

Investing in Texas Teacher Preparation

Key Features of Successful Residency Programs



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Summary

Texas's educator workforce has been characterized over the past few decades by high attrition rates contributing to persistent teacher shortages and increased hiring of underprepared and uncertified teachers. These conditions have motivated state investment in a multifaceted strategy to seed and support teacher residency programs. State guidance, grant provisions, and regulatory changes have incentivized residency programs to adopt a set of common features, six of which stand out in contributing to quality preparation: a yearlong clinical experience, integrated practice-based coursework, partnerships between preparation programs and school districts, trained and experienced mentor teachers, clinical faculty site coordinators to support residencies, and resident support through stipends. State policies can continue support for residencies by funding resident and mentor stipends with state matching grants, providing seed grants to educator preparation programs launching high-quality residencies, investing in building technical assistance capacity to launch new residencies and support existing programs, establishing pipelines for mentor teachers and residency clinical faculty to support residency expansion, and providing targeted support for residency partnerships preparing teachers for high-need assignments and locations.

This brief is based on two forthcoming reports, *Teacher Residencies in Texas: Supporting Successful Implementation* and *Preparing a High-Quality Teacher Workforce: Lessons From Texas Teacher Education Programs*.

Introduction

Texas's educator workforce has been characterized over the past few decades by persistent teacher shortages. Nationwide, a primary driver of such shortages is attrition, which accounts for more than 90% of the demand for new teachers.¹ In Texas, where the teacher attrition rate is 50% higher than the national average, there is a constant need for new hires to replace teachers leaving the classroom.² In recent years, more than 90% of all new hires in Texas were replacing teachers who left.³

The state has met the demand for new teachers with two very different approaches. One has emphasized filling vacancies quickly: School districts have been hiring an increasing number of teachers prepared through alternative routes or, more recently, without state certification.⁴ The other approach has focused on defining, incentivizing, supporting, and scaling teacher residencies—clinically intensive preparation programs built around a yearlong placement for teacher candidates. Teacher residents learn in the

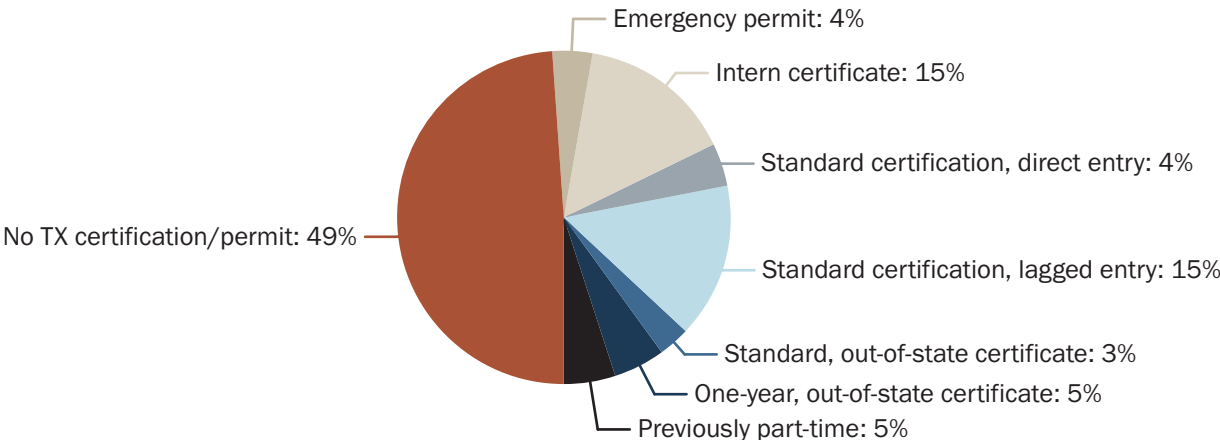
classrooms of expert mentor teachers while taking practice-based educator preparation program (EPP) coursework and receiving financial stipends to support living expenses. Importantly, residents are not teachers of record during their clinical placements; as co-teachers, they take on graduated responsibility with expert guidance from their mentors. Growing evidence indicates that residency program completers are more effective, and more likely to stay in teaching, than teachers who enter through other pathways or without preparation, contributing to student learning and workforce stability.⁵

This brief first provides an overview of Texas’s educator workforce challenges and state efforts to curb ongoing shortages. It then focuses on the essential features of residency programs as implemented and supported in Texas. The brief concludes with recommendations for the state to build upon its progress in seeding and supporting teacher residencies and, in doing so, to work toward state goals for a strong, stable, and diverse teacher workforce.

Meeting Demand for Teachers in Texas

Over the past decade, Texas schools have hired around 40,000 new teachers each year, with more than 49,000 hired in 2024.⁶ An increasing proportion of these teachers have been alternatively certified or hired without state certification.⁷ The fastest growth among alternative route programs, in which new educators learn on the job with little preservice preparation, has been in the for-profit pathways that have recently accounted for 70% of all Texas educator preparation program enrollment. The hiring of teachers without certification, a practice allowed in state-designated “[districts of innovation](#),” brought in 49% of all newly hired Texas teachers in 2023–24, while in the preceding year, in some rural counties, more than 80% of new hires were uncertified.⁸ Altogether, 68% of all newly hired teachers in 2023–24 were underqualified or unqualified, teaching with intern certificates, emergency permits, or no certification (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. 2023–24 Statewide New Hires by Pathway Into the Teaching Profession



Note: Includes newly licensed teachers only; excludes previously licensed teachers returning to the workforce.

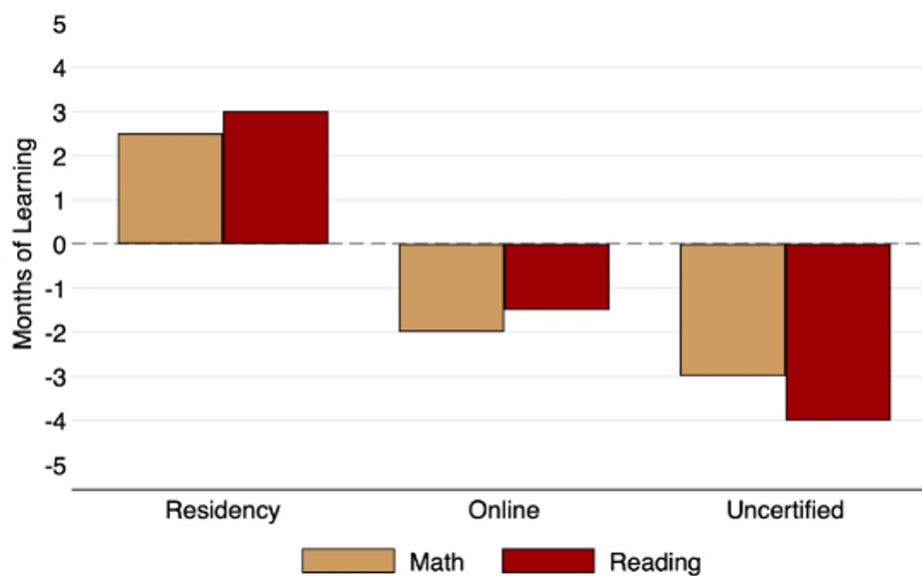
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency. (2024). *The pathway of an employed new hire, 2014–15 through 2023–24*.

Growing State Support for Teacher Residencies

While pathways into the classroom requiring little or no preservice preparation can fill vacancies quickly, research shows that these pathways are associated with substantially higher attrition and lower student outcomes compared to clinically intensive pathways like teacher residencies (see Figure 2).⁹ In contrast, residency program completers have consistently had higher retention rates, and candidates and employers view them as more effective.¹⁰

The state has undertaken a multifaceted, long-term strategy to support teacher residencies, a centerpiece of which was the [High-Quality, Sustainable Residency Program](#), launched in 2021. A part of the \$1.4 billion [Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports \(TCLAS\)](#) initiative, underwritten by federal COVID-19 relief funds, this program provided grant funding for paid placements supporting more than 2,100 residents at 85 school districts, offered in partnership with state-approved EPPs.¹¹ The grant also provided technical assistance for these districts to adopt “strategic staffing” models that, by reconfiguring educator positions and reallocating funding, were intended to sustain paid residencies after the end of grant funding in 2024.

Figure 2. Months of Student Learning Gained/Lost Compared With Average New Teacher, by Preparation Route



Source: Reproduced from Kirksey, J. J. (2024, July). *Building a stronger teacher workforce: Insights from studies on Texas teacher preparation* [Brief]. Texas Tech University Center for Innovative Research in Change, Leadership, and Education.

To apply for TCLAS residency grant funding, each school district was required to partner with a state-designated Vetted Teacher Residency program. To achieve this vetted status, EPPs were required to meet the state definition of a high-quality residency. These requirements meant that TCLAS-funded EPP–district partnerships launched with residency programs already in place, allowing grantee districts to focus on strengthening those partnerships, engaging in collaborative planning and governance, and adopting strategic staffing changes in K–12 schools.

The TCLAS residency grant was just one part of a larger push to build a strong teacher workforce through high-quality educator preparation and enhanced teacher professional opportunities. Recommendations of the state's [Teacher Vacancy Task Force](#) and levers from the newly developed statewide [Effective Preparation Framework](#) are in the process of being incorporated into state regulations and EPP approval systems. Meanwhile, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has established two additional state-funded grant programs, one [supporting existing residencies](#) and the other [supporting the launch](#) of new ones.

Key among the changes to state regulations was the recognition of residencies as a separate program category in educator preparation, connected to a new teacher license: the [enhanced standard certificate](#). Along with setting residencies apart, this formal distinction of the residency route has aligned TEA educator preparation program approval to the features of high-quality residencies. It will make it easier for districts to identify residents and residency completers for hiring purposes, for state agencies to assess residency outcomes, and for policymakers to understand the impact of residencies on the teacher workforce as they consider future state incentives and opportunities for residency completers.

Key Features of Strong Teacher Residencies in Texas

Through a mix of state guidance and requirements for EPPs, grant provisions and assurances for both programs and districts, and changes to state administrative code, Texas has incentivized residency programs to adopt a set of common features. They are based on the state's definition of a high-quality residency in which "the teacher candidate is paired with an experienced, highly effective mentor teacher for a full year of clinical training and co-teaching in a K–12 classroom."¹² Among these common features, six align with findings from recent studies as contributing to the successful implementation of residency programs.¹³

These features also reflect elements of strong teacher residencies as reported in prior research, standards, and definitions, including the [model developed by US PREP](#), a residency center and technical assistance provider for the state's residency support efforts.¹⁴ The features cited here, however, have made key contributions to the success achieved thus far by residencies supported by state policies and actions. Faculty and leaders at EPPs and K–12 school districts, as well as teacher residents and residency program completers, highlighted these features as vital to strong residency preparation experiences and outcomes.

Yearlong, Well-Supported Clinical Experience

The residency's intensive clinical experience goes beyond traditional, semester-long student teaching, encompassing the full school year and the breadth of a teacher's professional responsibilities. During this clinical experience, residents are placed in classrooms with selected and trained mentor teachers and engage in gradual-release co-teaching strategies with progressively increasing responsibilities. These strategies immerse residents in a broad range of classroom practices and learning opportunities aligned to their progress through the clinical year. Residents are also brought into the professional communities of educators at their schools and are treated, and expected to act, as regular faculty members (e.g., participating in parent conferences and faculty professional development).

Integrating Practice-Based Coursework Into Preparation

Before and during their yearlong clinical experiences, residents take practice-based EPP coursework aligned to their K–12 classroom learning. In developing their residency programs, Texas EPPs have redesigned course sequences to center clinical practice while aligning instructional frameworks and curricula to core teaching practices. This shift toward practice-based coursework has been informed by the clinically intensive structure of residencies. Mirroring the progressive introduction of co-teaching strategies, practice-based coursework is aligned to residents' development and progress, allowing candidates to practice their skills with scaffolding and support from experienced instructors. For some residents, these courses included opportunities to practice pedagogical skills with peers or instructors before applying them in clinical placements.

Partnerships Between Programs and School Districts

Rather than dividing teaching practice and preparation coursework between districts and EPPs, Texas has interwoven the responsibilities for teacher preparation across the two entities; state grants supporting high-quality residencies were built around the assumption that EPPs and districts would work in tandem. As the TEA described, “In high-quality teacher residency models, the EPP and [district] have shared ownership over the preparation, support, and success of the teacher resident.”¹⁵ Grant requirements thus called upon EPPs and districts, working individually in their own institutional contexts and together across residency partnerships, to play specified roles in implementing a state-defined high-quality residency model.

To a large extent, partnership requirements were instantiated through shared governance meetings. State guidance specified attendance by both EPP and district personnel at meetings, identified topics for collaborative planning, and called for joint data-informed decision-making. These structures strongly influenced the workings of residency partnerships, engaging the actors needed to make key programmatic decisions on issues ranging from budgets and finances to candidate and resident supports, while empowering both districts and EPPs to shape residencies to local community contexts and needs. They also created feedback loops enabling both partners to collaborate on reinforcing partnership strengths while holding one another accountable for continuous improvement. For example, even after EPP redesigns incorporated a practice-based approach, shared governance enabled EPPs to continue strengthening their clinical experiences by iterating on coursework, revisiting assignments, and improving alignment to district contexts.

Trained and Experienced Mentors in Co-Teaching Settings

The mentor teacher role is required for state grant-supported residencies and in EPP residency pathways leading to the enhanced standard certificate. The yearlong residency clinical placement is strongly interconnected with this role, since mentor teachers are the teachers of record who host residents in their classrooms and who, according to the TEA, “[provide] residents with the opportunity for quality teacher development.”¹⁶ Mentor teachers must have the experience and training to provide residents with these opportunities in structured co-teaching settings.

Co-teaching takes various forms across the yearlong clinical placement, corresponding with residents' progress. At the beginning of the year, mentor teachers and residents most frequently use models that call for shared practice. As residents gain competence and confidence in the classroom, mentor teachers fold in strategies emphasizing more differentiated and independent educator roles. Given the demands

of balancing co-teaching roles with resident progress and student learning, as well as mentor teachers' critical role in facilitating these strategies, mentor teachers require ample support as well as training in best practices in co-teaching.

In residency partnerships supported by TCLAS, EPPs and districts collaboratively selected and trained mentor teachers. Mentor teachers' co-teaching responsibilities were supported by state-required residency features: regular professional development sessions that featured data-driven discussions of resident progress and included other mentor teachers and EPP site coordinators. The state also funded mentor stipends through residency grants, another reflection of the demands of the role.

Clinical Faculty Site Coordinators Supporting Residencies

The site coordinator is a clinical faculty role at residency partner educator preparation programs. While the TCLAS Vetted Teacher Residency specifications refer to clinical faculty as field supervisors, study sites used the term "site coordinator," in keeping with US PREP's research-aligned residency transformation model. US PREP describes the site coordinator role as a "critical linchpin" to transformed residencies. It is a much-expanded role compared to typical clinical field supervisor assignments at traditional EPPs.¹⁷ While site coordinators do observe and coach teacher candidates, they also take on a much broader range of responsibilities, including providing mentor training and professional development, facilitating EPP–district partnership governance meetings, and compiling and presenting resident clinical performance data to inform partnership improvement efforts.

No other role in the residency models has formal responsibilities across so many aspects of the partnerships. As one US PREP staff member noted about the site coordinator role, "They're engaged with all stakeholders. They're the one responsible for gathering the data and supporting residents, mentors, and principals during the actual yearlong residency." Site coordinators also enhance the field experience through their responsibilities related to communication and governance. Though they are EPP faculty, site coordinators are embedded in school districts where they can work directly with mentor teachers, school leaders, and district administrators, enhancing collaboration between schools and partner EPPs.

Resident Support Through Stipends Covering Living Expenses

Paid residency stipends, intended to cover living expenses, were essential for the workings of grant-funded residencies. Set by the TCLAS grant program at \$20,000 per resident, stipends were aimed at eliminating the need for residents to take outside jobs during the yearlong clinical placement. They allowed residents to participate in their clinical experiences while completing their EPP coursework and helped ease the pressures of other responsibilities such as family obligations and paying for school. Stipends also made residencies a realistic option for a broader pool of teacher candidates, and current residents consistently shared that they were only able to participate in these yearlong programs because of the stipends.

While stipends were seen as vital for program access, they were also described as playing another key role: enabling residents' full participation in their immersive clinical placements. The residency model is built around intensive engagement by residents in their school sites and with their concurrent EPP coursework. As noted above, residency requirements and guidelines assume residents are members of school communities while progressively assuming greater responsibilities in co-teaching classrooms. In this light, resident stipends are an essential feature of Texas residencies, while the implementation of residencies without stipends may create barriers to full resident participation in local contexts.

Policy Recommendations

The progress Texas has made in promoting strong teacher residencies has created opportunities for sustaining existing programs and launching new ones. These opportunities, outlined in the recommendations below, align to the key features of state-supported residencies.

1. **Fund resident and mentor stipends with state matching grants that increase the district match over time to support sustainability.** Resident stipends have been essential for increasing access to, and full participation in, clinically intensive preparation. Mentor stipends have helped fund positions that underpin the residency model while compensating teachers for taking on leadership and coaching roles.

State grant programs have aimed to achieve sustainability in paid residencies, including resident and mentor stipends, by redirecting resources through strategic staffing. Though some districts have maintained this funding when grant funding has ended, others have struggled to do so. A strategy informed by previous state legislative efforts would provide dedicated state funding combined with increasing district matching contributions. Similar to current TEA grant structures and their sustainability provisions, the district match could increase over time as residencies gain traction locally.

A related option would be to adjust funding levels to meet district needs. As with the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) structure, the state could allocate higher funding levels for smaller districts with fewer financial resources and for districts located in more rural areas.

2. **Provide seed grants to EPPs to enable them to launch residencies with high-quality program features.** Efforts to establish and sustain residency programs through state grant funding have demonstrated the amount of time and effort needed to build strong programs and to establish the EPP–district partnerships that govern them. State grants initially built EPP–district partnerships by starting with established, vetted residencies at EPPs. However, continued residency expansion will inevitably involve EPPs that do not already have residency programs up and running. These EPPs may require additional support to redesign coursework and clinical experience requirements before establishing residency partnerships.

Seed grant funding for EPPs could provide needed time to redesign and implement programs aligned to the features of high-quality Texas residencies, preparing them for productive partnerships with districts. These grant funds could also help bring additional EPPs into alignment with the new state requirements for offering enhanced standard certificates, enabling these EPPs to act as full partners to any districts implementing paid residencies.

3. **Invest in technical assistance capacity through Education Service Centers to help launch new residencies and to support networking and expansion of existing programs.** The features that have proved important for successful residencies take time and expertise to develop. In Texas, technical assistance providers have been essential in supporting EPPs and districts to implement partnerships and establish sustainable residency funding through strategic staffing. Expanding technical assistance capacity through regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) has also been a state grantmaking priority. Providing state support to continue growing ESC technical assistance capacity can thus build on previous progress.

A first step could be to build on state matching grants by ensuring that technical assistance is included as a budget item. Additional state financial support could be provided by continuing to fund ESC personnel focused on residency technical assistance. Current TEA grants established “ESC Fellows” who specialize in supporting residency implementation and sustainability through strategic staffing models. Additional grant funding could maintain ESC infrastructure for future residency expansion.

A final area of potential support in technical assistance is to enable ESCs to create regional connections across districts, or to create multidistrict regional residency consortia, to allow coordination across programs and districts. Such consortia could build upon the work that ESC staff are already carrying out in the course of providing technical assistance to multiple districts and their EPP partners. Expanded opportunities for collaboration could allow districts and EPPs to share lessons learned in residency implementation across partnerships in their regions. Such networks might even facilitate multidistrict hiring efforts through shared regional pools of residency completers, creating additional flexibility to help meet fluctuating district staffing needs.

- 4. Establish pipelines for mentor teachers and residency clinical faculty, connected to state teacher workforce priorities, to support residency programs’ expansion.** Because both mentor teacher and EPP clinical faculty (“site coordinator”) roles are essential for residency implementation, building intentionally designed, supportive pipelines for educators aspiring to these roles would prepare the ground for bringing residencies to scale statewide. Such pipelines connect naturally to the teacher career options and leadership opportunities recommended by the governor’s Teacher Vacancy Task Force. Districts offer a starting point for both teacher career and EPP clinical faculty ladders; they can prepare K–12 teachers to move into mentor roles and more experienced teachers and administrators into faculty roles, respectively. The creation of career ladder options may best be handled within the context of EPP–district partnerships with state guidance.

A different route for promoting career opportunities for residency completers would be to revise state mentor teacher requirements to highlight residency experience. One such example, given residents’ lengthened clinical experience, would be to allow residency completers holding enhanced standard certificates to serve as mentors after 2 years as teachers of record, a year earlier than current administrative code allows.

- 5. Provide targeted support for residency partnerships preparing teachers for high-need assignments and locations, tailored to school district needs.** The features of high-quality residencies are most difficult to establish and sustain in communities with higher needs, including smaller, under-resourced, and more rural districts. These are the same communities where economic and geographic factors exacerbate teacher shortages, creating a challenge. Residencies could be a powerful lever to expand access to qualified teachers in the very districts where strategic staffing approaches have gained less traction in sustaining paid residencies.

The structure of the Texas Teacher Incentive Allotment program—funding higher pay for experienced, high-performing teachers who teach in schools where they are most needed—offers a model for the state provision of additional residency program support. One option for providing support would be to target additional funding for residency stipends and other administrative costs to districts designated as high-need. Targeted funds could also provide more time and support for these

districts to achieve sustainability. Another option, more closely aligned to the current TIA structure, would be to expand TIA funding to include residency completers. Making residency completers eligible for TIA funding could channel them into rural and high-need schools, with potential add-on effects for residency recruitment and completer hiring.

Conclusion

Amid challenging teacher workforce conditions, the state of Texas has been pursuing a systematic approach aimed at supporting and expanding the reach of established residencies. Grant programs using federal and state funds have seeded residencies statewide and supported their longer-term sustainability, setting up conditions for future growth. The state has thus established a strong foundation for policymakers concerned about high teacher attrition and shortages in the long term as well as for those seeking ways to strengthen the teacher workforce now. Texas has the opportunity to build on significant progress in seeding, sustaining, and scaling teacher residencies through continued funding, guidance, and technical assistance. Doing so would move the state closer to establishing a strong, stable, and diverse teacher workforce.

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