

How California's Teacher Residencies Are Helping to Solve Teacher Shortages and Strengthen Schools

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Abstract

With significant state investment, teacher residencies are spreading throughout California. These vignettes highlight two California teacher residencies and how they are helping to address shortages and support both students and teachers. These examples also spotlight creative funding strategies that can help California's investments in teacher residencies become sustainable over time.

The report on which this brief is based can be found online at <http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/strategies-funding-teacher-residencies-california> and <http://bankstreet.edu/strategies-funding-teacher-residencies-california>.

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Like many states, California has faced acute teacher shortages for a number of years, particularly in special education, mathematics and science, and bilingual education. In the 2017-18 school year, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) issued more than 13,000 intern credentials, permits, and waivers—all substandard credentials allowing underprepared individuals to enter classrooms as teachers of record, primarily in schools serving concentrations of students from low-income families.¹ High-quality teacher residencies provide an avenue for addressing California's teacher shortage areas. Research suggests that high-quality teacher residencies can prepare effective teachers who stay in the profession, helping to reduce high rates of teacher turnover and end the revolving door of educators in the highest-need schools. In addition, residencies, when adequately funded, often provide financially feasible pathways for candidates and are more likely to recruit teachers of color than other pathways into teaching.²

In 2018, California allocated \$75 million in seed funding to support teacher residency programs across the state. The vignettes below describe how two residency programs—in Humboldt County and Fresno—are helping to solve shortages and strengthen schools while developing sustainable programs that can be maintained over time.

Paraeducator to Education Specialist Pipeline: Humboldt County

A special education residency in Humboldt County is addressing special education shortages by developing paraeducators already employed by districts. The county spans more than 4,000 square miles across Northern California. To meet the needs of its 32 diverse

and primarily rural districts,³ the Humboldt County Office of Education partnered with Humboldt State University to form the North Coast Teacher Residency Consortium, which used California Teacher Residency Grant funds to launch its first cohort in fall 2019.

In 2017-18, 17% of teachers in the county were new hires, nearly 1 in 5 of whom was hired on a substandard credential or permit (i.e., an intern credential, emergency-style permit, or waiver).⁴ Special education is an acute shortage area, and districts struggle to fill positions with qualified special education teachers, often hiring teachers on substandard permits or credentials. With districts willing to hire teachers who have not yet earned a full credential, and candidates who cannot afford to forgo a paycheck while they undertake their teacher preparation training, a growing number of candidates in California are entering the teaching field through alternative pathways, for which turnover is significantly higher. “A number of [potential teacher candidates] say, ‘I’d love to come to your program, but I can’t afford not to work,’” says Humboldt State Special Education Program Coordinator Bernie Levy. To address the challenge of candidates opting for paid positions over a teacher residency or other preservice preparation pathway—a challenge that many programs experience—the residency focuses on recruiting existing special education paraeducators.

Of the 10 residents in the residency’s inaugural cohort, 8 were paraeducators. Paraeducator residents keep their jobs during the residency but are guaranteed to spend at least 50% of every day in a class setting working with a special education mentor teacher. Depending on their assignments, some paraeducators may then spend part of each day in a self-contained special education classroom, resource room, or one-on-one context. Partnership agreements ensure the 50% clinical fieldwork minimum as well as release time for program requirements, including a system by which residents can swap sites (e.g., elementary-secondary) and maintain their paraeducator positions at the new site.

During the 50% of their time spent as residents working with a special education mentor teacher, paraeducator residents have opportunities to co-plan with their mentor teacher, design curriculum, teach lessons to the whole class and small groups, and modify lessons to meet the needs of students with exceptional needs in their class. These opportunities differ significantly from the other 50% of their time, when they serve in a traditional paraeducator role, though the partnership is working to maximize resident time in the mentor teacher’s classroom. Residents earn their regular salaries of \$18,127 to \$25,635,⁵ plus benefits. In addition, the residency covers testing fees and \$10,000 tuition, and residents can opt to work during summer school for additional pay. Residents receive university coaching and support and attend evening courses at Humboldt State, with remotely located residents using distance learning tools. Sites hosting residents are allocated a \$9,000 supplemental budget to support residency activities, including mentor stipends and substitutes for when paraprofessional residents are engaged in residency work outside their regular positions.

Humboldt State supervisors and teacher preparation course instructors work together to provide a cohesive experience for residents. Not only do instructors reconfigure coursework and coordinate assignments to better integrate with clinical fieldwork; they also continue to meet with supervisors every 6 to 8 weeks to discuss programming, resident progress, mentor teacher feedback, and ways to provide additional support for residents who need it.

With the program only in its first year, it is too early to show results. But so far, the response has been positive: “We’re already getting calls for next year,” says Special Education Program Leader David Ellerd. “It’s helped a lot already,” says Humboldt County Coordinator of Personnel Services Stephanie Jackson. “Next cohort, we’ll have no problem filling it!” According to Bernie Levy, 9 of the 10 residents have full-time teaching positions to date, with the 10th resident still working as a paraeducator.

Through its design, the North Coast Residency leverages the fact that California’s residency grants allow for half-time residency placements. While full-time paid placements would be ideal, yearlong high-quality, half-time residencies represent strong improvements over internship or emergency-style permit models in which new teachers have little to no preparation before, or supports after, they enter the classroom as teacher of record. Given California’s context, the North Coast Residency’s approach is a creative solution to a widespread challenge.

Residency Supports Whole-School Improvement: Fresno Unified

Fresno Unified School District and Fresno State have an established teacher residency program—first launched with federal grant funding—that they have been able to grow with funding from California’s teacher residency grant program. Their strong partnership demonstrates how teacher residencies can be an effective strategy for whole-school improvement, which makes them eligible for Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funding. In fall 2017, Fresno Unified district leaders took a leap of faith by placing an entire cohort of 25 residents at one high-need school with an invested principal and a diverse student body of 600 students, most from low-income backgrounds.

District leadership and Wishon Elementary’s principal, Annarita Howell, were excited to pilot the model. District leaders partnered with Fresno State faculty to provide high-quality, context-specific teacher preparation classes on-site at Wishon so that residents could move seamlessly between clinical placements and courses. Courses were co-taught by a Fresno State instructor and a district content specialist to help ground course content in practice. Faculty also spent time visiting classrooms, modeling lessons, and building relationships with

mentor teachers. For example, mentor teachers were given release time and invited to attend class with their residents to collaboratively design integrated thematic units that were based on the district's mandated curriculum and included science, social studies, and arts standards.

Based on almost 10 years of developing residency programs, Fresno Teacher Residency Program leaders hypothesized that placing a resident as a second teacher in nearly every classroom—and using a co-teaching framework⁶ within a high-quality preparation program for residents—could transform student outcomes.

They were right. Within 1 year with 25 residents at the school site, school achievement scores improved in English language arts (ELA) by 32 points and mathematics by 28 points. These benefits in student learning applied across the board, effectively reducing the achievement gap. On average, group-level scores for students with disabilities, students who are dual-language learners, students from low-income families, students who are Hispanic, and students who are Asian improved by 37 points in ELA and 32 points in math.⁷ Mentor teachers and site administrators attribute the improvements to having two co-teachers in every classroom, which, combined with a high-quality teacher preparation program, made a significant difference for the school site.

Fresno Unified has been able to expand its residency program to include emphases in bilingual and special education using California Teacher Residency Grant funds. Based on the substantial schoolwide gains that coincided with the residency cohort, Wishon's story has implications for how districts might use Title I funding to supplement residency grant funding to support cohorts of residents as a targeted or comprehensive school improvement approach. ESSA requires states to set aside 7% of Title I funding for school improvement in the lowest-performing schools to implement evidence-based strategies for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement. These funds, which began flowing to districts in 2019, could be used to support cohorts of residents as a school and district improvement approach. Although the Wishon residency cohort began before ESSA Title I dollars became available for school improvement, it illustrates how future site-based residency cohorts might be strategically placed in the most struggling schools as part of a schoolwide plan. Designing teacher residencies as part of comprehensive school improvement plans opens up the possibility of redirecting annual improvement dollars that districts are already spending to support a successful strategy that not only improves student outcomes but also enables teacher learning and helps districts reach their recruitment goals.⁸

Endnotes

- 1 Carver-Thomas, D., Kini, T., & Burns, D. (2020). *Sharpening the divide: How California's teacher shortages expand inequality*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- 2 Guha, R., Hylar, M. E., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *The teacher residency: An innovative model for preparing teachers*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- 3 Humboldt County Office of Education. (2019). Humboldt County schools and districts. <https://hcoe.org/schools/> (accessed 11/20/19).
- 4 Learning Policy Institute. (2019). *Understanding teacher shortages in California: A district- and county-level analysis of the factors influencing teacher supply and demand* [Interactive]. Palo Alto, CA: Author. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/interactive-map-understanding-teacher-shortages-california> (accessed 03/09/20).
- 5 Instructional aide annual salaries range from \$18,127 to \$25,635. Personal email with Corey Weber, Humboldt County Office of Education Director of Fiscal Services (2019, December 27).
- 6 Bacharach, N., Heck, T. W., & Dahlberg, K. (2010). Changing the face of student teaching through coteaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 32(1), 3-14.
- 7 California Department of Education. (2018). California School Dashboard: School performance overview Wishon Elementary. <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/10621666006589/2018> (accessed 11/22/19).
- 8 For an analysis of how residencies can align to Title I school improvement goals, see: The Sustainable Funding Project. (2017). *ESSA and quality teacher preparation: Strengthening instructional effectiveness & supporting school improvements*. New York, NY: Bank Street College of Education. <http://bit.ly/29YOAbq> (accessed 03/20/20).