strong understanding of their own cultural identities and value the cultural contexts and identities of their students as tools to support development and learning. They draw on these understandings to create relevant, connected and equitable learning experiences with their students. Educators must learn to design and provide the varied materials, questions, goals, and supports that each student needs. At the same time we must acknowledge that teaching and learning is situated in various systems ranging from families to communities, and we must work to understand and challenge systems that perpetuate inequality. Our teacher education programs strive to assist educators in doing this foundational and complex work by developing the following ideas and practices:

- Develop and demonstrate awareness of one's own internalized biases and positional privileges and recognize that identity awareness and development are ongoing
- Demonstrate a recognition that teaching grounded in equity and social justice is essential in any setting and in the teaching of all subject matter
- Identify how various forms of systemic inequity (structural, cultural, political, historical) and local policy show up in classrooms and schools, and work towards reversing these various forms of inequity
- Understand, model, and learn to enact culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies that engage students in exploration of social issues through the lens of varied perspectives and identities
- Cultivate interactions that demonstrably value all students and colleagues and their ideas including knowing how to facilitate difficult conversations and how to respond to various expressions of bigotry
- Understand and draw on the assets of students, colleagues, and their surrounding communities by eliciting their experiences from both in and out of school

**FOSTER SUBJECT MATTER SENSEMAKING** We strive to develop educators with robust understandings of subject matter that can be applied in interdisciplinary ways to the world and their student's lives. These educators understand the importance of always being conscious that the way one thinks about learning informs the way one teaches. And because this is true, they are interested in studying the learning of subject matter based on their students' ideas and the literature. Knowing how students understand disciplinary ideas is an essential part of effective teaching and differentiating supports. It is also essential to recognize that subject matter ideas are always culturally situated. Educators in our programs will develop pedagogical content knowledge and practice that is primarily informed by the following ideas:

- View subject matter as sets of ideas that form both content and pedagogical process for making sense of the world; engage in sensemaking as learners
- Identify as learners and sensemakers who engage in strengthening their own subject matter knowledge and pedagogical practice
- Notice, understand and respond to student thinking in order to encourage meaning making within and across disciplines
- Recognize that the way learning environments are designed will elicit and privilege particular ways of knowing
- Engage in subject matter teaching as an iterative, interdisciplinary, and reflective process of design that involves the creative and skillful use of materials and resources, including technological tools
- Implement inquiry and other pedagogical approaches that reflect understanding knowledge as socially and culturally constructed
- Utilize formative and summative assessment practices that contribute to students' growth
- Examine and address standards within disciplinary areas as a way to both shape and determine content and expectations

**UNDERSTAND LEARNING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** We recognize that the way that educators understand learning and human development is one of the most significant influences on their decisions about instructional strategies, curriculum design, and classroom interactions. The awareness that teachers hold of the complexities of the process of human development influences their ability to engage in positive and productive relationships, address the learning needs of each student whom they serve; it also shapes the way they conceive of evidence about progress and learning. At the same time, educators need to commit to a reflective stance towards their own growth and development based on relevant forms of data. Towards that end, we will work with our community of educators to:

- Understand how theories of learning and development were established and how their enactment is complicated within powered and contradictory systems of schooling
- Understand and enact theories of learning that consider content-area knowledge as being formed by developmental, social, cultural, ethical, and political processes
- Engage in the study of human development as a process of maturation within a network of areas: physical, psychological, emotional and cultural
- Consider human development through an asset-based, iterative, perspective
- Apply systematic and reflective approaches to understanding learning as a function of social, cultural and ecological interactions within contexts
- Become facile at interpreting and evaluating data that influence learning about and improving schools by leveraging relationships between local, state and federal policies and understanding levers for changes

**ENGAGE WITHIN AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES** We recognize teaching and learning as socially mediated experiences that are nested in multiple communities of learning that hold various funds of knowledge. These include classroom and school communities, the communities of our students and families, as well as broader professional communities. Establishing meaningful and reciprocal relationships and being in community with others is contingent upon developing awareness of self and how to negotiate with others across multiple spaces of participation. We are committed to developing the knowledge and the pedagogical skills to support educators for the multiple communities in which they engage, which include:

- See schools, families, and communities as particular types of intersecting systems within a larger ecosystem that shape our students' lives
- Develop a repertoire of self-awareness and self-management skills that support effective relationships and decision making in communities of practice
- Design, establish, and maintain an environment and norms that center students' needs and ideas and fosters a sense of belonging
- Facilitate meaningful discourse and interactions where all members of a community can meaningfully participate and where ideas are encouraged and welcomed
- Establish asset-based, trusting authentic relationships with students and families in service of learning
- Communicate and function with colleagues ethically, responsively and productively
- Participate in professional learning communities as a mechanism for teacher scholarship toward continual individual growth and leadership
- Identify and leverage the formal and informal learning that occurs outside schools
- Engage in learning about the landscape, histories, challenges, assets, and resources of a community in which a school resides to inform relational and instructional interactions with students and families

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