

Transformative Teacher Preparation through Paid Yearlong Residencies: Program Design to Implementation

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Abstract: The teacher attrition rate has drawn serious attention, but the extreme turnover in rural minority communities has become a crisis. To address it, one university's Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) partnered with local districts to offer paid yearlong residencies. In the residency model, residents receive income, intensive support, and job-embedded training. School districts use residents as substitutes on Fridays and engrain them into their school culture. The EPP compared the performance of candidates in traditional student teaching to those in the residency model and residents performed significantly higher in a majority of the components on their final performance-based assessment.

Introduction

The teacher attrition rate nationwide has drawn serious attention, but the extreme turnover in rural, poverty-stricken, minority communities has become a crisis. Many school districts in the southern United States region are full of students taught by unlicensed teachers in 50% or more of their courses. To address both teacher preparation and retention, many university Educator Preparation Providers (EPP) have partnered with local school districts to offer fully paid yearlong residencies for teacher candidates.

In response to the critical teacher shortage and the need for more robust preparation and partnership practices, many teacher preparation programs have designed residency models to improve the recruitment, training, and retention of highly qualified educators (Pike & Carli, 2020). In most cases, teacher residency programs provide intensive pathways into the profession that focus on rigorous classroom experience with a candidate's coursework integrated into a yearlong placement alongside an expert mentor teacher. Teacher residencies have proven that, when implemented effectively, they better prepare teachers, increase retention rates, and positively impact student achievement (Hirschboeck et al., 2022). A university EPP in a rural minority community has implemented paid yearlong residencies in partnership with local school districts to build capacity by immersing candidates in the school cultures.

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Literature Review

Across multiple teacher preparation contexts, field experiences are the most critical learning activities (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). To accomplish more effective experiences, Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) must venture further from the university and engage in mutual transformation with school districts (Schaffer & Welsh, 2014). These partnerships not only develop teacher candidates but provide teachers with an additional educator to assist in teaching students. Yearlong teacher residencies provide several significant benefits and positive outcomes associated with this innovative teacher preparation model. Yearlong residencies offer more rigorous classroom experiences for teacher candidates than traditional student teaching models. The extended duration allows candidates to spend extensive time in a real classroom environment, leading to improved classroom management and instructional practices (Beal et al., 2020).

Broadening teacher candidates' field experiences beyond a single semester may better prepare them for the realities of the classroom. Darling-Hammond (2010) explained that brief student teaching experiences are often unlike actual teaching, as the candidates are not responsible for all aspects of instruction and classroom management. In comparison, yearlong residencies provide an authentic context for candidates to integrate theory and practice. In a study of teachers who had completed either semester-only or yearlong residencies, Guha et al. (2016) found that those with the extended clinical experiences reported feeling more prepared across various aspects of teaching, including planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection.

Residency programs also allow more time for teacher candidates to develop relationships with their learners. Teacher candidates in semester-only placements report struggling to establish rapport and classroom management routines in such a small window of time (Ronfeldt, 2012). McCollough and Ramirez (2012) found that candidates in yearlong residencies felt they got to know their students' academic and personal needs better, which allowed them to provide more individualized instruction and support. Yearlong teacher residencies also have a positive impact on teacher retention rates. Guha, Hyler, and Darling-Hammond (2016) posited that teacher retention rates are higher among educators who complete yearlong residencies. The immersive experience fosters stronger connections with the school community and culture, leading to a more significant commitment to continue teaching in the partner districts.

Evidence indicates that novice teachers, especially those in high-needs schools, are likely to leave the profession within their first five years (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, graduates of yearlong residencies demonstrate greater commitment to remaining in the classroom. Papay et al. (2012) found that candidates who had completed a yearlong urban teacher residency were much more likely to continue teaching in the same district after three years compared to those prepared through a traditional student teaching pathway. The residency experience helps candidates develop skills, dispositions, and support networks that enable them to thrive as teachers over the long-term.

However, while the advantages of yearlong residencies seem promising (Beal et al., 2020), published findings also reveal certain limitations and gaps that warrant further exploration. Because there can be such variability across school districts and institutions in the design of residency models, it is difficult to compare impact. A lack of standardized

models makes it challenging to compare outcomes across studies and identify best practices for program implementation.

Much of the existing research on yearlong residencies has focused more on secondary teacher residencies in urban settings (Papay et al., 2012). Less is known about outcomes for residency programs that prepare elementary or rural teachers. Yearlong residencies in teacher preparation likely have distinct differences across geographic and grade-level contexts. Further research is needed to explore the benefits and challenges faced within each circumstance.

Another significant gap exists in the lack of comparison between teacher residency models and other teacher preparation models. Guha, Hyler, and Darling-Hammond (2016) and Beal et al. (2020) focus exclusively on the benefits of yearlong residencies without comparing their outcomes to other teacher preparation models, such as traditional student teaching or alternative pathways. Comparative research is vital for identifying yearlong residencies' unique contributions and strengths. This comparison gap drives the focus of this study.

Residency Design

One particular yearlong teacher residency (“program”) was developed at a regional university in Arkansas to build and sustain a pipeline of diverse, highly trained educators through embedded coursework, quality mentors, and intensive support who are committed to teaching in districts within the region. The design and implementation of the program was a collaborative effort between the university’s Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) and local district partners to bridge the disconnect between educational theory and classroom practice. Each aspect of the program was strategically designed to create a shared vision for best practices that align university coursework and authentic classroom experiences.

To launch the program, the EPP partnered with two local districts to offer fully paid yearlong clinical experiences. Residents applied to participate, interviewed with district administration, and were hired as resident teachers within the district and provided financial support if selected. Mentor teachers were jointly selected by the EPP and districts and compensated for the additional expectations. The EPP also developed a clinical faculty role to serve as a liaison between the university EPP and school sites (Petti, 2013). Rather than being housed on the university campus, the clinical faculty members were embedded within each district, taught program coursework, and provided intensive support to residents and mentor teachers through observation, feedback, and coaching.

In this newly designed model of teacher preparation, not only do candidates receive income which opens avenues for underrepresented populations who are often unable to afford unpaid internships, but it also offers them intensive job-embedded training (Kawasaki, 2023). School districts, in return, use candidates as substitutes one day per week and have an entire year to engrain future educators into their school culture, thus increasing the long-term retention of employees. Ultimately, it is the students who benefit most from the model. Teacher candidates and mentors must agree to implement co-teaching models in the yearlong residency. Islam (2015) discussed that student achievement declines in a traditional student teaching model using a gradual release of responsibility, but with a co-teaching residency model, the opposite is true.

The program is also a different approach to teacher preparation partnerships designed to place district collaboration at the forefront of both design and implementation of teacher training. Ensuring that the partnerships between the EPP and districts were mutually beneficial was a cornerstone of the program. As such, the residency model's design was tailored to each district's specific needs. One district paired residents with mentors five days per week, while the other paired residents with mentors for four days and used residents as substitutes in the district every Friday.

As part of the launch and ongoing partnership, the EPP and district leadership communicate and collaborate regularly regarding logistics, embedded courses, professional development, and support for residents. Motivated to maintain a mutually beneficial partnership, the program engages in quarterly leadership meetings with essential stakeholders to review resident performance data and discuss program improvements. Securing clinical placements for teacher candidates has long been an issue that has plagued EPPs, often resulting in placements made because university personnel asked friends or colleagues to "take" a student teacher out of a sense of loyalty or even guilt (Petti, 2013). However, one of the greatest strengths of a residency model is the joint selection of mentor teachers and residents, with both the EPP leadership and district administrators involved in decision-making (Valente et al., 2022). Mentor teachers chosen to participate in the program were selected in partnership between university EPP leadership and district administrators based on jointly established criteria.

In the program, residents were hired and paid as employees of both districts. While traditional student teachers spent a substantial amount of time in the classroom, the residency model provided residents with the perspective of an employee of a particular school environment. As employees, residents had access to and participated in various activities outside the typical student teaching expectations, including district curriculum, district professional development, and parent-teacher conferences.

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

The study participants were all undergraduate candidates pursuing initial teaching licenses in elementary, middle school, or secondary education. All participants were in their culminating field experience. Upon admission to the institution's Educator Preparation Provider (EPP), participants agree that their assessment data may be used for research and analysis.

Data were collected from the participants' final performance assessment ratings. There were 68 participants, with 51 in a traditional student teaching model and 17 in the newly designed residency model. Participants in the residency model were in two districts located near the EPP, while those in the student teaching model were spread throughout the state. Participants were observed planning, teaching, and reflecting upon a lesson in their content area and assessed by university faculty. Each participant was assessed using the same state-adopted rubric. The rubric was nationally validated in its last revision in 2022, and all university faculty calibrated annually to ensure reliability.

Data Analysis

To analyze and compare performance between those who participated in a traditional student teaching model and those in a residency model, data were collected from all 68 participants on each of the 17 components scored on the assessment rubric. Components were scored on a scale of one to three. Average scores were calculated for each component for the group of participants in the student teaching model as well as for the group of participants in the residency model.

Of the 17 components, participants in the residency model scored equal to or above the average of participants in the student teaching model. The two components where student teachers outperformed residents were in the areas of managing classroom procedures and managing student behavior. An independent t-test was used and found statistically significant differences in means between the groups in those two components.

Findings

The study aimed to compare the scores on final performance assessments between teacher candidates who participated in a traditional student teaching experience and those who participated in a co-teaching residency model. The comparison helped identify strengths and weaknesses in the performance of participants in a residency model when compared to the performance of participants in a traditional student teaching experience.

The first significant difference where residents score lower was found in the 'managing classroom procedures' component. Traditional student teachers ($M = 2.9, SD = 4.51$) scored significantly higher than residents ($M = 2.71, SD = 3.53$), $p < 0.05$. Participants in the student teaching group ($M = 2.92, SD = 3.69$) also scored significantly higher than residents ($M = 2.71, SD = 3.53$), $p < 0.05$ in the component scoring their ability to manage student behavior.

Researchers surmise that these disparities may result from the amount of autonomy that residency participants have in the classroom compared to participants in a student teaching environment. Because the participants in the residency model are expected to co-teach for the entirety of their experience, their assessment scores in the areas of classroom management are likely accurate reflections of their own practice. However, participants in a student teaching model have less control over implementing their own procedures and behavior management strategies. The participants' scores in the student teaching model are likely more reflective of the procedures and practices of their mentor teachers.

Discussion and Implications

While the financial support incentivizes the residency for participants, it may also impact teacher retention in the region long-term. Residency models increase teacher retention with more prolonged and intensive clinical experiences (Huguet et al., 2021). Valente et al. (2022) found that a yearlong experience helped residents decide if they wanted to teach in a particular district, and those who did accept a position where they completed their residency cited familiarity with the school context and fondness of the culture as reasons for accepting the job. In the launch of the residency program at the

studied EPP, one district hired 100% (nine out of nine) of its residents as teachers in the district immediately upon graduation.

Researchers consistently agree that the quality of the teacher is the most critical factor in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Schmoker, 2006; Petti, 2013). While there may be disagreement on where to place that responsibility, it is undeniable that improving teacher quality is a mutual goal of teacher preparation programs and school districts. The success of the residency program contributes to the literature identifying how authentic partnerships between university EPPs and school districts offer significant benefits to all (Kretchmar et al., 2018).

With the popularity of residency models continuing to spread throughout EPPs, the need to investigate the quality of preparation compared to other models is critical. This study revealed that a residency model resulted in higher or equivalent performance scores than traditional student teaching in all but two of the 17 observed components. Recognizing the strengths of a residency model is critical for its success and long-term sustainability.

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