

Successful Teacher Education Models to Address Teacher Shortage and Retention

Kymberly Harris

Alisa Lecki

Eric Landers

*Georgia Southern Univer-
sity*

Abstract

Colleges and schools of education are tasked with preparing the students who enroll in their programs and meeting the needs of school districts that depend upon their graduates. Faced with the current teacher shortage, critical discussions between teacher preparation programs and local communities attempt to provide stop-gap measures to move teachers into classrooms more quickly while maintaining rigorous professional standards. The examples provided in this program description include paid residencies, allowing students to return home to student teach, and course redesign to give paraprofessionals opportunities to earn certification while remaining in the classroom.

Successful Teacher Education Models to Address Teacher Shortage and Retention

The declining enrollment of teacher candidates in the colleges of education exacerbates the need for qualified teachers. In states where the current P-12 workforce is moving toward retirement, the need to replace teachers, especially in crucial subject areas such as math and science and discipline areas like special education, has become the centerpiece of teacher preparation programs. The need in these critical areas has been compounded due to the loss of teachers during the pandemic through early retirement and teachers leaving the profession (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Even before the pandemic, teacher shortages were already a problem targeted by state-level departments of education, school districts, and institutes of higher education (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019).

In addition to the existing shortage of teachers in the classroom, the ability to recruit students into the teaching profession has become more challenging. Historically, the teaching profession has been a sought-after vocation by those individuals desiring to work with children, have a schedule that supports personal and work balance, and have the opportunity to teach others. However, the teaching profession has reached its lowest point in 50 years (Kraft & Arnold, 2022). According to Kraft and Arnold (2022), teachers' job satisfaction, high school seniors' interest in becoming a teacher, and the public perception of the teaching profession have all declined for nearly half a century. Teachers do not recommend their students go into teaching. In a survey conducted by our Georgia Department of Education, 66.9% of teachers answered that they were unlikely to recommend pursuing a career in teaching (Owens, 2015). As teachers in the field become

disparaging of the profession, encouraging new teachers to enter the field becomes more difficult.

In areas where staffing classrooms has become critical, districts in our state and others have turned to either hiring new teachers without standard certification at higher rates (McKillip & Farrie, 2019) or relying on Alternative Certification Programs (ACP). However, both of these sources of new teachers come with drawbacks. First, placing teachers in the classroom without standard certification has been shown to have adverse effects on retention, student achievement, and classroom climate, and these teachers are more likely to be teaching in schools that are high poverty where certified teachers are needed the most (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Alternatively, ACPs were designed to address the teacher shortage and reduce the time needed to place teachers in the classroom. However, when comparing teachers prepared through ACPs to traditional preparation programs (TPP), it has been found that teachers who went through TPP were more likely to remain in the profession (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020). The drop in enrollment in TPP has prompted universities to offer more variety and increased support to those students who choose to become teachers.

Responding to the difficulties in attracting teacher candidates, faculty within the College of Education at our university began to examine the initial teacher certification programs to address the teacher candidate shortage. This process began before the pandemic, but the pandemic intensified the effort. Nationally, at the beginning of the 2022 academic year, nearly 44% of public schools reported teaching vacancies, and more than half were due to resignations (NCES, 2022). Annenberg Institute at Brown University indicates a teacher shortage of nearly 2 percent. Still, more than 5 percent of positions are currently held by underqualified teachers (Long, 2022, para. 2). Concurrent with existing

teacher shortages in the classroom, universities are faced with decreases in enrollment in TPP. For example, a survey of over 1,200 undergraduate prospective teachers found that 44% considered a field in teaching but decided to pursue other career options due primarily to low salaries and perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession (Bill et al., 2022). The number of teachers retiring from the field and the decline of students pursuing teaching as a profession create a need for immediate action to address the shortage.

With pressure from institutions to address declines in enrollment coupled with increased requests from school system partners to have early access to upcoming graduates, faculty have been challenged to be flexible and innovative while maintaining the caliber of programs and the success of our graduates. According to current data, approximately 90% of our graduates are still in the field of education five years after graduation (Georgia Department of Education, 2022), and this is a trend we continue in our goal to develop solutions to address teacher shortages. Our approach is responsive, receptive, and reflective when engaging faculty, school partners, and administration. This approach resulted in implementing three programs to address the need for teacher candidates: *Paid Residencies*, *Return to Home*, and *Certification Pathways for Paraprofessionals*. All three options have benefits for both students and our partner school systems. These programs are currently operating in the state of Georgia, where challenges associated with teacher shortages have necessitated innovative solutions.

Paid Residency

The Paid Residency Program was designed to provide districts with full-time teachers of record while fully supporting a teacher candidate through student teaching. The program is structured as a triad with one designated mentor teacher who supports two residents within the same school building. The mentor teachers play a particularly

critical role in this model, as in most teacher residency programs (Chan, 2014; Van Zandt Allen, 2013). Mentors model instructional and management strategies, support residents with school-specific routines and practices, provide guidance with lesson planning and student assessment, and assist residents in myriad small ways to support their success. Residents are hired by the school system as teachers of record and follow first-year teachers' orientation and induction schedules in their respective school systems. Teacher residents must engage in all the duties and responsibilities of first-year teachers and school community members.

Further, in the fall semester, they are also full-time students taking three or four courses at the university. One of the primary benefits for residents is that they are compensated with an annual salary of about \$19,000 (which is approximately half the salary of a first-year teacher in the district), including health benefits and time earned towards state retirement. This payment structure allows the district to employ two teachers of record for the cost of a single teacher. The mentor continues to receive their salary through the school district, which results in the school system "paying" for two teachers and acquiring two teachers and a mentor. The school-based triad is supported by a field supervisor from the university, and the students' remaining coursework needed for their degree is structured to align with their school-based teaching requirements as much as possible. This structure reflects the ongoing support for residents and is financially viable for school districts.

The *Paid Residency Program* has resulted in several positive outcomes for teacher retention. First, one of the goals of residency programs is to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce (Azar et al., 2020), and our model provides evidence of this possibility. While we did not directly target any particular student group for participation in the pro-

gram, students who chose to participate, applied, and were selected for this residency program were racially diverse, particularly in comparison with our overall College of Education student population. For example, while only 32.5% of our College of Education undergraduates are non-white, 41.2% of our paid residents are non-white.

Further, many first-generation college students participated in the residency program. These first-generation college students face personal challenges and systemic barriers that impede attaining a bachelor's degree (The Pell Institute, 2016). In most instances, the teacher candidates who selected the paid residency were students working full-time or two part-time jobs throughout their undergraduate studies (Rahimi & Cossa, 2022). In response to the needs of these students, this paid residency program allowed them to be able to sustain a salary while completing their clinical practice, making this an attractive opportunity for “non-traditional” students who are not working full time and/or are the typical age of a college junior.

Finally, while the program is relatively new and the numbers are small, they represent a positive trend in retaining teachers in these positions. Of the first 23 residents who completed the program, 16 are still employed at the school after two years where they completed their residency, and four work in high-needs schools in their home counties. The small but impactful data indicates that this paid residency program immerses residents in the school culture and fosters a strong support network, leading to teacher retention at the site. Retaining well-prepared first-year teachers is crucial for improving student outcomes, mainly since the schools hosting the paid residency often serve underserved communities or face challenges such as high poverty rates, staff shortages, and low student achievement levels.

Return to Home

Similar to the *Paid Residency Program*, our *Return to Home Program* was partly developed to respond to the need to support teacher candidates financially and fill teaching positions in critical need areas. The *Return to Home Program* was designed to allow teacher candidates to return to their “home school district” where they attended school to complete student teaching. A small, rural county superintendent initiated the plan to encourage a student who attended school in that county to return “home” to teach. Like many small, rural counties, this county does not have a university or college of education nearby, so access to graduating teachers was limited. The idea for *Return to Home* is similar to the *Grow Your Own* partnerships in that individuals from districts are provided opportunities by colleges of education to prepare to teach in schools in their home community (Heller, 2021). In our example, this student could not complete student teaching in their home district because it was out of the 70-mile limit of the range for supervision. Providing the option to return home under the supervision of a mentor teacher within the student’s home district promoted program completion for the student and a well-trained teacher for the district.

After deliberate communication was initiated with the superintendent and university faculty, a process was established to supervise student teachers beyond the service area so they could return to their home counties for their student teaching semester. These conversations required both entities to listen and determine their capacity to support the teacher candidate in this novel context. Both the university and school system are invested in the success of the teacher candidate. Still, we needed to delineate what this would look like at the school and university levels. This process involved training a mentor teacher within the Return to Home school about our policies and procedures re-

garding clinical practice for supervising student teachers, providing virtual support from university faculty, and identifying additional support mechanisms if the teacher candidate should encounter problems. While we do our best to ensure that teacher candidates are fully prepared for the student teaching semester, there are situations where students need additional help. Providing that support is relatively easy within our service area. Still, it becomes problematic if assistance is needed in schools that would require two to five hours of travel time each way for university faculty. Clearly, establishing and communicating these support structures is essential.

The *Return to Home Program* benefited both teacher candidates and districts. First, this option created a structure that supports students financially as they can live at home during the final semester when they are in the classroom full time. The financial support alleviates the need for a student to work a second job or take out more student loans to pay living expenses. It also provides family and community support to students as they return to their hometowns. Many of these students eventually intended to return to their home school district. Second, in rural districts without university access for student teachers, the program allows districts to access student teachers and encourages teacher candidates to return to communities where they are likely to stay (Esparza et al., 2019; Moreno, 2018). Since its inception in 2021, 79 student teachers have returned home for their final semester, and 61 have remained in their school systems upon graduation.

Certification Pathways for Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals represent a unique group to fill teacher positions because they are a group of adults interested in working with and supporting youth. They tend to have roots in the community. They are less likely to leave when compared to educators hired

from outside of the community (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006) and are more likely to succeed as beginning teachers and to remain in the job over time (Bonner, Pacino, & Stanford, 2011; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014). The *Pathways for Paraprofessionals* is designed to provide paraprofessionals a way to reach certification while remaining in their current job position. This newly approved program launched in Fall 2023.

The program was developed in collaboration with school system partners to provide paraprofessionals with a certification option to keep in their current jobs while completing courses. The work began by hosting several information/listening sessions to gauge paraprofessionals' interest and understand their educational backgrounds. Several exigencies became clear. First, paraprofessionals needed options to remain in their current position while financially supporting themselves. Second, based on the various levels of education this group possessed, multiple tracks were needed for completion. Finally, this group needed to be flexible in completing the program at various paces. As a result, three pathways to certification were developed: 1) redesigned hybrid and online College of Education courses with alternative field experiences so paraprofessionals could continue to work, 2) a fully online accelerated Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies to Master of Arts in Teaching Special Education for those that need a fully online program, and 3) an online Master of Arts in Teaching for those who already have a bachelor's degree.

Upon developing a plan that met the school partners' and adult learners' needs, procedures were built within the college and university to support the programs and ensure the success of this population of students. Advisors within the College of Education and College of Arts and Humanities worked to develop a curriculum map and potential timelines for program completion. University marketing assisted in creating promotional materials to reach potential students. The registrar's office instituted a tracking system

to monitor the students' progress in the various pathways. Finally, the admissions office works with recruitment staff to develop a tailored paraprofessional recruitment plan that addresses the needs of adult learners who have practical experience in the special education field. These actions ensure paraprofessionals receive the academic, technological, and mentor support needed to promote program completion.

Broader Implications

Implementing these new programs highlighted several benefits for the college and the districts. Increased communication and increased trust were developed with districts as we collaborated to create these programs. Instead of presenting to school districts a plan to fit our enrollment needs, we worked alongside the districts to develop plans that would be mutually beneficial. Implementing these programs has made the placement of student teachers in the field more manageable and efficient. The increase in trust could be because, by working through these initiatives, school districts recognized the role of the college as a partnership rather than simply an outside entity seeking to use schools as field placement locations. The programs highlight the importance of building these initiatives alongside the school district, which will be essential to the success of future programs to meet the district's needs and make these programs more attractive to prospective teachers.

While this article addresses teacher shortages through innovative preparation models, the strategies discussed have broader implications for workforce development across various professions. For instance, the Paid Residency model demonstrates how integrating practical experience with financial support can attract and retain individuals in demanding careers. This approach could be adapted to fields like nursing and social

work, where early, hands-on experience and financial stability are critical to building a committed workforce.

Similarly, the Return to Home program underscores the potential of leveraging local talent to address staffing needs in rural or underserved areas. This model could inspire similar initiatives in STEM-related fields, where talent pipelines often fail to reach geographically isolated regions. Industries can foster long-term retention and sustainability by creating opportunities for professionals to serve their home communities.

Finally, the Certification Pathways for Paraprofessionals highlights the importance of accessible, flexible training programs that support career progression while meeting the needs of adult learners. This concept is highly applicable to other sectors, emphasizing the necessity of aligning professional development opportunities with the realities of working professionals. Together, these strategies provide a framework for addressing workforce shortages through targeted recruitment, innovative training models, and robust support systems. These lessons can inspire interdisciplinary solutions to pressing workforce challenges in various fields.

Conclusion

The teaching world has faced many obstacles, requiring unique solutions. We have developed successful programs in the wake of these obstacles. With our highly collaborative relationships with school systems and our willingness to redesign coursework while maintaining robust expectations, we created venues to address the specific needs of our student population while considering the critical tasks of placing well-prepared teachers in schools quickly and efficiently. The *Paid Residencies*, the *Return to Home*, and *Certification Pathways for Paraprofessionals* programs address issues that increase

the likelihood of teacher retention and decrease the result of vacancies. By providing compensation in our *Paid Residency* program, a desirable geographical location in our *Return to Home* program, and room to advance in our Pathways for Paraprofessionals, we continue to strive for successful education programs. The process of filling vacancies, promoting retention, and inspiring people to become teachers will be made more accessible through these initiatives that are designed specifically for the needs of our students and our community stakeholders. These three programs—Paid Residencies, Return to Home, and Certification Pathways for Paraprofessionals—are innovative responses to the teacher shortage, each addressing unique challenges teacher candidates and school districts face. While initial outcomes are promising, further exploration is warranted to assess the long-term effectiveness of these approaches in addressing teacher shortages and improving teacher retention. Practitioners may investigate how these models can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse school contexts, including urban, suburban, and rural districts.

For researchers, these programs provide fertile ground for studies on the sustainability and scalability of teacher preparation innovations. Key areas for future research include the impact of these models on teacher quality, student achievement, and workforce diversity, as well as the cost-benefit analysis for districts implementing similar programs. By exploring these dimensions, practitioners, and researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of cultivating a robust and enduring teacher workforce nationwide.

References

- Azar, T., Hines, E., Schneib, C., (2020). *Teacher residencies as a vehicle to recruit teachers of color*. National Center for Teacher Residencies. <https://nctresidencies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Teacher-Residencies-as-a-Vehicle-to-Recruit-Teachers-of-Color-NOVEMBER-2020.pdf>
- Bill, K., Bowsher, A., Malen, B., Rice, J. K., & Saltmarsh, J. E. (2022). Making matters worse? Covid-19 and teacher recruitment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 103(6), 36–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221082808>
- Bonner, P. J., Pacino, M. A., & Hardcastle Stanford, B. (2011). Transition from para-professionals to bilingual teachers: Latino voices and experiences in education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 10(3), 212–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192711403483>
- Chan, T. C. (2014). Effective induction and mentoring programs for K-12 teachers and teacher education faculty. Perspectives of an operational model. *Educational Research & Development*, 17(2), 45–55. https://doi.org/https://www.viethconsulting.com/members/proposals/view_file.php?md=VIEW&file_id=501921
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Podolsky, A. (2019). Breaking the cycle of teacher shortages: What kind of policies can make a difference? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27(34), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4633>
- Ernst-Slavit, G., & Wenger, K. J. (2006). Teaching in the margins: The multifaceted work and struggles of bilingual paraeducators. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 37(1), 62–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3651375>

- Esparza, E., Sarmiento, M., Geneser, V., & Harris, S. (2019). In support of home-grown teachers: An examination of factors that supported the success of pre-service teachers in a bilingual education program from 2012-2017. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 2(4), 811–821. <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1993.02.04.108>
- García, E. & Weiss, E. (2020, October 16). Policy solutions to deal with the nation’s teacher shortage—a crisis made worse by COVID-19. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/blog/policy-solutions-to-deal-with-the-nations-teacher-shortage-a-crisis-made-worse-by-covid-19/>
- Heller, R. (2021). The grow-your-own approach to teacher preparation: A conversation with Amaya Garcia. *Kappan*, 103(3), 28–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172172111058511>
- Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2014). *What are the effects of teacher education and preparation on beginning teacher attrition?* Consortium For Policy Research in Education. https://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/researchreport/2018_prepeffects2014.pdf
- Kraft, M. A., & Lyon, M.A. (2022). The rise and fall of the teaching profession: Prestige, interest, preparation, and satisfaction over the last half century. (EdWorkingPaper: 22-679). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/7b1a-vk92>
- Long, H. (2022, December 27). *Opinion | America’s teacher shortage will last until pay rises*. The Washington Post. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/12/27/teacher-shortage-us/>
- McKillip, M & Ferrari, D. (2019). Invest in Georgia teachers: The need to attract and retain a high-quality workforce. *Fair School Funding: A Resource Equity Report*. The Education Law Center. <https://edlawcenter.org/research/invest-in-georgia-teachers-the-need-to-attract-and-retain-a-high-quality-workforce/>

- Moreno, Y. (2018). *Homegrown teacher project: Developing an early intervention pipeline for teachers of color* [Doctoral dissertation, Loyola Marymount University]. Digital Commons @LMU/LMS. <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1538&context=etd>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *U.S. schools report increased teacher vacancies due to COVID-19 pandemic, new NCES data show*. https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/3_3_2022.asp
- Rahimi, R., & Cossa, N. (2022). "Honestly, I think it's going great so far... I did have a mental Breakdown" examining the experiences of paid residents in their first year. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 13(5), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.7176/jep/13-5-01>
- Owens, S. J. (2015). *Georgia's teacher dropout crisis: A look at why nearly half of Georgia public school teachers are leaving the profession*. Georgia Department of Education. <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Survey%20Results.pdf>
- The Pell Institute. (2016). Indicators of higher education equity in the United States: 2016 historical trend report. University of Pennsylvania. <https://www.pellinstitute.org/pell-institute-indicators-2016/>
- Van Overschelde, J. P., & Wiggins, A. Y. (2020). Teacher preparation pathways: Differences in program selection and teacher retention. *Action in Teacher Education*, 42(4), 311–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2019.1656116>
- Van Zandt Allen, L. (2013). The Impact of Induction Support on Teacher Development, Teacher Retention and the Teacher Quality Issue. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 40(3), 75–92. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43684703>