Intensifying Teacher Training
THE BIG PICTURE

Teachers spend a lot of time with children during their formative years. Research shows that quality relationships developed over time between teachers and students can foster students’ social-emotional development and improve academic outcomes. Yet, despite the central role teachers play in the lives of children, teacher turnover in the United States is startlingly high. This is especially true in high-need, Title I schools, where annual turnover rates are nearly 50 percent higher than in non-Title I schools.

As education leaders look to address the root causes of teacher turnover, many have focused on the fact that 77 percent of new teachers report they did not feel prepared to meet the needs of their students when they first entered the classroom. In light of this, programs designed to provide longer-term and more intensive pre-service classroom experience for teachers-in-training have become more common. Teacher residency programs, in which aspiring teachers work with veteran teachers in classrooms for a full year before entering the teaching workforce, have gained ground, growing from a handful of residency programs in the early 2000s to three dozen programs making up the membership of the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) in 2018. By embedding in classrooms for a full academic year rather than the more customary 10 weeks, teacher candidates have more time to learn from experienced educators and gain a feel for the dynamics of classroom life throughout a school year. Organizations affiliated with the NCTR are seeing this residency model approach to teacher preparation pay off, with 86 percent of students graduating from NCTR member programs remaining in the field for more than three years. Educators and policymakers are now exploring ways to scale the residency model approach to teacher preparation and expand its impact in high-need districts, in particular.

NEW UEI KNOWLEDGE

The University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program (UChicago UTEP) launched in 2003 as one of the first teacher residency programs in the United States. UChicago UTEP offers a two-year Master of Arts in Teaching followed by three years of post-graduation mentoring and coaching for five years of comprehensive teacher education. As a founding member of the NCTR, UChicago UTEP’s practice has helped shape the national discussion about how to effectively prepare pre-service teachers for successful, long-term careers in education.

With a focus on educating youth in urban school districts, UChicago UTEP’s coursework is designed to prepare pre-service teachers to reflect upon and develop an in-depth understanding of the community and cultural contexts in which they will serve as educators. UChicago UTEP developed a Foundations Seminar to help teacher candidates “unlearn” some of their socialized, preconceived notions about what it means to be a teacher, and provide forums for critical, honest conversations about race, class, and unconscious bias. The Foundations Seminar also integrates critical analysis of the specific education, housing, and economic policies that have impacted the communities in which UTEP students will teach, as well as thoughtful examination of norms related to gender identity and sexuality, with the ultimate aim of helping aspiring educators create more inclusive school and classroom environments.

In addition to coursework, UChicago UTEP students embed within local nonprofit and social service organizations, where they have the opportunity to work with and learn alongside community members. In the Foundations Year, they work with community-based organizations like the Center on Halsted, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and Blocks Together. As students progress to their Residency year, their work in the community continues with organizations such as the Umoja Corporation, which helps UTEP’s teacher candidates learn how to implement restorative justice practices in their classrooms. Each of these placements and collaborations allow pre-service teachers to learn about the challenges the
communities in which they will serve face, as well as the assets and strengths that community members can bring to their classrooms. UTEP students also learn how to understand the trauma that plagues many students and families in high-need communities. In partnership with Dr. Micere Keels, an Associate Professor in the University of Chicago’s Department of Comparative Human Development, UChicago UTEP teaches trauma-responsive practices that can help educators deescalate aggressive behaviors that stem from trauma experienced outside the classroom, build restorative communities, and keep students on productive learning paths. In 2018, UChicago UTEP began offering an English as a second language (ESL) endorsement pathway in response to the burgeoning population of English language learners and Illinois’ 2015 mandate for an ESL endorsement for every teacher serving students with ESL needs. UTEP’s endorsement will provide both pre-service and seasoned teachers with in-depth knowledge of various methods of teaching ESL and explore instructional approaches, methodologies, and techniques for successfully engaging ESL students.

Each element of UChicago UTEP’s model noted above is designed to help teachers empathize with and understand the students and families with whom they will work so that they are better poised to teach and remain teaching in high-need communities. UTEP’s integration of coursework, classroom, and community-based experiences has helped keep 92 percent of UTEP graduates inside high-need schools five years into their teaching careers. By comparison, “many schools serving America’s neediest children lose over half of their teaching staff every five years.”

DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

New teacher residency programs are cropping up across the country as evidence of their effectiveness in stemming the tide of teacher attrition mounts. Colleges and universities have historically operated a majority of the nation’s teacher residency programs, but public school districts have begun to create their own residency programs to develop and retain a larger pool of well-prepared teachers. In 2018, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launched its own residency program to prepare future teachers committed to working in CPS schools to succeed and thrive.

Other states and districts across the country are also channeling resources toward creating residency programs. The 2018-19 budget for the State of California included $75 million marked specifically for grants to support residency programs across the state. With a specific focus on special education and STEM teaching, this influx of money is expected to produce around 3,700 new teachers. Residency partnerships between universities and urban school districts have also cropped up in cities like Denver, Boston, Philadelphia, Richmond, and Seattle.

Despite the growth in teacher residency programs, the number of teachers in the workforce who have gone through a residency program versus a more typical university-based teaching program or postgraduate teacher accreditation program is low. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are roughly 3.2 million full-time teachers employed in the United States. By comparison, the NCTR reports that, through the course of its history, its member residency programs have graduated only 3,500 teachers.

As the number of residency programs rises, so too does the number of shorter-term teacher preparation programs designed to address significant teacher shortages. In Detroit, for example, school leaders have turned to alternative certification programs that provide interim certifications that only become full certifications after three years on the job and good reviews from a teacher’s administrator. Illinois has also reduced some licensing standards in an effort to address teacher shortages around the state. While these alternative approaches to accreditation may help alleviate immediate shortages, the question of whether they adequately prepare teachers for classrooms in high-need districts, in particular, remains.

To download the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute’s full New Knowledge Report, visit: https://www.ueiknowledge.org/2018-new-knowledge-report
Sources


4. The University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program


