
Teacher Residencies

Building a High-Quality, Sustainable Workforce

By Roneeta Guha and Tara Kini



The Problem

Recruitment and retention challenges are once again leading to teacher shortages in California and 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 face a revolving door of teachers over the course of their school careers. Many of these teachers are underprepared for the fields they teach.

In districts that meet shortages by hiring teachers who have not completed adequate preparation, turnover is higher, as novices without training leave after their first year at twice the rate of those who have had student teaching and preparation. Similarly, teachers who are left to sink or swim on their own leave teaching at much higher rates than those who receive supportive mentoring in their first years on the job. Under these circumstances everyone loses: student achievement is undermined by high rates of teacher turnover and 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.

The Promise of Residencies

Newly emerging teacher residency programs offer an innovative approach to recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. These programs

- Create a vehicle to recruit teachers for high-needs fields and locations,
- Offer recruits strong clinical preparation specifically for the kinds of schools in which they will teach,
- Connect new teachers to early career mentoring that will keep them in the profession, and
- Provide financial incentives that will keep teachers in the districts that have invested in them.

Key Characteristics of Strong Residencies:

1. Strong district/university partnerships
2. Coursework tightly integrated with clinical practice
3. Full-year residency teaching alongside an expert mentor teacher
4. High-ability, diverse candidates recruited to meet specific district hiring needs, typically in fields where there are shortages
5. Financial support for residents in exchange for a three- to four-year teaching commitment
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. Expert mentor teachers who co-teach with residents
8. Ongoing mentoring and support for graduates

What is a teacher residency? 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 three to four years beyond the residency.

How do schools benefit? 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.

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Impact of Residencies

The teacher residency model creates long-term benefits for districts, for schools, and ultimately and most importantly, for the students they serve. With recent federal and philanthropic support, there are now an estimated 50 residency programs nationwide, which range in size from five to 100 residents per year. The emerging research base points to residencies as a promising model.

- **On Recruitment:** Initial research suggests that residencies bring greater gender and racial diversity into the teaching workforce. Across teacher residency programs nationally, more than a third of residents (38 percent) in 2014–15 were people of color, double the national average of new teachers of color entering the field (19 percent).
- **On Retention:** Rigorous studies of teacher residency programs have found significantly higher retention rates for graduates of these programs. A recent study of graduates of the 12 oldest and largest residency programs found 82 percent still teaching in the same district in their third and fourth year, compared with 72 percent of non-residency recruits. An in-depth study of the Boston Teacher Residency found that 80 percent of residency graduates were still teaching in Boston Public Schools in their third year compared with 63 percent of non-resident teachers; by their fifth year, 75 percent of residency graduates were still teaching in the district compared with 51 percent of non-resident teachers.
- **On Student Outcomes:** The same study of the Boston Teacher Residency found that residency graduates surpass the effectiveness of new and veteran teachers in math after the fourth of year of teaching.

Conclusion

The teacher residency model is a promising approach to addressing recruitment and retention issues in high-needs districts and in shortage subject areas. At the same time, they create fundamental systemic change and build the teaching profession, especially in the most challenging districts. Residencies are a promising long-term solution to meeting district hiring needs, allowing districts to play a direct role in training their future workforce. Districts benefit by filling vacancies with better prepared, more diverse teachers who stay longer to serve as leaders in their schools and community. And students benefit from well-prepared teachers who provide continuity and leadership in their schools.