

# Barriers to the Scalability and Sustainability of the California Teacher Residency Grant Program

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## **The California Teacher Residency Grant Program represents a commitment to long-term solutions to statewide teacher shortages**

California has made a major investment in teacher residencies through the California Teacher Residency Grant Program (TRGP), allocating over \$600 million in successive rounds of funding to launch and expand teacher residencies throughout the state. California's investment comes as the state grapples with a persistent teacher shortage. This shortage has forced districts to hire new teachers who enter the classroom through intern and emergency-style permit pathways, which allow candidates to become a teacher of record with minimal training.<sup>i</sup> These underprepared teachers are more likely to teach in schools that serve a high proportion of students of color and students from families with low income. Recent studies have also shown that, nationally and within California, underprepared teachers are less likely to stay in the teaching profession.<sup>ii</sup> These data points suggest that "quick entry" pathways are a short-term solution, one that disproportionately places vulnerable students in the classrooms of inexperienced teachers.

WestEd's formative evaluation of the California Teacher Residency Grant Program and the data informing this brief

WestEd has partnered with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to conduct a formative evaluation of the California Teacher Residency Grant Program (TRGP) aimed at assisting residency practitioners, technical assistance providers, and policymakers to better understand and support grant progress. Data informing this brief were drawn from the 37 programs that received grants to launch or expand residencies through the initial round of TRGP funding released in March 2019.

For more information on the evaluation and to access the reports informing this brief, please visit the WestEd project page: <https://www.wested.org/project/california-teacher-residency-grant-program-evaluation/>

In the context of California's ongoing teacher shortage, the state's investment in teacher residencies represents a promising step toward a long-term solution. Research suggests that teacher residencies result in teachers who are better prepared and responsive to the hiring needs and contexts of partner LEAs. Crucially, a growing number of studies nationwide show that between 80 and 95 percent of residents teach in the classroom for at least 3 years,<sup>iii</sup> as compared to 75 and 58 percent of California teachers entering on intern and emergency-style permits, respectively.<sup>iv</sup>

After close to 4 years of implementation, there are signs that California's TRGP residencies are following similar positive trends. Early placement and retention data show that around 90 percent of the first two cohorts of TRGP-funded residents were hired in California, and 88 percent of those are still teaching in their second year. TRGP-funded residencies are attracting a more diverse teaching workforce that better reflects California's students. Residents, mentor teachers, and partnership team members praise the strength of clinical preparation that residents receive through their yearlong placement with an expert mentor teacher.

### **A coordinated state effort is urgently needed to address structural barriers to the uptake, growth, and sustainability of residencies in California**

Despite early indicators of the TRGP's promise, the TRGP faces critical structural barriers. Across these specific barriers two challenges are clear: **The teacher residency programs funded by the TRGP are not affordable for many teacher candidates**, and **many residency programs are not yet structured to scale and sustain beyond the life of the grant**.

WestEd's evaluation data and work with interest holders in this space suggest the need for a coordinated state effort to address these challenges by

- increasing the size of the total financial package for teacher residents, with special attention to resident pay and benefits;
- bolstering staffing capacity and collaboration structures across host local education agencies (LEAs), and partner institutions of higher education (IHEs) to support effective implementation and scaling of residencies; and
- leveraging requirements, incentives, and technical assistance (TA) to ensure that successful residencies can be sustained after one-time funds have expired.

#### **What are teacher residencies?**

Developed and operated by a partnership between a local education agency (LEA) and a university or college that has a state-approved teacher preparation program, residencies serve as a pathway for meeting an LEA's specific teacher workforce needs, typically defined by subject or student focus (e.g., a need for more special education teachers). Teacher residencies provide intensive pathways into the teaching profession that focus on rigorous "clinical preparation" whereby a resident's credentialing coursework is integrated with a yearlong placement in the classroom of an expert mentor teacher (i.e., an accomplished teacher who provides mentorship, teaches alongside the resident, and supports the resident in gradually assuming increased responsibility in the classroom). As residents learn to teach during their residency year, they typically receive financial support in exchange for a several-year teaching commitment in the host LEA upon completing the residency program.

The TRGP is a limited-term program in California. For the most recent expansion of the program (in 2022), funds are to be encumbered by June 2027. If the goal is for the residency pathway to be an established (and preferred) pathway into the profession in California, this is a critical moment in which to address these barriers and establish a network of high-quality sustainable teacher residencies in the state.

## Barriers to the scalability and sustainability of the Teacher Residency Grant Program

### 1. Most programs are not yet offering the level of financial support needed to make residencies an affordable option for candidates.

Residents need financial support to cover their living costs during a year of intensive clinical training and coursework. However, **the median stipend offered to residents across TRGP programs was \$13,433—far below the cost of living in California.**<sup>v</sup>

Unsurprisingly, **programs have cited resident financial barriers as their most significant recruitment challenge.** A majority of candidates who do participate in TRGP-funded residencies experience financial hardship during their residency year, and over a quarter of residents do not have health insurance. These financial hardships disproportionately impact residents of color.

An in-depth cost analysis of a sample of TRGP programs looked at residents' pay during their participation in the residency.<sup>vi</sup> Resident pay approximated a living wage in just 3 of the 10 programs sampled. All 3 of these programs leveraged a combination of living stipends and concurrent roles for residents as full-time paraeducators in the host LEA.

Ultimately, **insufficient pay for residents leaves residency pathways unable to compete with intern and permit/waiver entry options,** which allow candidates to become salaried teachers of record with minimal training. In comparison to the median resident stipend of \$13,433, the average entry-level teacher salary in California (roughly what an intern would earn) is approximately \$47,000. There is a stark economic disincentive to choosing the residency pathway.

Legislation authorizing the TRGP allocated \$20,000 grant dollars per resident to recipient LEAs, supplemented by a required LEA match. Legislation in 2021 increased the per resident funding to \$25,000 and decreased the required LEA match to 80 percent. However, **the legislation does not require any grant or matching funds to be put toward resident stipends, and LEAs must decide locally how much funding to allocate toward resident financial supports** versus other allowable activities that are needed to launch and grow residencies.

### 2. Grants have been underenrolled since the start of the TRGP; with program expansions, underenrollment could become much more pronounced.

**The available funding exceeds the number of candidates who have enrolled in each cohort of the TRGP.** WestEd estimated that the first round of TRGP funding, authorized in 2018, could support about 612 residents per cohort. However, actual resident enrollment has hovered at around half that amount, and cohort size has not increased between the first and third cohorts.<sup>vii</sup> The numbers of enrolled residents also fell short of programs' own projections. New funding authorized through the 2021 and 2022 state budgets expands the potential number of residents that could be funded by the TRGP by nearly 20,000 residents.

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### 3. Few of the existing programs have the staffing capacity to support robust residency partnerships.

Strong residency partnerships within and across LEA and IHE partners are essential components of successful teacher residencies. These partnerships allow for coordinated recruitment, placement, and hiring processes aligned with the LEA's needs. Strong partnerships also allow residency programs to reallocate resources and rethink staffing models to build sustainable, affordable residencies.

Evaluation findings suggest that most programs have room to strengthen these partnerships. There is a particular need for increased LEA and IHE leadership engagement and greater alignment between the residency program and LEA workforce strategy, especially through collaboration across LEA leadership, human resources staff, and the residency program.

**However, evaluation data also indicate that many programs do not currently have sufficient staffing structures to build and manage these vital partnerships.** Virtually all program leads interviewed expressed that they would need a more robust staffing structure to expand the residency in the future, with many leads pointing to the need for a full-time coordinator role dedicated solely to the residency work.

Additionally, while residency programs are inherently a collaboration between an LEA and an IHE-based teacher preparation program, the current TRGP structure offers no direct financial support to IHE partners, leading to IHE-based staff taking on unpaid work to support residency programs or being unable to engage at a level appropriate for supporting robust partnerships.

The 2021 trailer bill language updated TRGP allowable spending categories to explicitly include staffing, which is a promising step in the right direction.<sup>viii</sup> However, **programs have little guidance on how to allocate their limited grant and matching dollars to meet staffing needs while also funding other allowable activities that are critical to residency implementation and scale**, like resident stipends, mentor teacher stipends and training, and induction supports. And because TRGP funding is tied to individual residents, **smaller programs that need dedicated staffing support to build and scale programs may be particularly pressed to balance the need for staffing capacity with other demands on grant dollars** (most residencies funded through the TRGP are still relatively small, with the majority of programs enrolling fewer than 15 residents).

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### 4. Most programs do not have plans in place to sustain the residency after the TRGP funding concludes.

The upfront resources required to design and launch residency partnerships while providing early cohorts of residents with adequate financial support are substantial. Grant and philanthropic funding can play a critical role in this early phase. **Sustainable residency programs, however, must eventually shift reliance away from grant and philanthropic support by developing alternative funding streams, sharing costs across partners, integrating residencies into long-term staffing strategies, and reducing costs within their own organizations.** Residencies can ultimately lower LEA costs overall by recruiting, training, onboarding, and retaining well-prepared teachers in high-need credential areas.<sup>ix</sup>

According to evaluation data, **most TRGP programs do not have plans in place to leverage nongrant funding sources after the TRGP funding sunsets.** This uncertainty about sustainability plans is likely linked to the other barriers summarized above. That is, residency programs without the financial incentives to attract residents at a scale commensurate with the LEAs' workforce needs—and without robust partnerships and staffing structures—may struggle to engage in the strategic planning and resource reallocation needed to sustain residencies beyond the life of the grant.

## 5. Residency program participation in technical assistance to support affordability, sustainability, and foundational partnership development has been uneven.

Given the complexity of building strong and sustainable residency partnerships, it is likely that many programs need additional support. However, residency program participation in TA has been uneven. Moreover, **TA opportunities focusing explicitly on partnership development and sustainability planning—two major areas of need—have been limited,** and those that do exist have seen low take-up. Barriers to TA participation cited by programs include navigating the many options, understanding what their TA needs are, and lacking staff time and capacity to engage with TA opportunities. The state's allocation of \$20 million toward a statewide TA center presents an exciting opportunity to support residencies in working through these challenges.

## Recommendations

California is part of a burgeoning, nationwide effort to address teacher shortages through high-retention, rigorous, and supportive pathways into the profession. A growing number of state and LEA initiatives—several within California—are piloting creative approaches to overcoming the implementation and scaling challenges to building affordable residencies. Innovations include designing LEA-based roles that allow candidates to earn income while fulfilling district staffing needs, leveraging federal and state grant opportunities for residents, and forming regional consortiums to pool resources and expertise.<sup>x</sup> These emerging bright spots suggest that when residency partnerships have access to high-quality TA, adequate start-up funding, and fully invested LEA and IHE partners, residencies can become affordable *and* sustainable over time.<sup>xi</sup>

California needs to support all its residency programs to pursue similar innovations that will allow for residency sustainability and scale. The state should start by immediately addressing the resident affordability and staffing capacity challenges that are preventing many TRGP residencies from gaining momentum. In parallel, the state should provide guidance, incentives, and accountability mechanisms to encourage residency programs to build financially sustainable program models by the conclusion of the grant.

The following recommendations are drawn from WestEd's formative evaluation data and are informed by a growing body of research and practitioner expertise around supporting sustainable, affordable, and high-quality teacher residency programs.

- a.) **Require minimum resident pay (composed of direct living stipends and/or employment opportunities)** for TRGP recipients tied to a regional living wage and benefits that can compete with intern salaries and benefits. Grant dollars could be used to support these stipends in a residency program's early years but should be accompanied by TA and incentives for programs to shift to self-sustaining models by the sunset of the TRGP. For example, strategies might include designing residencies to leverage LEA-based employment opportunities or reallocating LEA funds to support residents.

- b.) **Connect residencies and their IHE and LEA partners with technical support to design and optimize financial compensation packages for residents**, with an emphasis on strategies for making affordable residencies sustainable over time, independent of external grant funding. The shift to a fully sustainable and affordable residency model requires significant interorganizational coordination, time, and expertise.
- c.) **Provide clear guidance on federal and state financial aid that is available to residents** (e.g., federal TEACH grants, federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness, Golden State Teacher Grants, Cal Grants) and on how to support residents to access this aid. Make this information accessible for programs and residents, and streamline the process for accessing funds.
- d.) **Provide dedicated funding for two 0.5 to 1.0 FTE coordinator positions**, one each at the LEA and the IHE, that are dedicated to the residency for 3 years, until the program is sustainable and those positions are fully funded by LEA and IHE funds.
- e.) **Consider opportunities to help residencies realize economies of scale** while maintaining the responsiveness to local contexts and workforce needs that make residency programs unique. For example, regional consortiums across LEAs (perhaps orchestrated at the COE level) could allow for the pooling of resources to support recruitment, dedicated staff, and high-quality placements.

## Endnotes

- i Lambert, D., Willis, D. J., & Xie, Y. (2022, June 30). Nearly 1 out of 5 classes in California taught by underprepared teachers. *EdSource*. <https://edsources.org/2022/nearlyone-out-of-five-classes-in-california-taught-by-underprepared-teachers/674906>; García, E., & Weiss, E. (2019). *The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought: The first report in "The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market" series*. Economic Policy Institute.
- ii La Torre, D., Leon, S., Ong, C., Sloan, T., & Smith, T. (2021). *Diversifying California's teaching force: How teachers enter the classroom, who they serve, & if they stay*. California Teacher Education and Improvement Network, University of California. <https://cterin.ucop.edu/resources/cterin-briefs/policy-briefs/policy-brief-vollno1-diversifying-ca-teaching-force.html>; Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2014). *What are the effects of teacher education and preparation on beginning teacher attrition?* [Research report (#RR-82)]. Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania.
- iii Guha, R., Hyler, M. E., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *The teacher residency: An innovative model for preparing teachers*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-residency>; Silva, T., McKie, A., & Gleason, P. (2015). *New findings on the retention of novice teachers from teaching residency programs*. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20154015/pdf/20154015.pdf>.
- iv La Torre et al., 2021.
- v As reference, MIT's living wage model calculates a living wage translated into annual income before taxes for a single adult to be \$44,142 in Los Angeles County, and \$34,676 in Kern County (<https://livingwage.mit.edu>).
- vi This cost study looked beyond the grant-supported stipend amount residents receive and assessed the value of the complete financial packages available to residents, including but not limited to living stipends, employment opportunities, scholarships and tuition reduction, induction support, and testing fee waivers. To understand resident income, we attended to either cash stipends or earnings from district-based employment opportunities that allow residents to directly support their living expenses. Many programs in the sample also offered subsidized tuition or scholarships to residents.
- vii CTC administrative data show 300 residents enrolled in cohort 1, 324 in cohort 2, and 317 in cohort 3.
- viii A.B. 130 (Ch. 44, Secs. 45–46), 2021 Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2021). [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=20210220AB130](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=20210220AB130)
- ix De Moss, K. (2018). *Following the money: Exploring residency funding through the lens of economics*. Bank Street College, Prepared to Teach.
- x Dennis, H., & DeMoss, K. (2021). *The residency revolution: Funding high quality teacher preparation*. Prepared To Teach, Bank Street College of Education.
- xi Yun, C., & DeMoss, K. (2020). *Sustainable strategies for funding teacher residencies: Lessons from California*. Learning Policy Institute.; US PREP. (2023). *Why teacher residencies need to be the standard*. US PREP National Center. [https://irp.cdn-website.com/30f69313/files/uploaded/US%20PREP%20Residency%20Impact%20Pub%20FINAL\\_1LFmmKdnRxS5RcFn2RbK.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/30f69313/files/uploaded/US%20PREP%20Residency%20Impact%20Pub%20FINAL_1LFmmKdnRxS5RcFn2RbK.pdf)

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