

# From I Don't Know to Let me Show You: A Pre-Service Teacher's Toolkit

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## Abstract

*The underpinning of our yearlong teacher residency program is an extensive support network (AVID®, Sanford, Salary/Benefits) that ensures pre-service teachers complete residencies poised to begin their first year of teaching with the experience, and confidence, of second year teachers. Helping to meet the demand for high-quality PreK – 12<sup>th</sup> grade educators career pathways include traditional four-year and accelerated three-year students. We further embed a yearlong mentoring plan that supports teacher residents at the classroom, district, and university levels. In fall 2023, we will add a rural residency program providing 100% online coursework for students up to 300 miles from campus.*

Keywords: Teacher Residency, Teacher Resident, MCL, Mentor Teacher, Site Coordinator, US PREP, Opportunity Culture, AVID, T-TESS

The focus of the University's College of Education is to mentor prospective teacher residents from their first-year seminar through the completion of a yearlong Teacher Residency Program so that they graduate not only with distinction but fully confident in their abilities as a classroom teacher. This initiated our decision to pilot an innovative program in the 2020-2021 academic year that would transform the student teaching experience. Serving predominantly rural areas, we joined the University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP), a multi-university coalition that seeks to build competencies for K-12 teacher candidates in communities with historically underserved and low-income students (US PREP, n.d.). As a Hispanic-Serving and Minority Serving Institution, the University's undergraduate student population is approximately 72% minority, with Hispanics accounting for 54% of enrolled students (College Factual, 2022). Adopting the US PREP model provided a framework for a yearlong teacher residency that integrates coursework and clinical

experiences and yields a more authentic teaching practice. This model further allows us to strengthen teaching competencies for underrepresented students as well as to build strong district partnerships with rural schools that need accomplished Pre-K through 12th-grade educators.

With a higher population of residents living below poverty—15.4% in our region, which is almost three points higher than the national average—we also needed a solution for providing low-income students with career pathways (Census Reporter, n.d.). In the fall of 2022, the University launched a new tuition-free program for students of families with an annual income of \$100,000 or less, with every dollar being claimed by students in need. This gateway to learning means many of our undergraduate students can now complete their college education free of loans or debt and can graduate from an accredited education program with certification. This opens the door to many students who never dreamed a college education

would be possible. It is one of the many ways we are giving back to our communities.

A second financial incentive for our education students is a yearlong paid teacher residency program that includes a monthly salary and benefits. During the developmental phase of the pilot program in early 2020, salaries and benefits were key parts of the negotiations. Students in our yearlong residency have therefore been afforded salaries of \$24,000 with benefits, to include one year in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) during their year of residency. A game changer, this yields the opportunity for those students to focus wholly on their residency without needing to secure additional employment. Participating school districts and the University collaborate to schedule the teacher residents' final year courses on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and evenings. The teacher residents are intentionally released from their school campuses to complete university coursework, but with pay from their respective districts—meaning they are compensated for a 40-hour week but are only required to work 32 hours during the fall and spring semesters. Essentially, teacher residents are being paid to complete university course work. This is especially important given the demographics and financial status of our students, many of whom are supporting families.

The concept of a paid salary for teacher residents was a new concept in negotiations with our district partners, and a solution was not immediate. This progressive effort brought many stakeholders, over an extended period, to the negotiating table. The big question to be answered was exactly how much should a teacher resident earn? University leaders completed the research for minimum sustainable income, after which school districts applied for grants and used Opportunity Culture structures to meet this need. The Opportunity Culture structure was selected due to the organization's innovative model to redesign schools for greater excellence in teaching by assigning master teachers to teacher residents for the academic year (Opportunity Culture, n.d.). This co-teaching model—co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing—accelerates the growth of the teacher residents while simultaneously affording the master teachers (multi-classroom leaders) with more collaboration time for leading grade level teams.

Support for our teacher residents is also provided via multiple pathways for certification. While most students

select the traditional four-year program, completing local teacher residencies and attending on-campus classes at the University, additional pathways are available for program completion. Our Teaching in 3 accelerated program is offered through partnership with a local community college and affords students the opportunity to complete their bachelor's degree in three years, completing the same course work requirements as four-year students. This is an especially important program since 80% of our transfer students matriculate from community colleges. After earning an associate degree in three semesters, accelerated students complete an additional three semesters at the University for the conferment of their bachelor's degree. The University has strategically developed 8-week courses for these students to complete what their peers are completing in 16-week courses without sacrificing content or standards. Cohort students must also complete their courses on the university campus and on the same Tuesday and Thursday schedule as traditional students to facilitate their academic, social-emotional, and culturally relevant growth. All students, traditional or accelerated, serve as teacher residents in local districts during their senior year. Regardless of which pathway was chosen, they work together during their year of residency, including jointly attending the on-campus weekly residency seminar.

In fall 2023, an additional pathway for teacher residency will be made available to rural students unable to commute for on-campus classes or local residency assignments. Nearing the end of year two in the University's teacher residency program, a decision was made to extend the program to remote rural districts via an online residency. Interested rural district leaders—superintendents, principals, deans, educational partnerships—were sponsored at a two-day Extending our Reach convening, during which time we introduced the model for our expanding residency program, fostered strategic cross-district networking, and refined our vision for rural outreach. Three weeks of district visitations followed, with the University leaders traveling throughout rural parts of Texas and New Mexico, visiting some districts that had never had a university leadership team on campus. One by one, we worked with individual district leaders to enlarge the vision for adding certified teachers to their grow-your-own programs in alignment with our yearlong teacher residency. The response from rural district heads was overwhelmingly positive, and we are now

positioned to launch the first rural residency with uniquely designed cross-district cohorts.

The rural online cohort will encompass areas of Texas and New Mexico up to four hours away from the University and provide rural students with opportunities for a yearlong residency experience without leaving their home districts. Geographical areas served by the rural online cohort will include districts up to 300 miles from campus within an 86,000 square mile area. Students choosing this pathway will complete all required coursework online, including the residency seminar, and serve teacher residencies at assigned schools in their respective districts. While these students will not attend weekly on campus classes, like the local teacher residents, rural teacher residents will be afforded a hybrid model that allows for 15% virtual class time, interactive discussion threads, and varied opportunities to connect and collaborate with their peers. Since online University faculty are required to complete Quality Matters training to ensure quality assurance in innovative digital teaching and learning environments (Quality Matters, n.d.), online students will receive the same standard of learning as on campus students.

Additionally, online students can schedule virtual office hours for meeting with instructors and learning more about coursework. Students will gain an authentic learning experience not usually afforded online students, which includes peer-to-peer learning fosters by online discussions, online assignment collaborations, and virtual presentations. The rural residency program will function similarly to local residencies in that teacher residents will have assigned site coordinators, mentor teachers, and the support of their administrative and district leaders. Unlike the local residencies, the mentor teacher will only coach his or her assigned teacher resident and will not have the added responsibility of being a team lead, as designed in the Opportunity Culture model (Opportunity Culture, n.d.). A *Progression of Student Teaching Responsibilities* guide will be provided to assist both the mentor teacher and teacher resident with the progression of co-teaching to include when and how to shift responsibilities so that the teacher resident becomes the lead teacher by semester's end. This grow-your-own teacher residency program will make it possible for students to remain in their hometowns, and districts of choice, to serve as educators. Within the rural

online cohort framework, instructional aides and Reach Associates will also have opportunities to transition to a yearlong teacher resident in their current placements. This will provide minimal interruption to their progress plans as well as provide paid incentives. Other rural students joining the rural online cohort will likewise have opportunities to serve paid residencies in their local communities. Funding will be provided through T-Class grants and other district funding designated for grow-your-own programs. As with local teacher residents, many of the rural residents will likewise be afforded benefits and become vested in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). In at least one rural district, compensation up to \$30,000, plus housing, may be available for approved teacher residents during their year of residency.

In collaboration with district partners and key stakeholders, a year-long mentoring plan was developed to support all teacher residents at the classroom, district, and university levels, beginning with summer orientation and ending with a culminating capstone project the following spring. During orientation, teacher residents draft a living document to pen their vision for becoming a teacher. This concrete vision statement is continually revised throughout the year of residency so that graduating students are ready to use their statements as part of the hiring process for their first year of teaching. The yearlong mentorship program includes mentoring by an assigned site coordinator who jointly serves on the University's faculty and teaches related courses, including the weekly residency seminar. In alignment with the US PREP model, this provides an indispensable bridge between the academic and clinical work being completed by the resident and allows our faculty, in real time, to make programmatic adjustments. For example, we discovered a need to introduce specific learning objectives earlier in assigned coursework so that teacher residents have the requisite skills needed during their year of residency.

As an AVID® school, we began adding AVID® components like WICOR—Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading—as well as introducing key elements of lesson plans in level 3000 courses (AVID®, n.d.) one to two semesters earlier than previously offered. We also intentionally embedded T-TESS vocabulary into coursework to guide teacher residents in their understanding and application of state standards. Teacher

residents therefore become familiar with the T-TESS rubric domains and dimensions, including descriptors and practice and performance levels, from *improvement needed* to *distinguished* performance. They further learn best practices for planning, instruction, the learning environment, and professional practices and responsibilities.

District mentoring is also provided by an assigned multi-classroom leader who works one-on-one with the teacher resident for the full academic year, August till May, in the same classroom. School administrators likewise provide supplemental mentoring and support, along with assigned district directors overseeing the residency placements. This includes ongoing professional development offered by schools and districts from which the residents can benefit alongside their multi-classroom leader or mentor teacher. Professional development opportunities for teacher residents include workshops provided by Opportunity Culture, AVID®, the Ron Clark Academy, UTeacher Foundations (or Advanced) of Blended Learning, among others. Multi-classroom leaders also attend quarterly support meetings, led by site coordinators, alongside other district leaders. These data-driven meetings provide opportunities to share teacher residents aggregated and disaggregated data to elaborate on trends observed during walkthroughs and POP cycle visits. School administrators similarly attend quarterly data-driven governance meetings where they learn about the progress of teacher residents assigned to their schools.

The University structures its education courses to additionally support students through service learning—from introductory classes to self-reflection in senior level courses—and during the year of teacher residency. Teacher residents are recruited and vetted based on collective factors that ensure the best qualified candidates are admitted to the program as well as candidates who are prepared for the rigor of the yearlong residency. Qualifying teacher residency candidates must be admitted to the College of Education on a regular status and lack no more than 30 credit hours for a bachelor’s degree and certification. An overall GPA of 2.5 is required, and the candidate’s education courses must have a cumulative 2.75 GPA with no grade lower than a C. The candidate must further take the practice Content and General exams, as well. When applying, the candidate is required to submit an

essay of intent, desired certification area, and to name the district/school of choice. The College of Education then verifies the potential candidate’s qualifications and shares the candidate’s files with the district of the potential teacher resident has chosen. This comprehensive process invites the participation of all stakeholders, including administrators and district leaders.

As a community of stakeholders, the teacher residency program is further supported by monthly partner meetings designed to strengthen university-district relationships and solidify the academic and clinical. In contrast to the data-driven meetings, these qualitative meetings provide opportunities to advocate for our teacher residents as well as to respectfully consider the needs of our district partners. Collaboratively, we work to solve the difficult questions. For example, how do we improve communication between the multi-classroom leader and teacher resident when problems arise in the classroom or clinical relationship? One successful way we found to improve communication was to create the *Progression of TR Development and Release Time* guide. This guide includes suggested timelines for co-teaching, solo teaching, and when or if a teacher resident should be required or allowed to substitute teach. The guide further offers suggestions for multi-classroom leader release time to foster team collaboration. The community invested time into numerous meetings to negotiate an equitable solution for supporting both teacher residents and district schools to prevent a daily shortage of qualified teachers. The University further tackled the question of how university field experiences, in alignment with required course work, impacted the time teacher residents took away from their district classrooms. Because our district partners were brave enough to say that pulling teacher residents from their assigned classrooms for extended field hours was counterproductive, this allowed us, in real time, to realign field experiences while continuing to work on course alignments.

Modeling and practicing what we expect teacher residents to perform in their district classrooms is foundational to our program, and their success. They receive a comprehensive Teacher Resident handbook that includes the *Progression of TR Development and Release Time* guide to inform the teacher residents what their gradual release into co-teaching will look like over the course of the academic year. This guide references different

types of co-teaching and expectations from week one to week sixteen and beyond. The guide further recognizes and supports the developmental stages of teacher resident, from *I don't know to let me show you*. They likewise advance through the ongoing modeling and mentoring of their multi-classroom leaders, who follow the *Progression of Teacher Development and Release Time* guide for optimal growth. The expectation is that by May teacher residents are equipped to lead their district classrooms with the multi-classroom leaders in a support role, a complete reversal of the co-teaching roles starting in August.

Both teacher residents and their multi-classroom leaders gain additional support in building relational capacity through specific activities promoted by the co-teaching model. An AVID school, the University promotes the implementation of AVID strategies along with the *Learning Forward's* AEIOU norms for participation: Ask questions, Engage fully, Integrate new information, Open minds to diverse views, and Utilize what is learned (AVID Press, 2016). AVID provides professional learning for educators to close the opportunity gap, especially for underrepresented students (AVID, n.d.). Implementing AVID's four levels of relational capacity therefore helps to foster stronger connections between teacher residents and multi-classroom leaders. These levels include helping teacher residents to become self-directed, self-advocating, and self-monitoring under the leadership of both the University and district mentors. As a community, we facilitate deep engagement and ensure a variety of AVID strategies are modeled and directly taught to our teacher residents during the seminar, course work, and in their school districts since AVID promotes an equitable, student-centered approach to learning (AVID, n.d.). Since the partner school districts use blended learning, teacher residents are required to use Technology (International Society for Technology in Education standards for teachers and students) and AVID strategies in each lesson plan to advance social emotional learning and culturally relevant teaching. We further support our teacher residents by using Sanford Inspire and Sanford Harmony modules, a CASEL accredited online program for educators, as part of their course assignments (Harmony SEL, 2022). The teacher residents reflect on Sanford modules using AVID debrief strategies—the AVID 4A's: Adopt, Adapt, Accelerate and Advocate. Teacher residents experience AVID infused

College of Education classes/seminars both as a learner and as a future teacher.

The yearlong mentoring for teacher residents also includes University faculty, serving as site coordinators, who complete informal walkthroughs and POP cycles (pre-conferences, formal observations, and post-conferences) during which teacher residents receive strategic feedback aligned with the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The use of the T-TESS affords teacher residents multiple experiences with the school districts and state's evaluation system before they encounter it in the workforce. Walkthroughs provide an informal, spontaneous snapshot of the teacher resident and multi-classroom leader in action with their students. Feedback for this 15 to 20-minute observation focuses on observed co-teaching strategies, areas of reinforcement, and areas of refinement.

To facilitate communication, the teacher residents maintain a notebook with key school district information and university information. Included within the notebook is the walkthrough and POP cycle tracker. The teacher resident, multi-classroom leader and site coordinator can use the T-TESS data and language for just in time teaching or to reinforce great teaching points. The POP cycle encompasses formal and planned observations of student teaching for at least 45 minutes. In advance of the observation, the teacher resident's assigned university site coordinator reviews all documents required for the observation. This includes a completed Student Achievement Chart, documenting pre-assessment scores of students prior to the lesson being taught, along with the completed lesson plan, constructed in alignment with the pre-assessment outcomes, and associated lesson materials. The teacher resident receives a provided template and curriculum support to design and execute a strategic lesson for his/her students, which includes both pre-assessment and post-assessment of students to measure growth, documented on the Student Achievement Chart. These documents are reviewed by the site coordinator in advance of the pre-conference and then reviewed a second time with the teacher resident during the conference using a prescribed pre-conference guide to support in-depth discussion. Post-observation, the teacher resident and site coordinator meet again, using a prescribed post-conference guide, to debrief the lesson. This yields opportunities for site coordinators to coach teacher residents in applying next

steps to improve lesson planning and execution, focusing on targeted areas for refinement. When the needed refinement is one observed throughout a district, in the classrooms of multiple teacher residents, it subsequently becomes a seminar focus with modeling and application by site coordinators. In modeling expectations, the site coordinators consistently embed practices for which teacher residents need refinement during the data-driven weekly seminars, which focus on data gained through walkthroughs, multi-classroom leader observations, and scheduled POP cycles for continuous programmatic improvement. For example, if a needed district-wide refinement is classroom management, site coordinators model examples of classroom management during a seminar, after which teacher residents are given real-time opportunities for application. During subsequent POP cycle observations, teacher residents then have an opportunity to demonstrate growth by making a reinforcement of a former refinement. Teacher residents have additional opportunities to gain support from site coordinators during weekly on-campus seminars, during which the site coordinators provide hands-on assistance in the completion of clinically based assignments. Work sessions also afford teacher residents one-on-one time to meet with site coordinators for academic and/or emotional maintenance.

Scheduled seminar time also incorporates community lead professional development sessions to support our teacher residents' mental and social-emotional well-being while affording them certification in key areas of development. The *Mental Health First Aid* skills-based training advances understanding regarding mental health issues (National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2023). By attending this full day workshop, our teacher residents gain guidance for talking to young people about mental health challenges, including suicide prevention and substance abuse, and developing action plans for both identifying and responding to potential mental health threats. Likewise, the *Darkness to Light* training our teacher residents attend focuses on the education and prevention of child abuse and neglect (Darkness to Light, 2023). These future educators learn more about how to recognize, and potentially prevent, child abuse. We further supplement these training with selected AVID for Higher Education professional development, including coping with teacher stress and teachers as agents of change. We created our AVID for Higher Education Model to foster a professional

community of practice with university faculty, community college faculty, local independent school district teachers, student teachers and teacher residents.

The multifaceted heart work we provide to uplift and support our teacher residents as pre-service teachers is a collaborative and evolving effort we daily seek to improve. From providing financial relief, to accessibility, to equitability, we strive to reinforce the pre-service learning for our teacher residents in ways that build capacity both academically and clinically so that our graduating students are well-equipped and poised to be successful classroom teachers. This includes providing innovative programs and opportunities for historically underrepresented students, especially important since we predominantly serve both minority and first-generation college students. Tuition-free programs become significantly more important given the demographics. It means ensuring qualified students will never have to pay a dime of tuition or worry about student loans or giving education students the opportunity to earn an income while simultaneously completing their residencies sustain them financially. It also means providing diverse pathways, to include an accelerated program that allows us to place high-quality educators in districts even sooner. Further, it embraces an outreach to rural districts to include students who may not otherwise have an opportunity to complete a four-year degree. It includes a well-structured and collaborative mentorship so that our education students have multiple levels of support both at the university and in their respective school districts. It encompasses the implementation of high rigor strategies and learning programs, such as AVID and Sanford Inspire and Harmony, and the ongoing professional development through programs like *Mental Health First Aid* and *Darkness to Light*. It reinforces holding teacher residents to the highest standards personally and professionally as we consistently provide structural feedback to advance individual growth and learning. And it supports the successful co-teaching model that ensures teacher residents will be consistently mentored every step of the way—equipped academically, socially, emotionally, and mentally—so that they enter their future classrooms both skilled and experienced with the qualifications of a second-year teacher. Therein lies the success of our yearlong mentorship-based teacher residency: Helping our students to accelerate learning without compromising the learning process, gaining essential knowledge for supporting their

communities of practice, both demonstrating and fostering social-emotional learning in their classrooms, and applying culturally relevant pedagogy to support optimal levels of

student achievement and inclusion. This is our best heart work to date.

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