

# Mentoring residents in team-based staffing models

New opportunities to better support teacher residents

## ▶ The challenge

Teacher residencies offer a robust pathway into professional teaching. The exact defining elements of a teacher residency vary by program, but nearly all share the common attributes of (1) a rigorous full-year classroom apprenticeship; (2) academic coursework that is closely aligned to the classroom experience; and (3) the opportunity to work alongside a highly trained, supported mentor teacher. Residencies are backed by a strong evidence base across a range of outcomes (Azar, Grossman, Lozier & Scheib, 2021).

It is widely accepted that the quality of the mentor teacher has positive and statistically significant effect on the development of resident teachers (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2020). For that reason, finding enough high-quality mentor teachers can often be a limiting factor in the growth and sustainability of a residency program.

In the same way that we often expect single teachers working in one-teacher, one-classroom models to be all things to all learners at all times, we make similar demands of mentor teachers. Although still early in our work and research, we believe that by placing teacher residents on teams with multiple professional educators allows for distributed mentorship that helps accelerate the development of resident teachers.

## ▶ How has the role of mentor evolved in team-based staffing models?

The role of the mentor has evolved along with our learning about how to best organize an educator team with distributed expertise that shares a common roster of students.

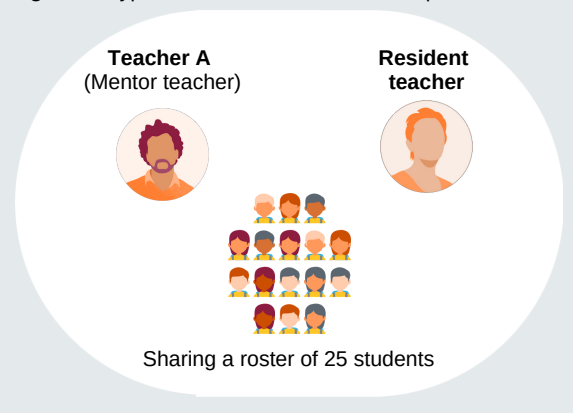
Imagine a school with four third-grade classrooms, of which one was unstaffed on the first day of the school year. Rather than hire a long-term substitute or an emergency-certified teacher, the school uses those “vacancy dollars” to hire two or three teacher residents.

Early models were based on teams that included one mentor teacher and the two or three teacher candidates. They shared a larger roster of students (usually two classrooms worth, or ~50 learners) and distributed the work of teaching, with the residents predictably taking on increasingly complex responsibilities over the course of the year. These models were relatively easy to implement--needing only to secure a single high-quality mentor in the same grade level as a vacancy. While there were positive outcomes in terms of resident development, the job of the mentor teacher became even more complex. In this model, the mentor teachers now had ultimate responsibility for double the number of students along with the developmental growth of two or three resident teachers. While potentially better than having students placed with a long-term substitute for an entire year, we believed there had to be a better way to structure the models to make the mentor teachers’ jobs more sustainable.

Still based on “vacancy dollars”, a better version of the team-based residency models soon emerged. In these models two or three residents joined a team that included multiple professional educators sharing a common roster of students. The numbers of professional educators varied from two to as many as four, especially in the cases where a professional special educator was also a member of the team. The economics of these models stayed the same--the salary and benefits associated with the unfilled position were distributed among the residents and also helped pay a stipend for either a lead teacher (responsible for the whole team) and/or a mentor teacher (responsible for just the teacher residents).

As school systems have seen the benefits of team-based models, some have moved away from leveraging “vacancy dollars” to create sustainable, paid residencies and have begun to intentionally build paid resident slots into team-based models. This often involves shifting money or positions, but it means that schools don’t need to rely on a vacancy to have a paid resident slot. This means that school systems and the educator preparation program can be far more intentional about where residents are placed. We can better ensure that there is an educator on the team who has deep expertise in mentoring residents. The number of residents on a team varies, typically ranging from one to three. A lower number of residents is typically associated with a higher stipend and additional monies that can be used flexibly to bring other educators around this group of students and/or create more planning time for the team.

**Figure 1:** Typical one-mentor, one-resident placement



**Figure 2:** Third grade educator team

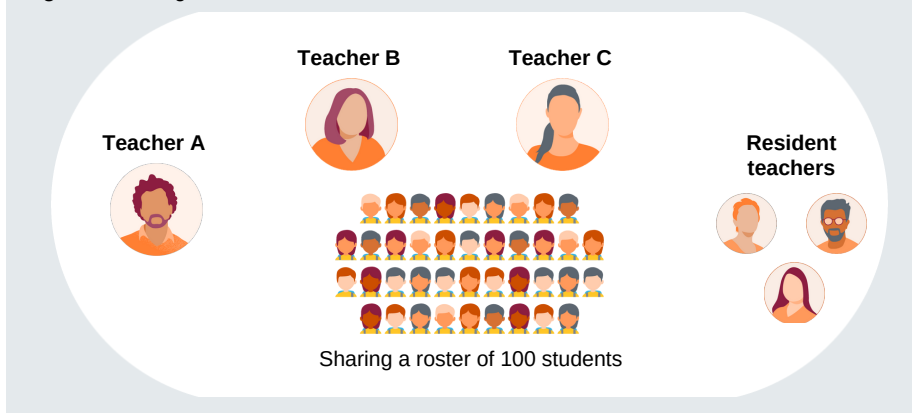


Figure 1 depicts the typical one-resident, one-mentor placement. Figure 2 shows how several residents can be placed on an educator team that shares a common roster of students (this could vary between one and three residents).

## ► Implications for mentorship in the team-based setting

Team-based models create new opportunities for mentorship. Importantly, any time a resident is placed on an educator team, there must be a professional educator who serves as that resident’s mentor teacher. That person serves as the primary point of contact with the educator preparation program and is responsible for completing any associated paperwork. That person should have specific training and expertise in supporting pre-service teachers. Additionally, however, residents in team-based models also receive wrap-around support from the other professional educators on the team through a distributed mentorship approach. Consequently, resident teachers experience diverse perspectives and coaching supports to develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to become a professional educator.

Designated mentors employ strategic mentorship through coaching cycles tailored to individual resident needs--leveraging their own expertise and the distributed expertise of the educator team. Although the work of mentorship is individualized there is a notion of “stronger together.” Benefits exist when environments are created to foster collaboration. When residents and members of the educator team come together to share ideas, they are able to leverage their combined resources and individual strengths to better serve their students.

With residents joining educator teams, it is possible to lower the student-to-teacher ratio, while also giving the resident authentic, often individual or small-group opportunities, to work directly with students from day one. As the team works together in new ways, they are able to distribute expertise as they plan and structure the complex components of teaching. As a result, the work can become even more focused analyzing student data across an even broader set of outcomes in cycles of continuous improvement.

## References

Azar, T., Grossman, T., Lozier, C., and Scheib, C. (2021). *The teacher residency return on investment: A pathway that prepares effective and diverse teachers who stay*. NCTR. Retrieved May 24, 2022, from <https://nctresidencies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NCTR-ROI-Report-October-26-2021-FINAL-3.pdf>

Goldhaber, Krieg, J., & Theobald, R. (2020). Effective like me? Does having a more productive mentor improve the productivity of mentees? *Labour Economics*, 63, 101792–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.101792>