

# The Teacher Residency

A Practical Path to Recruitment and Retention



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**R**ecruitment and retention challenges are once again leading to teacher shortages across the nation. Especially in urban and rural school districts, low salaries and poor working conditions often contribute to the difficulties of recruiting and keeping teachers, as can the challenges of the work itself. As a consequence, in many schools—especially those serving the most vulnerable populations—students often face a revolving door of teachers over the course of their school careers.<sup>1</sup>

Turnover is higher in districts that meet shortages by hiring teachers who have not completed an adequate preparation, as

novices without training leave after their first year at more than twice the rate of those who have had student teaching and rigorous preparation.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, teachers who do not receive mentoring and support in their first years leave teaching at much higher rates than those whose school or district provides such support.<sup>3</sup> Under these circumstances, everyone loses: Student achievement is undermined by high rates of teacher turnover and by teachers who are inadequately prepared for the challenges they face. Schools suffer from continual churn, undermining long-term improvement efforts. Districts pay the costs of both students' underachievement and teachers' high attrition.<sup>4</sup>

Newly emerging teacher residency programs seek to address these problems by offering an innovative approach to recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Residencies have typically been focused in hard-to-staff geographic areas (urban and rural) and subject areas (e.g., mathematics, science, special education, and bilingual/English as a second language teaching). They recruit the teachers that local districts know they will need early, before they are prepared, so that they can then prepare them to excel and remain in these schools. When used in this deliberative

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manner, teacher residencies can address a crucial recruitment need while also building the capacity of districts to provide high-quality instruction to the students they serve.

## The Design of Teacher Residency Programs

Building on the medical residency model, teacher residencies provide an alternative pathway to teacher certification grounded in deep clinical training. Residents apprentice alongside an expert teacher in a high-need classroom for a full academic year. They take closely linked coursework from a partnering university that leads to a credential and a master's degree at the end of the residency year. They receive living stipends and tuition support as they learn to teach; in exchange, they commit to teach in the district for several years beyond the residency.

## Residents apprentice alongside an expert teacher in a high-need classroom for a full academic year.

This model fosters tight partnerships between local school districts and teacher preparation programs. Residencies recruit teachers to meet district needs—usually in shortage fields. Then they rigorously prepare them and keep them in the district. While most teacher residencies began in urban districts, consortia of rural districts and charter school organizations have also created them.

Although many teacher preparation programs have evolved substantially, traditional university-based programs have often been critiqued for being academically and theoretically focused, with limited and disconnected opportunities for clinical experience. Conversely, alternative routes into teaching have been criticized for focusing on “learning by doing,” with limited theoretical grounding and little or no opportunity for supervised student teaching alongside expert teachers modeling good practice.<sup>5</sup> These critiques, coupled with the challenge of hiring and keeping well-prepared teachers in hard-to-staff districts, have led to the “third space” from which teacher residencies have grown in the last 15 years.<sup>6</sup>

In part, the residency design emerged from the Master of Arts in Teaching programs started in the 1960s and 1970s—an earlier era of teacher shortages—as federally funded innovations at elite colleges and universities. Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, among others, launched yearlong post-graduate programs that typically placed candidates in schools for a full year of student-teaching internships in the classrooms of expert veteran teachers, while the candidates also took coursework from the university. In those days, the federal government

provided aid to offset many of the costs of these teacher preparation programs. Even though federal aid has dwindled considerably, many of these programs continue today. This design created the foundation for the residency model, which adds a closer connection to the hiring district and provides additional financial incentives and mentoring supports for teacher candidates.

## Key Characteristics

Several characteristics set teacher residency programs apart from most traditional teacher preparation and alternative certification programs. First, residencies are typically developed as a partnership between a school district and a local institution of higher education, with the goal of fulfilling the partner district's hiring needs. A second characteristic of residencies is a longer clinical placement than is found in most traditional or alternative programs, generally at least a full school year, with residents working under the guidance of an experienced, expert mentor—before becoming the teacher of record. Third, high-quality residencies offer teacher candidates a curriculum that is tightly integrated with their clinical practice, which creates a more powerful learning experience.

Although each teacher residency program is unique, a few of the key common characteristics shared by high-quality residencies are described below:

**District-university partnerships.** In contrast to traditional teacher preparation programs, which often do not recruit and place candidates in specific districts to fulfill the districts' particular needs, residents are recruited to work for the partner district (or charter management organization) and fulfill its hiring needs (e.g., filling shortage subject areas and/or teaching in specific schools). Residents commit to teaching in the local school district after the program ends. High-quality residency programs are codesigned by the district and the university to ensure that residents get to know the students and families in the communities in which they will be teaching and are rigorously prepared to teach in those communities and schools.

**Candidate recruitment and selection.** Districts and preparation programs partner in the recruitment and selection of the

## High-quality teacher residencies feature:

1. Strong district-university partnerships.
2. High-ability, diverse candidates recruited to meet specific district hiring needs, typically in fields where there are shortages.
3. A full year of apprentice teaching under supervision.
4. Coursework about teaching and learning tightly integrated with clinical practice.
5. Ongoing mentoring and support for graduates.
6. Cohorts of residents placed in “teaching schools” that model good practices with diverse learners and are designed to help novices learn to teach.
7. Financial support for residents in exchange for a three- to five-year teaching commitment.
8. Carefully selected expert mentor teachers who coteach with residents.

residents to ensure that residents meet local hiring needs. In addition, the programs aim to broaden and diversify the local teacher workforce by selecting high-quality candidates through a competitive screening process. Residencies recruit candidates from a wide variety of backgrounds, both recent college graduates and midcareer professionals, and are highly selective.

**Clinical experience.** For at least one academic year, candidates spend four to five days a week in a classroom under the wing of an experienced and trained mentor teacher, and gradually take on more responsibilities over the course of the year.<sup>7</sup> Most residents receive at least 900 hours of pre-service clinical preparation, while the norm for most traditional programs is in the range of 400–600 hours. Most alternative certification programs offer little or no student teaching.<sup>8</sup>

**Coursework.** Coursework in residencies is closely integrated with clinical experiences. Sometimes, courses are designed and taught by experienced teachers in the district.<sup>9</sup> Often, the university faculty members who teach courses are involved in local schools and are themselves former teachers. Many courses are cotaught by school and university faculty. Candidates take graduate-level coursework that leads to both state certification/licensure and a master's degree from the partner university.

One study found that residents across 30 teacher residency programs took an average of 450 hours of coursework, roughly equivalent to 10 college courses; residents in these programs reported that the coursework was well integrated with their clinical experiences, a key goal of residencies.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, many programs require frequent feedback and performance-based assessments of candidates' classroom practice.

**Mentor recruitment and selection.** Residencies not only allow districts to attract and train high-quality teacher candidates, but also provide career advancement opportunities for experienced teachers within those districts to serve as mentors, supervisors, and instructors in the programs. As it is for candidates, the selection process for mentors typically is rigorous because they must be both experienced and accomplished. A study of 30 teacher residency programs found that mentors in these programs had, on average, 10 years of prior teaching experience.<sup>11</sup> Some programs offer teacher mentors financial benefits, such as \$2,000 or \$3,000 stipends and/or money targeted for professional development, but there are nonfinancial rewards to mentoring as well, notably the benefit to mentors of improving their own practice. As a mathematics and science mentor from one program explained:

The mentorship experience re-inspired me. I became a more reflective educator by working closely with someone daily, and my students benefited by having two teachers in the classroom. Mentoring also made me think back to everything that I had stopped doing and reminded me how to be a better teacher.<sup>12</sup>

**Cohorts placed in teaching schools.** Another key feature of many residencies is the placement of candidates into cohorts; participants of a program may be clustered in university courses as well as school sites, to create a stronger support network and to foster collaboration among new and experienced teachers.<sup>13</sup>

In these kinds of teaching schools, often called professional development schools (PDSs) or partner schools, faculty members from the school and university work together to develop curricu-

lum, improve instruction, and undertake school reforms, making the entire school a site for learning and feedback for adults and students alike.<sup>14</sup> Many such schools actively encourage resident teachers to participate in all aspects of school functioning, ranging from special education and support services for students, to parent meetings, home visits, and community outreach, to faculty discussions and projects aimed at ongoing improvement in students' opportunities to learn.

Studies of highly developed PDSs have found that new teachers who graduate from such programs feel better prepared to teach and are rated by employers, supervisors, and researchers as stronger than other new teachers. Veteran teachers working in such schools describe changes in their own practice as a result of the professional development, action research, and mentoring parts



of the PDS. Studies have documented gains in student performance tied to curriculum and teaching interventions resulting from PDS initiatives.<sup>15</sup>

**Early career mentoring.** Programs also provide early career mentoring and support for one to three years after a candidate becomes the teacher of record. This type of intentional mentoring in high-quality residency programs can be very important both for developing teachers' competence and for reducing attrition. Studies show that having planned time to collaborate with a mentor in the same subject area is a key element of successful induction that supports beginning teacher retention.<sup>16</sup>

**Financial support and incentives.** Unlike most traditional or alternative preparation programs, residency programs are organized and funded to offer financial incentives to attract and retain high-quality candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences. These incentives include living stipends, student loan forgiveness, and/or tuition remittance in exchange for residents' commitment to teaching in the district for a specified period of time, typically three to five years. One cross-site study cites residency program contributions for candidates' training and master's degrees to be anywhere from \$0 to \$36,000 in the programs reviewed.<sup>17</sup> Other kinds of resident funding and support, such as stipends and tuition reimbursements, also vary. Often, living stipends are lower when tuition reimbursements are higher.

## Impact of Residencies

With recent federal and philanthropic support, there are now at least 50 teacher residency programs nationwide, which range in size from five to 100 residents per year. A small but growing body of research has been conducted on the impact of residencies on teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and student achievement. Most studies have been in-depth case studies of the earliest programs; to date, only one comprehensive study (of the Teacher Quality Partnership grant) examines characteristics and impact across several programs nationally.

The findings from these studies regarding the impact of teacher residencies on teacher recruitment and retention are promising, although more research is needed, especially with respect to teacher impacts on students. Research suggests that well-designed and well-implemented teacher residency models can

## Studies of teacher residency programs consistently point to the high retention rates of their graduates, even after several years in the profession.

create long-term benefits for districts, for schools, and, ultimately and most importantly, for the students they serve. Key benefits include increased teacher recruitment diversity, higher teacher retention, and greater student outcomes.

**Recruitment.** Many residency programs have specific goals around recruitment, such as diversifying the teacher workforce by attracting more candidates of color or bringing in midcareer professionals. Research suggests that residencies bring greater gender and racial diversity into the teaching workforce. Across teacher residency programs nationally, 45 percent of residents in 2015–2016 were people of color. This proportion is more than double the national average of teachers of color entering the field, which is 19 percent.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to attracting a more diverse workforce, residencies aim to staff high-need schools and subject areas. Nationally, 45 percent of residency graduates in 2015–2016 taught in a high-need subject area, including mathematics, science, technology fields, bilingual education, and special education.<sup>19</sup>

**Retention.** National studies indicate that around 20–30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years, and that attrition is even higher (often reaching 50 percent or more) in high-poverty schools and in high-need subject areas.<sup>20</sup> Studies of teacher residency programs consistently point to the high retention rates of their graduates, even after several years in the profession, generally ranging from 80–90 percent in the same

district after three years and 70–80 percent after five years.<sup>21</sup>

In two of the most rigorous studies to date, researchers found statistically significant differences in retention rates between residency graduates and nonresidency peers, controlling for the residents' characteristics and those of the settings in which they taught. Higher retention rates may be attributable to the combination of program quality, residents' commitment to teach for a specific period of time in return for financial support, and induction support during the first one to three years of teaching.<sup>22</sup>

**Student outcomes.** Because most residency programs are still in their infancy, only a few studies have examined program impact on student achievement. These initial studies have found that the students of teachers who participated in a residency program outperform students of non-residency-prepared teachers on select state assessments.<sup>23</sup>

The teacher residency model holds much promise to address the issues of recruitment and retention in high-need districts and subject areas. This model also has the potential to support systemic change and the building of the teaching profession, especially in the most challenging districts.

Initial research is promising as to the impact residencies can have on increasing the diversity of the teaching force, improving retention of new teachers, and promoting gains in student learning. This research also suggests that the success of residencies requires attention to each of the defining characteristics of the model and the integrity of their implementation. Important factors include: (1) careful recruitment and selection of residents and mentor teachers within the context of a strong partnership between a district and university, (2) a tightly integrated curriculum based on a yearlong clinical placement in classrooms and schools that model strong practice, (3) adequate financial assistance, and (4) mentoring supports as candidates take on classrooms and move into their second and third years of teaching.

Residencies support the development of the profession by acknowledging that the complexity of teaching requires rigorous preparation in line with the high levels of skill and knowledge needed in the profession. Residencies also build professional capacity by providing professional learning and leadership opportunities for accomplished teachers in the field, as they support the growth and development of new teachers. These elements of strengthening the teaching profession can create long-term benefits for districts, schools, and, most importantly, the students they serve. □

## Endnotes

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18. Nineteen percent of new hires (first-time teachers) are teachers of color (nonwhite). Twenty percent of total hires are teachers of color—this includes brand-new, returning, and reentry teachers. Eighteen percent of the total teacher workforce are teachers of color (nonwhite). Data from authors' analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, *2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Restricted-Use Data Files*.

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21. For more on these findings, see table 1 in Roneeta Guha, Maria E. Hyler, and Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Teacher Residency: An Innovative Model for Preparing Teachers* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016), 14.

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