Purpose: This project will prepare highly qualified personnel who can provide quality instruction using evidence-based best practices, curriculum, and pedagogy responsive to the needs of students with high-incidence disabilities in urban, K-12 school settings. Specifically, the redesigned integrated/unified elementary and special education program will improve the quality of K-12 special education teachers to ensure that program graduates are able to meet highly qualified teacher requirements under IDEA and are well prepared to serve students with high-incidence disabilities. Teacher candidates will earn the B.S. degree in Elementary Education and acquire licensure in Special Education General Curriculum (K-12) and Elementary Education (K-6).

Method: Project FIRE's strategies include the following: (a) increase collaborative efforts between elementary and special education faculty members through regularly scheduled educational collaboration team meetings to align and revise curriculum, course syllabi, and field experience competencies, as well as integrate evidence-based interventions and develop induction and mentoring program components; (b) increase field-based opportunities for preservice candidates in schools and settings with wide student and teacher diversity and high poverty; (c) engage in mutually beneficial partnerships between North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University and area local education agencies (i.e., professional development schools) where diverse students are served to promote continuous improvement in the elementary and special education teacher preparation program and in service delivery to high-need students with disabilities in urban classrooms; (d) design support systems using tutors, mentors, professional development workshops on innovative practices, and induction programs to enhance retention in the
program and success upon completion; and (e) disseminate evidence-based practices, valid field experience competencies, faculty collaboration models, and effective support systems.

Products: