

# The power and potential of teacher residencies

The teacher residency model shows great promise in helping local school districts build a highly capable, diverse, and stable teaching workforce.



**By Roneeta Guha, Maria E. Hyler, and Linda Darling-Hammond**

Much as it did a generation ago, the U.S. now finds itself in the midst of a serious teacher shortage. Today, most states are struggling to recruit and retain effective educators, and many school systems — especially urban and rural districts, which tend to serve the most vulnerable student populations — are having particular trouble filling teaching vacancies, especially in shortage fields. As a result, students in many communities have to cope with a constant churn of new and inexperienced teachers, often pulled in at the last minute (or even midyear) to fill vacancies in subjects they are underprepared to teach.

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**Early research findings suggest that when residencies are well-designed and well-implemented, they can create significant long-term benefits for districts, schools, and, most important, the students they serve.**

Several factors appear to be contributing to the current crisis. For example, the retirement of veteran teachers accounts for part of the attrition rate — though only a small part of it. As many as two-thirds of those who leave their teaching positions or who leave the profession altogether do so well before retirement age (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Similarly, low salaries and poor working conditions add to the difficulties of attracting and keeping teachers, as do the challenges of the work itself. Inadequate teacher preparation also plays a major role — untrained novice teachers are especially likely to leave the profession after their first year in the classroom; they leave at three times the rate of those who have had student teaching experience and completed a preparation program (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014). Another culprit is the lack of adequate support for beginning teachers — those who are left to sink or swim tend to leave teaching at much higher rates than those who receive supportive mentoring in their first years on the job (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Fortunately, teacher residency programs show great promise in addressing these last two challenges — improving preservice preparation and strengthening

early-career mentoring. If they prove to be effective and scalable, they will provide a useful way to fix the so-called leaky bucket phenomenon of teacher turnover and, more broadly, to reduce the severity of the country's teacher shortage.

### **Strong preparation and early career support**

The first teacher residency program was created in Chicago in 2001. Programs in Boston and Denver were launched two years later and, since then, the model has expanded to more than 50 locations across the country. Although most of them are in urban districts, consortia of rural districts and charter school organizations — supported by nearby teacher preparation programs — have recently created residencies as well.

Inspired by the medical residency model (which has served as a bridge from medical school to clinical practice for generations of doctors), teacher residencies provide a pathway to teacher certification grounded in deep clinical training tailored to the unique needs and assets of the participating school district. Each resident works as an apprentice alongside an expert teacher in a high-need classroom for a full academic year while also taking closely linked



# Snapshot: The San Francisco Teacher Residency

In 2010, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) partnered with the University of San Francisco (USF), Stanford University, and United Educators of San Francisco to create the San Francisco Teacher Residency (SFTR). Residents complete a year-long apprenticeship teaching alongside an expert teacher in a high-needs school while taking courses at night that are tightly integrated with their clinical placement. The 32 residents come together once a week for additional coursework taught by SFTR and SFUSD leaders on topics particularly relevant to district teachers.

As part of the SFTR program, residents also participate in clinical instructional rounds, modeled after medical rounds, in which they visit classrooms in other schools to observe expert instructional practices and then debrief with their supervisors. Upon successful completion of the program, residents are guaranteed a job teaching in SFUSD and receive two years of additional intensive coaching and mentoring support – known as induction – from SFTR.

The San Francisco Teacher Residency offers a more affordable pathway into teaching for many prospective teachers while providing intensive preparation for the challenges of teaching in a high-needs school. In exchange for a commitment to teach for at least three years in SFUSD, residents receive a 50% tuition remission at USF and significant scholarship support and loan forgiveness at Stanford. Residents also receive more than \$17,000 in stipends (in part from AmeriCorps), \$15,000 in housing grants, and free health care benefits. Many residents identify this strong financial support as a key reason why they chose SFTR over other pathways into teaching.

Mentor teachers are carefully chosen based on a demonstrated track record of successful teaching as well as their interest in mentoring the next generation of teachers. They are provided significant professional learning opportunities through SFTR (with paid substitutes) and a \$2,500 stipend. As one SFTR mentor teacher said, “What I really enjoy about being a mentor teacher is that it doesn’t keep me stale in my teaching. It really keeps me young. It keeps me engaged.”

Building on the professional development school model, SFTR also places residents in a small number of teaching academies – these schools serve primarily low-income students of color and have been identified by the district as hard-to-staff but with strong leadership and teaching practices. As one principal who has hired multiple SFTR graduates observed, “The residents who are now teaching here definitely have a leg up. They understand the students and the microsystems we have created to accomplish specific tasks . . . . They know the curriculum, they usually know the parents, and kids already know their faces! It would be great if all new teachers could come in with that sort of knowledge, able to start off without being overwhelmed by everything and anything.”

Since 2010, SFTR has prepared nearly 150 aspiring teachers to work in high-needs schools in the San Francisco Unified School District. Now in its seventh year, the district’s investment appears to be paying off:

- **SFTR graduates show remarkably high retention rates.** After five years, 80% of SFTR graduates are still teaching in SFUSD, compared with 38% of other beginning teachers hired by SFUSD and 20% of Teach for America members placed in SFUSD. Of all SFTR graduates over the past five years (including first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year teachers), 97% are still teaching, with 89% still teaching in SFUSD.
- **SFTR graduates are helping diversify the SFUSD teacher workforce.** Sixty-six percent of SFTR graduates are teachers of color, compared with 49% of SFUSD teachers as a whole.
- **SFUSD principals say SFTR graduates are more effective than other new teachers.** One hundred percent of principals agree that SFTR graduates are more effective than other new teachers from both university-based and alternative route programs.
- **Students taught by SFTR graduates have high levels of confidence in their teachers’ competence.** On the YouthTruth Student Survey administered to more than 1,700 middle and high school students taught by SFTR graduates, students were especially confident in their teachers’ ability to engage, develop personal relationships, and employ academic rigor, high expectations, and strong instructional methods with them. High school students also rated their teachers as having strong expertise in creating a positive classroom culture.

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## Up close: One resident's story

Roxanne Cano, 26, graduated from the San Francisco Teacher Residency Program (SFTR) in 2013 and has been teaching in the district ever since. The San Francisco native is a kindergarten teacher at Bret Harte Elementary in the city's Bayview district, where she and her family lived for a time while she was growing up.



*Roxanne Cano, SFTR graduate  
(Photo: Nana Kolfi)*

Cano was the first in her family to go to college and learned about SFTR while an undergraduate at the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit university in the city. The program's social justice mission and commitment to historically underserved students in San Francisco's public schools was perfectly aligned with her goals. "I knew I was going to be a teacher, and I knew I wanted to teach in an inner-city school here in SF," Cano said. "The residency really focuses on getting teachers ready for working in an inner-city school. I felt education was an outlet for me, and I wanted to give that to other students just like me."

The financial support from SFTR, which included tuition assistance and a living stipend, were key to Cano's decision to join the program. She had accumulated significant student loan debt as an undergraduate, and the stipend and tuition assistance allowed her to focus on her work. "I think it would have definitely been more of a struggle [without the financial assistance]," she said. "Knowing that part of my tuition was paid for and that I was getting a stipend definitely made a difference."

Cano credits the combination of the year-long classroom apprenticeship with a cooperating teacher, weekly courses taught by SFTR and SFUSD leaders on topics relevant to San Francisco teachers, and three years of coaching once in the classroom with preparing her to be a successful classroom teacher in a high-need urban school. "The student teaching made me feel so much more comfortable when I became a classroom teacher," she said. SFTR's cohort model — a hallmark of many residency programs — was also critical, Cano said. "We met every Friday. We took classes together. We became a community, almost like family. We knew that with this family we were going to be prepared and get a job in the district."

Of the program's many great features and supports, Cano's coach, Debbie Ruskay, who supported her during her first two years of teaching, was particularly helpful. Ruskay had taught in the Bayview district for almost 30 years and "had a level of understanding of the kids and the community and the amount of love that you put into this job that you can't really teach people," Cano said. Ruskay's guidance, support, and encouragement was especially helpful as Cano struggled to address the needs of a very challenging student her first year of teaching.

Importantly, SFTR introduced Cano to topics specifically relevant to San Francisco teachers, including implementing restorative practices, developing trauma-informed classrooms, building partnerships with families, and understanding the SFUSD common core curriculum. Cano deepened her understanding of these practices through her teaching at Bret Harte, where she has implemented restorative circles with her 5-year-old students and where mindfulness practices are being implemented schoolwide. Through SFTR, she learned how to set up her classroom, which includes a peace corner for students who are having a hard time in class and need a place to cool down without being excluded from the community. "Those are things that once I was here at Bret Harte also were the expectations, but it wasn't brand new to me because I had already seen it and heard it through the residency," Cano said.

Looking back at her time in SFTR and the ongoing support she receives, Cano said, "Four years in, I still have relationships with these people who have supported me throughout. Knowing that there was a whole group of people who were there to support me and make sure I succeeded for these kids was something so meaningful and indescribable. I don't know that I would be the same teacher I am today had I not gotten that support.

"Teaching is a lot of work," she said. "Having that preparation and guidance makes you a better teacher and makes you able to do this very important work to the best of your ability."

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coursework from a partnering university, leading to both a teaching credential and a master's degree.

Although each teacher residency program is unique, they tend to share a number of key characteristics. These programs typically:

- Feature strong partnerships between school districts and universities;
- Recruit high-ability candidates to meet specific district hiring needs, especially in fields where there are shortages;
- Provide a full year of clinical practice teaching alongside an expert mentor teacher;
- Provide relevant coursework that is tightly integrated with clinical practice;
- Recruit and train expert mentor teachers who coteach with residents;
- Place cohorts of residents in “teaching schools” that model good practices with diverse learners and are designed to help novices learn to teach;
- Offer ongoing mentoring and support for graduates; and
- Offer financial support for residents in exchange for committing to teach in the sponsoring district for a minimum number of years.

***District-university partnerships.*** A hallmark of residency programs is the focus on recruiting and preparing candidates to fit the specific needs of the partner district or charter management organization. For example, the Montclair Newark Urban Teacher Residency Program has a long-standing relationship with the Newark (N.J.) Public Schools. Residents are embedded in schools and classrooms for 12 to 15 months while completing graduate coursework onsite. Each resident also completes an internship with a community-based organization, which provides opportunities to interact with students, their families, and members of the broader Newark community (Hyer & Harrell, in press).

***Candidate recruitment and selection.*** Compared to traditional and alternative certification programs, residencies tend to attract a more diverse and highly competitive pool of applicants, including candidates of all ages and professional backgrounds, both recent college graduates and midcareer professionals. In fact, a recent study of 30 teacher residency programs found that graduates were more likely to be career changers than were peers from other programs working in the same districts (Silva et al., 2014). Also, preparation programs work closely with their partner districts throughout the recruitment and selection process to ensure that they choose residents whose skills and expertise align well with local hiring needs.

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***Clinical experience.*** Residencies invest much more heavily in practice-based training than do most traditional or alternative preparation programs. Typically, residents spend four to five days a week, for at least one academic year, working in a classroom under the wing of an experienced and trained mentor teacher, gradually taking on more responsibilities over time. Altogether, most residents receive at least 900 hours of preservice clinical preparation, while the norm for traditional programs is 400 to 600 hours (AACTE, 2012; Silva et al., 2014).

***Coursework.*** Coursework in residencies is closely integrated with clinical experiences. Courses are often designed and taught by experienced teachers in the district or by university faculty who are involved in local schools and are former teachers themselves (and many courses are cotaught by school and university faculty). Here, too, the Montclair Newark program offers a good example: Instructors are careful to practice the very same constructivist approaches that they feature in the syllabus (Hyer & Harrell, in press). In too many preservice programs, faculty explicitly endorse inquiry- and problem-based teaching and learning while treating their own students as passive receivers of information about pedagogy (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008), but at Montclair Newark, coursework is specifically designed to model effective practices and provide scaffolding during the transition to teaching.

***Mentor recruitment and selection.*** Not only do residencies help districts attract and train high-quality teacher candidates, they also provide career advancement opportunities for the experienced teachers who are mentors, supervisors, and instructors. In the most successful programs, mentors receive significant pro-

professional development to help them effectively support residents — and this tends to benefit their own classroom instruction as well. Also, in most programs, selecting mentors (who must show evidence that they are both experienced and highly skilled) is just as rigorous as it is for teaching candidates.

**Cohorts placed in teaching schools.** Another key feature of many residencies is the placement of candidates into cohorts. Typically, residents are clustered in university courses and school sites and encouraged to create informal networks and to collaborate with teachers from earlier cohorts. Many graduates — such as Roxanne Cano, featured in the sidebar on p. 34 — report that their peers provided critical support throughout their residency and that these relationships often continue after the program ends.

**Early career mentoring.** Research shows that beginning teachers who receive high-quality mentoring and support tend to emerge from their early years with higher levels of commitment to teaching, greater satisfaction with their careers, and more likelihood of staying in their current positions over time

(Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Noting the impressive returns on such early-career investments, some residency programs now provide mentoring and support for an additional one to three years. Even after residents graduate and become teachers of record, their mentors continue to observe and meet with them, helping them strengthen their skills and build satisfying careers.

**Financial support and incentives.** Unlike most traditional or alternative preparation programs, residencies offer financial incentives to attract high-quality candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences, including many who could not otherwise afford to participate. Supports include living stipends, student loan forgiveness, and/or tuition remittance in exchange for residents' commitment to teaching in the district for three to five years beyond the residency.

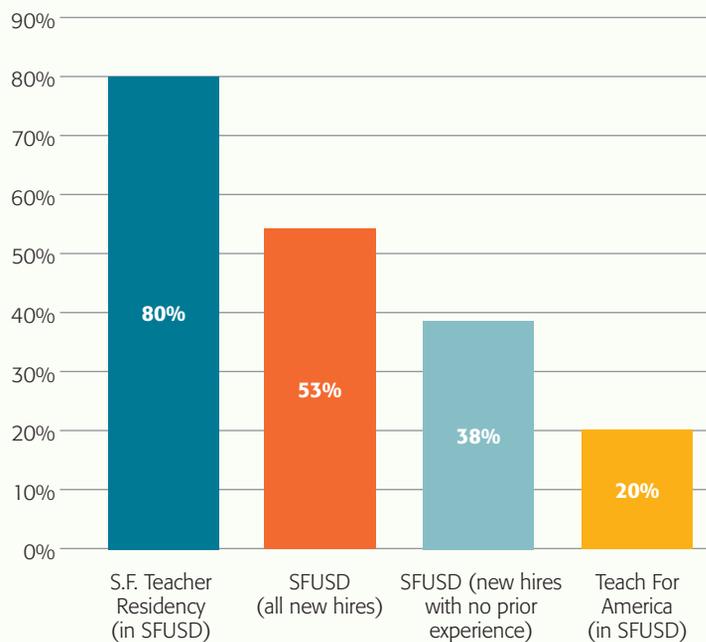
### Early studies suggest lasting effect

Thanks to federal and philanthropic support, there are now at least 50 residency programs nationwide, ranging in size from five to 100 residents per year. Preliminary research studies have focused mainly on the effect of residencies on teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and (though somewhat less data has been conducted in this area) student achievement. Early research findings suggest that when residencies are well-designed and well-implemented, they can create significant long-term benefits for districts, schools, and, most important, the students they serve. Details include:

**Recruitment.** Many residency programs have specific goals for recruitment, such as diversifying the teacher workforce (for example, by attracting more candidates of color and bringing in midcareer professionals) and/or placing strong candidates in hard-to-staff subject areas such as math, science, special education, and bilingual education. Research suggests that residencies do bring greater gender and racial diversity into the teaching workforce. For example, across teacher residency programs nationally, 45% of participants in 2015-16 were people of color, more than double the national average (19% of those enrolled in preservice programs) (NCTR, 2016). Moreover, 13% of residency graduates in 2015-16 taught in math, science, or technology fields, and 32% taught English language learners and/or students with special needs (NCTR, 2016).

**Retention.** National studies of teacher retention indicate that about 20% to 30% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Attrition is even higher at high-poverty schools and in high-need subject areas, often reaching 50% or

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Comparison of five-year teacher retention rates**  
San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)



The five-year retention rate in Column 1 was calculated in 2016 and refers to teachers who began teaching in SFUSD in the 2010-11 school year. Columns 2 and 3 refer to the five-year retention rate for SFUSD teachers hired in any year from 2003 to 2012. Column 4 refers to TFA teachers hired in 2008, 2009, and 2010.

**Source:** SFUSD human resources department; San Francisco Teacher Residency Program.

more. In contrast, studies of teacher residency programs (which typically focus on the very same high-need populations and subject areas) consistently find that their graduates have much higher retention rates, generally ranging from 80% to 90% of teachers remaining in the same district after three years and 70% to 80% after five years. Key factors contributing to the high retention rates include program quality, residents' commitment to teach for a specific time in return for financial support, and induction support during the first one to two years of teaching.

## Teacher residency programs show great promise in improving preservice preparation and strengthening early-career mentoring.

**Student outcomes.** Because most residency programs are still in their infancy and trend data at scale have rarely been available, only a few studies have examined program effects on student achievement. A 2015 study of the New Visions Hunter College Urban Teacher Residency in New York City found that students of its residents and graduates outperformed those taught by other novice teachers on 16 out of 22 (or 73%) comparisons of state Regents exam scores (Sloan & Blazevski, 2015). A value-added analysis of the Boston Teacher Residency suggested that its graduates were initially comparable to other novice teachers in raising students' English language arts and math scores, but Boston graduates' effectiveness surpassed that of new and veteran teachers in math by the fourth year of teaching (Papay, West, Fullerton, & Kane, 2012). A study of the Memphis Teacher Residency program found that residency graduates had higher student achievement gains than other beginning teachers and larger gains than veteran teachers on most of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program exams (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2014).

### Conclusion

The teacher residency model is a promising approach to addressing recruitment and retention issues in high-needs school districts and hard-to-staff subject areas. At the same time, residencies support fundamental systemic change and help strengthen the teaching profession, especially in the most challenging districts. Further, they help districts play a more direct and productive role in training their future workforce, allowing them to fill vacancies with teachers who are better prepared, more diverse, and more likely to stay in place over time and serve as leaders in their schools and communities. ◀

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