



## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

# Thinking Strategically and Creating Coherence

BY LAUREN MATLACH

Two historically black institutions, Voorhees College and Coppin State University, are Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grantees at different points of their grant cycle. Voorhees College, a 2020 TQP and Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grantee, is deep in planning and early in implementation. Coppin State University, a 2016 grantee, has experienced successes and continues to scale up its efforts. Both grantees approach the work with a strategic lens on critical aspects of sustainability, including partnerships, human and organizational capacity/authority, and alignment and integration. In addition, both grantees designed their programs based on a clear understanding of the strengths and needs of their prospective students.



### What is the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) program?

The TQP program aims to improve the quality of prospective and new teachers by improving the quality of educator preparation of future teachers and professional learning for new teachers. TQP aims to recruit highly qualified individuals, especially those who would increase the diversity of teachers and those interested in teaching in high-needs subjects, into teaching. When applying for a TQP grant, applicants must demonstrate they have established a partnership that includes a high-need local education agency, an educator preparation institution, and specific schools and departments within those partner organizations.



## Meet the Grantees

### Voorhees College

Damara Hightower Mitchell, Ed.D.

Founding Executive Director of the Center of Excellence for Educator Preparation and Innovation at Voorhees College

Voorhees College is a 2020 TQP and SEED grantee. Located in rural Denmark, South Carolina, Voorhees is a four-year career-oriented liberal arts college and a historically black institution. Voorhees was the first college in the United States established by an African American woman.

Its project, V-NET: Voorhees Network for Enhanced Teaching! supports advanced certification and licensure of up to 100 teachers from diverse, non-traditional backgrounds to raise student achievement, eradicate persistent achievement gaps, and ensure students graduate college- and career-ready. The project has a focus on recruiting and supporting mid-career professionals from STEM and critical shortage areas to become fully certified and successful teachers. This work will also lead to the creation of an M.Ed. program, the college's first Master's-level program.

In addition to winning a 2020 TQP grant, Voorhees College received a 2020 SEED grant for their project RISE: Rigorous Instruction Supports Equity!

- [V-NET Abstract](#)
- [RISE: Rigorous Instruction Supports Equity! Abstract](#)



## Meet the Grantees

# Coppin State University

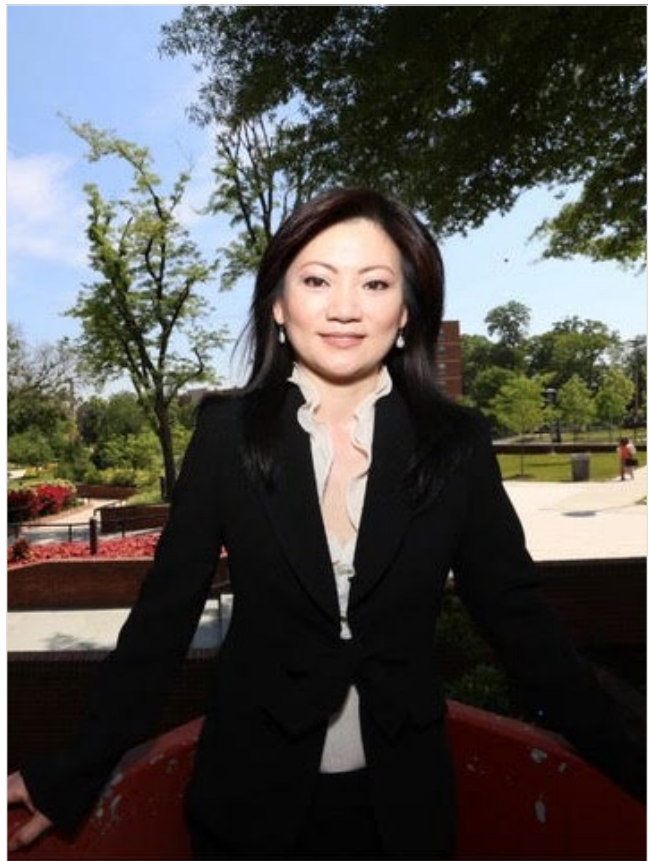
Yi Huang, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Principal Investigator  
of P2P Initiatives

Coppin State University (CSU) is a 2016 TQP grantee. CSU is a historically black institution located in Baltimore, MD, and is one of the smallest institutions within the University System of Maryland. Despite its small size, CSU has worked to grow its Pathways to Professions (P2P) initiative over time.

Its P2P initiative aims to build capacities in delivering high-impact teacher preparation and education programs while simultaneously bridging opportunity and achievement gaps in high-needs urban and rural communities across Maryland. One of the key features of P2P is its clinical rounds: day-long field experiences where teacher candidates engage in school settings significantly different from their home institutions. Another feature is its clinical rotations: multi-day micro-immersion experiences where candidates engage in residential internships in school settings significantly different from their home institutions. Various aspects of P2P have been implemented in 14 high-needs schools across 5 districts in Maryland.

- [Coppin State University: Cultural Diversity and Growth Mindset Microcredential](#)
- [Coppin State University, Frostburg State University Partnership Prepares Teachers for all Classroom Environments](#)



# SUSTAINABILITY-FOCUSED FROM THE BEGINNING

## Voorhees College

### Intentional Needs-Centered Design

Voorhees College applied for 2020 TQP and SEED grants out of a desire to address local needs. “In the surrounding areas, it’s a true struggle to staff schools. There have been efforts to attract talent to bolster student achievement,” explained Dr. Damara Hightower Mitchell, but “Voorhees wanted to contribute and find a way to support education.”

Voorhees had been committed to advancing education for years, but did not sustain previous educator preparation efforts. “We have done traditional educator preparation, and it didn’t quite serve Voorhees—nor has it served other small underresourced educator preparation programs, in my opinion,” Dr. Hightower Mitchell explained. “This is the opportunity to be as innovative and creative as we can.”

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### Internal Alignment and Capacity

The TQP and SEED grants are now part of a larger effort housed within the Center for Excellence for Educator Preparation and Innovation. “There’s something for everyone,” Hightower Mitchell shared. This center houses work in four pathways focused on educator preparation and support:

- A pathway for teachers who are already certified to obtain a microcredential or teacher endorsement (i.e. the SEED grant work)
- An alternative certification program for career changers and degree-holders to get certified through an 11-month residency (i.e. the TQP grant work)

When Voorhees applied for TQP and SEED grants, it approached the same need to staff schools and raise student achievement, especially in STEM areas, from different perspectives. Voorhees recognized that teachers enter the profession in many ways, and part of their TQP project focuses on attracting mid-career professionals in STEM fields. The design of their new competency-based residency “attends to and centers on adults who need to work and also bring skills and talents to the work,” Hightower Mitchell shared. Recognizing the unique needs of career changers, Voorhees College emphasizes preparation that is individualized, self-paced, job-embedded, and grounded in work with schools and students. Voorhees’ SEED grant application focused on helping currently certified teachers add Computer Science or STEM endorsements to their teaching licenses.

“We never thought we would win both grants,” Hightower Mitchell explained, but, as one of only a few grantees to have both a TQP and SEED grant, there is an “opportunity to create synergy between the two programs because they are so well-aligned.”

- A Master’s Degree program for career changers and degree-holders that is competency-based and self-paced (i.e. the TQP grant work)
- Professional learning for already-certified educators to complete an improvement science microcredential and/or complete self-paced professional development (a federal Education Innovation and Research grant effort)

Having multiple grants has enabled the Center to share learnings cross-project, leverage the varied skillsets of the team cross-project, and pool resources when appropriate. “We have a well-rounded team with a coordinator that is clear about the individual initiatives and where it’s appropriate to pool resources,” Hightower Mitchell discussed. “This will help with sustainability.” By leveraging staff strengths across projects, Voorhees is helping to ensure it has sufficient staff capacity for success.

The Center for Excellence for Educator Preparation and Innovation also has support and investment from university leadership and faculty. The Interim President, Dr. Ronnie Hopkins, is a former middle school and high school teacher, and was one of the grant writers. He keeps the grant work at the heart and center of the institution. “The institution has worked hard to help us find resources so that the center is well-positioned,” Hightower Mitchell explained. In addition, faculty and department chairs are supportive of the Center’s work and are eager to be involved.

“The college has supported us the entire way since getting started,” Alisha Truesdale-Cotton, Program Coordinator for RISE, shared.

## Strategic Partnerships

Although Voorhees is early in its TQP and SEED grant implementation, it views its partnerships as one of its early grant achievements. Voorhees has developed partnerships with six districts in South Carolina as well as an alternate certification program. When thinking about partners, the college has been intentional about who they partner with to ensure that values are aligned and that there is a genuine desire for collaboration.

“The logic model was actually very helpful,” Dr. Hightower Mitchell explained. “It helped us articulate what we were going to do in a succinct and accessible manner. Sharing it with prospective partners has been helpful to see where there is common ground and well-aligned values and goals.”

In particular, Voorhees is excited about its partnership with the Carolina Collaborative for Alternative Preparation (CAP), an alternative certification program established by the University of South Carolina and the Center for Teaching Quality. “We had the option to start our own alternative certification program or look at some of the existing programs and find a way to pool resources and collaborate,” said Hightower Mitchell. Voorhees is excited to work with a well-established alternative certification program. CAP will be able to share its expertise and experience with Voorhees, and Voorhees will be able to help CAP add some new services and supports.

Establishing advisory boards and partnerships has energized the Center staff. “Seeing their energy, it energizes us.” Center staff, Voorhees College, and its partners are ready for the deep work ahead and are excited for what the future holds.

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### Leveraging Logic Models to Support Communications and Partnerships: Resources

Logic models can be a useful communications tool because they concisely convey the goals, strategies, and intended outcomes of grant work. For more details about writing and using logic models, see:

1. **Logic Model Playlist** - This playlist includes four brief videos, including a grantee panel focused on the opportunities and challenges of developing and using logic models.
2. **EED Blog** - Blog Post 5, Using Your Logic Model to Enhance and Inform Your Communications Toolkit, focuses on how to use logic models as a communications tool and how to use logic models to inform communications planning.



# BUILDING PATHWAYS TO INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

## Coppin State University

### From Necessity Comes Innovation

Given its small size, CSU seemed like an unlikely candidate for a sizable federal grant. When talking about the TQP grant, Dr. Yi Huang was very honest: CSU applied partly out of mission and partly out of necessity. CSU's focus on "making excellence inclusive" meant changing the ways things were traditionally done, and her department had a focus on academic innovation and community transformation but had no research and development budget to support the work. The TQP grant was an opportunity to build capacity and support the critical work of the institution.

CSU was aware that students in rural and urban areas had similar needs but different contexts. Its TQP grant development, in Huang's words, "started with a simple idea": taking Coppin State students, some of whom "have never been outside [Baltimore] city," to rural K-12 schools to make CSU's teacher candidates more culturally responsive and globally competitive. The idea of Pathways to Professions (P2P) was born.

In addition to unique residency clinical experiences, CSU's grant application proposed microcredentials for career readiness completed during clinical preparation and microcredentials for career advancement completed during the early teaching years.

### The Importance of Multi-Sector Partnerships to Support Scale-Up

The P2P Project began as a partnership between two urban entities (Coppin State University and Baltimore Teachers Union) and two rural entities (Frostburg State University and Alleghany County Public Schools). Over time, the P2P project has expanded to include additional partners. "We recognize how small we are," Dr. Huang shared, "We need to be strategic in leveraging the power of many."

CSU understood the importance of establishing multiple collaborative partnerships across multiple stakeholders when addressing intractable opportunity and achievement gaps. CSU leveraged expertise and resources among policymakers, academic experts, and industry leaders to build capacity, enhance transparency, and improve outcomes, especially for under-served populations in high-needs communities.

CSU currently offers 12 microcredentials, including (A) P2P Microcredentials for Career Readiness in cultural diversity, universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, assessment, classroom management, and family engagement, and (B) P2P Microcredentials for Career Advancement in social emotional learning, culturally responsive practices, critical thinking, transformational technology, behavior support for increased engagement, and competency-based learning.

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education awarded CSU a TQP grant, making CSU one of the first historically black institutions to be awarded a TQP grant and one of the first TQP grantees to have a focus on microcredentials.

Despite contextual and operational challenges faced with implementing a large scale project, Huang credits the resiliency of the grant team. Keeping true to the core principles and focusing on "making excellence inclusive" have helped the team stay the course, helping them achieve positive outcomes to date.

Huang highlighted the importance of support from the University System of Maryland (USM), which includes CSU, 11 other state-funded institutions and three regional centers. Notably, the leadership and support from Dr. Nancy Shapiro, Associate Vice Chancellor & Special Assistant to the Chancellor for P-20 Education led to greater collaboration among the P2P/USM Consortium members from IHEs and LEAs and broader recognition of CSU's microcredentials among the partnering agencies.

The P2P/USM Consortium created by CSU and with the support of the USM has been critical to scaling P2P. The consortium includes multiple institutions from the University System of Maryland, multiple districts across Maryland, multiple regulatory and advocacy agencies (such as the USM's Office of P-20 Initiatives, the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, and industry leaders, such as Watermark and Credly Acclaim. This networked improvement community (NIC) has helped CSU build its own capacity and the capacity of partners in the joint commitment toward increasing teacher effectiveness and improving student learning.

In 2019, Huang at CSU authored a second TQP grant for Frostburg State University, which replicates key elements of the P2P model from the current CSU grant. This second TQP grant exemplifies strategic actions for sustained innovation and scaled implementation with promising practices and lessons learned from the TQP grant at CSU.

As of Spring 2021, P2P has been implemented in 14 high-needs schools across five districts in Maryland, supported 293 candidates through clinical rounds, 42 candidates for clinical rotations, issued 356 microcredentials in career readiness and in career advancement.

## Institutional Growth & Integration

CSU's TQP grant work is one piece of a larger puzzle. Since 2016, the P2P Initiative has grown significantly. P2P initiatives now include a collection of grants funded by state, federal and private agencies, and based on a common framework inclusive of community pathways, higher education pathways (including TQP grant work), and industry pathways (including TQP grant work). All pathways focus on providing opportunities to those who otherwise may not have had access, keeping true to Coppin State's vision of "making excellence inclusive."



### Establishing and Maintaining Meaningful Partnerships: Resources

Logic models can be a useful communications tool because they concisely convey the goals, strategies, and intended outcomes of grant work. For more details about writing and using logic models, see:

1. **Partnership Playlist** – This playlist includes three videos, including an introductory video and a 16-minute video describing different partnership types.
2. **Blog** – Blog Post 7, "Partnerships, A Critical Aspect of Sustainability", provides clarity on partnerships currently operating in your EED grant.

In addition, CSU is working toward applying the learnings of P2P Microcredentials to create new institutional policies and models for Credits for Prior Learning (CPL). CPL recognizes students' prior learning through work and other life experiences that are worthy of college credits. The CPL options present additional opportunities for non-traditional students who are interested in entering the teaching profession. These new options will likely have significant impact on university offerings and academic pathways long-term.

## CLOSING

“People said we were never going to get the grant, that we don’t have the capacity,” Huang explained. “But we won the grant, and we are making progress. I want to encourage other institutions like us to apply for grants.” Not only is Coppin State University making progress, but it was highlighted in February 2021, by the U.S. Department of Education as a Promising Grant.

Both Voorhees College and Coppin State University are examples of how grantees can build partnerships and engage stakeholders early to help build capacity and garner support that leads to careful alignment and integration of work into the core of the institution.

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