

SCHOOL LEADERS OF HIGH-NEED DISTRICTS AND THEIR PERSPECTIVES OF A UNIVERSITY-BASED TEACHER RESIDENCY PROGRAM

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Abstract

Effective recruitment and retention strategies of teachers remain elusive for school district leaders. This qualitative study examines the pilot implementation of a university-based teacher residency program throughout 4 high-needs districts of a year-long program among 8 residents. District administrators are interviewed about their recruitment and retention efforts, and document how the teacher residents experienced these structures throughout their residency year. Findings have implications for improving residencies as an innovative teacher preparation approach and stem teacher attrition.

Keywords: *School leaders, high-need school districts, initial teachers, teacher residencies, qualitative inquiry.*

1. Introduction and objectives

Increasing classroom vacancies (Garcia et al., 2022) beckons innovative solutions to increase teacher supply. This is a salient issue for Texas, which is amid a current teacher shortfall concentrated within underserved districts (Sullivan et al., 2017). Teacher preparation programs (TPPs) should consider alternative methods to preparing and supporting preservice teachers (PSTs), such as teacher residencies programs (TRP). As such, this exploratory study examines two complementary perspectives in such a program guided by the research questions:

1. How do high-needs district administrators approach recruitment and retention of beginning teachers?
2. What are teacher residents' experiences with district recruitment and retention throughout their first year?

2. Related literature and conceptual perspective

TRPs are often defined by elongated clinical teaching time (Darling-Hammond, 2010), increased opportunities to connect practice to theory (Zeichner, 2010), enhanced induction (Wang et al., 2008), instructional coaching (Gardiner, 2011), and increased recruitment of teachers of color (Azar et al., 2020). These programs help to stem teacher attrition by improving the diversity of teachers relative to student diversity (Silva et al., 2015).

Although existing research on residencies helps to describe the need, theory, and purpose of residencies (Gist, 2021; Klein et al., 2013), there remains the need for deeper examination of how multiple stakeholders participate in the process; specifically, how districts recruit and support residents as well as the residents' experience within the TRP. The district-perspective has been explored within larger, urban settings, but many studies focus on the logistics of such models (e.g., Zugelder et al., 2021) or identity development (Chu, 2019, 2021) instead of the experience of those involved.

3. Design and methods

Context. A teacher residency model (RM¹) program was designed within State College, containing one of the largest TPPs in Texas. RM is designed as a four-year program with post-baccalaureates, where residents sign a 3-year commitment with their placement district, in which they are hired—pending district satisfaction after the resident year—as a teacher of record. Residents are also paid a living wage during this time, which is funded by a Department of Education Teacher Quality Partnership grant. Four partner districts participated in this study and grant, and each is considered high needs according to the grant qualifications, as shown by district demographics in Table 1.

The RM program leverages a 5-point Comprehensive Community Induction Framework (CCIF[®]; Hill-Jackson, 2020) of which general themes address two overarching goals: to provide orientation and activities to familiarize the residents with high-need ISDs and to cultivate professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

The vision of TERM[®] is driven by a 5-point Comprehensive Community Induction Framework (CCIF[®]) and is the theoretical foundation for TERM[®] (Hill-Jackson et al., 2020). Born out of the CCIF[®] framework, the initial five strategies were streamlined to the four current strategies of TERM[®], which are:

- **Strategy 1:** calculated recruitment
- **Strategy 2:** meaningful professional learning for TERM[®] residents
- **Strategy 3:** meaningful professional learning for district partner stakeholders
- **Strategy 4:** well-aligned course-to-field residency experiences

Data Collection. To learn more about varied recruitment and retention experiences, we conducted semi-structured interviews via Zoom with two separate groups. First, we identified participating district administrators overseeing teacher personnel and held individual 60-minute interviews at the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic school year (see Table 2).

To learn about resident experiences, the investigative team conducted semi-structured focus group interviews at the conclusion of each academic semester allowing participants to build upon each other’s thoughts, the potential for similarity of experience, and the reduction of time (Sagoe, 2012). Attendance to these interviews was programmatically required, though all participants consented to the overarching study and voluntarily provided responses throughout. Resident demographics are provided in Table 3, with all residents self-identifying as white.

Table 1. Participating Districts’ Student Demographics.

	AISD	BISD	CISD	DISD
# of Schools	125	22	4	3
# of Students	74,627	16,189	1,757	862
% Students of Color	70	80	51.8	92.9
% Students Who Qualify for Free & Reduced-Priced Lunch	51	76.9	55.5	98.3
% Students Who Speak English as a Second Language	29	27.4	11.4	17.2
% Students Identified as At-Risk	47.2	72	36.6	65.4

Table 2. District Administrator Demographics.

Pseudonym	District	Role
AISD	Maddie	Professional Learning Design Coordinator
BISD	Sheri	Assistant Director of Human Resources
CISD	Suzanne	Director of Instruction
CISD	Asher	Superintendent
DISD	Timothy	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction

¹Pseudonyms are used for all Independent School Districts, participants, and the RM program.

Table 3. Resident Demographics.

Pseudonym	District	Certification Area
Ally	BISD	Science Composite (Physics)
Bethany	BISD	Mathematics
Caroline	CISD	Social Studies
Kelly	BISD	Social Studies
Krystal	AISD	Biology
Richard	AISD	Social Studies
Ricky	DISD	History
Sal	BISD	Life Science

Analysis. Qualitative analysis were completed on each set of data separately, reducing the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) towards the two research goals: recruitment and retention. Data on these two areas were gathered and summarized by district. Similarly, resident interview data were consolidated around their first-year experiences amidst recruitment and retention. The research team considered both focus group interviews collectively, as time was not an important element to this study.

Analytic memos were created separately for each set of data, where we focused on summarizing the data and pulling out salient themes (Miles et al., 2020). A constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) was then used to go back and forth between the data and our interpretations to ensure our participants' voices were accurately represented.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The interviews of residents and administrators form the findings of our qualitative study. Findings have implications for improving this innovative and increasingly implemented teacher preparation structure towards raising the quality of the teacher workforce. During a didactic single-topic presentation the results and two primary implications arose from this study, for the districts and the TRPs, will be unveiled.

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