

Strategic staffing models and the perceived value of paid teacher residencies: a convergent mixed-methods study

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Abstract

Purpose – This convergent mixed-methods study identifies effective strategic staffing practices that districts currently use to support paid residencies and examines the benefits these models provide for both residents and districts. This study seeks to identify opportunities to strengthen and scale sustainable residency models.

Design/methodology/approach – This study collects data from five districts partnering with one university in a year-long teacher residency program. The researchers integrate qualitative data from focus group interviews with quantitative data from multiple-choice and scaled survey items. Using a convergent analysis approach, the study identifies themes aligned with the research questions and compares patterns across data sources.

Findings – Participants in this study overwhelmingly report positive perceptions of paid residencies and the strategic staffing models that support them. The integrated analysis of qualitative and quantitative data yields five key themes: (1) strategic staffing models as organizational innovation, (2) contributions to campus operations, (3) development of teacher versatility and readiness, (4) increased commitment through compensation, and (5) infrastructure needed for sustainability.

Originality/value – This study examines district-level strategic staffing practices for paid teacher residencies, identifying replicable models and sustainability considerations that offer actionable guidance for districts, educator preparation programs, and policymakers.

Keywords Strategic staffing, Paid teacher residencies, School-university partnerships, Teacher recruitment and retention, Residency sustainability, Policy, State guidance

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Growing demand for a stable, well-prepared teacher workforce has intensified concerns about recruitment and retention across the United States. However, the problem is especially acute in Texas, where attrition rates exceed national trends and workforce instability disproportionately affects novice teachers. Research suggests that approximately 30–40% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years, with even higher attrition among those who enter through underprepared pathways (Bland, Wojcikiewicz, Darling-Hammond, & Wei, 2023). In Texas, a

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growing reliance on alternative certification and other less comprehensive preparation routes has coincided with increased turnover and instructional disruption, particularly in high-need districts serving students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and rural communities. As a result, high-quality preparation models that integrate extended clinical practice, structured mentorship, and financial support, such as paid teacher residencies, have emerged as a promising lever for reducing early-career attrition and improving outcomes for teachers, districts, and students. As federal oversight becomes less centralized and responsibilities shift to the states, policymakers increasingly expect State Education Agencies (SEAs) and districts to sustain educator workforce initiatives through state-designed frameworks.

This study examines how Texas school districts implement strategic staffing models to support paid teacher residencies and how district and campus leaders perceive the value, impact, and sustainability of these approaches. It provides district-level evidence on how paid residencies are operationalized through strategic staffing by identifying specific staffing configurations and implementation conditions that leaders consider most feasible for sustaining resident compensation while maintaining program quality.

Impact of paid teacher residencies

Researchers and policymakers widely recognize paid teacher residencies as a high-impact, evidence-based approach to strengthening teacher preparation, workforce stability, and student outcomes, particularly in high-need contexts. By providing financial compensation alongside yearlong clinical preparation, residencies reduce economic barriers to entry and enable candidates to engage deeply in mentored classroom practice (DeMoss & Brennan, 2024). Research indicates that residency programs characterized by structured mentorship, coherent coursework, and strong induction support enhance novice teachers' instructional readiness, professional confidence, and retention compared to traditional pathways (Feinberg & Bey, 2023; Kwok, Svajda-Hardy, Hill-Jackson, & Hutchins, 2024). Longitudinal analyses in Texas show that teachers who complete yearlong residencies are more likely to remain in the profession through their third year and generate cost savings for districts by reducing early-career attrition (US PREP National Center, 2024). Residents also report a stronger sense of belonging and long-term commitment to their schools, which contributes to sustained workforce stability (Kwok *et al.*, 2024; Yun & Fitz, 2025). Additionally, residency preparation is associated with improved PK–12 student outcomes, including gains in reading and mathematics, particularly for historically marginalized students (Kirksey, 2024; Kwok, Svajda-Hardy, Hill-Jackson, & Hutchins, 2023). Collectively, this research positions paid teacher residencies as a scalable strategy to improve teacher readiness, stabilize the workforce, and address persistent staffing shortages.

Challenges and sustainability

Despite their demonstrated benefits, sustaining paid teacher residency programs presents significant financial and structural challenges. Resident stipends and living supports are consistently identified as the most difficult components to maintain, as many programs rely on time-limited grants or philanthropic funding rather than embedded district resources (DeMoss, 2018; Hirschboeck, Eiler White, Brannegan, & Reade, 2022). Although some districts initially offset costs through reallocations or targeted grants, many struggle to identify long-term funding strategies within complex policy and budgeting environments (Bland *et al.*, 2023; Kwok *et al.*, 2023; Saunders, Fitz, DiNapoli, & Kini, 2024).

When residents lack sufficient financial support, they often must seek outside employment while completing full-time residency and coursework, thereby increasing the risk of attrition before program completion (Hirschboeck *et al.*, 2022). Without deliberate strategies that integrate residencies into district staffing and induction systems, residency models risk remaining small-scale rather than becoming a durable component of educator workforce infrastructure (DeMoss, 2018; Yun & DeMoss, 2020).

Federal and state reform

Recent federal and state reforms have emphasized strategic staffing as a mechanism for sustaining paid teacher residencies by embedding resident compensation within district staffing structures rather than relying on temporary external funding (Darling-Hammond, Furger, Shields, Sutchter, & Carver-Thomas, 2021; Podolsky, Kini, Darling-Hammond, & Bishop, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2025). In this context, state education agencies play a critical role in translating broad policy goals into actionable frameworks, tools, and flexibilities as responsibility for oversight, guidance, and implementation increasingly shifts from the federal to the state level. Within Texas's Strategic Staffing (TSS) framework, districts are granted flexibility to implement models such as substitute-based placements, mentor release-time structures, and paraprofessional-to-teacher pathways, thereby aligning residency compensation with operational staffing needs (Yun & DeMoss, 2020). These models matter not because they prescribe a single approach, but because they create policy space for districts to design locally feasible solutions that balance fiscal constraints, instructional quality, and workforce development. The following findings illustrate how districts enacted these models in practice and how leaders evaluated their viability, value, and sustainability.

Theoretical framework

This study is situated within a laboratories-of-democracy framework that treats school districts as local policy-learning sites, adapting state guidance to address workforce problems under real fiscal and operational constraints. Drawing on policy diffusion and learning theory, which conceptualizes states and local agencies as “laboratories of democracy,” this study frames districts as policy-learning sites that adapt state strategic staffing guidance to meet local workforce needs (Karch, 2007). Consistent with Dewey's conception of democratic problem solving, districts refine practice through iterative inquiry-trying strategies, observing consequences, and adjusting based on shared feedback and local needs over time (Dewey, 1916, 1927). To interpret variation across districts, the study also draws on policy diffusion and learning theory, which explains why some innovations spread or stabilize when they are perceived as effective, feasible, and contextually “fit” (Berry & Berry, 1990; Shipan & Volden, 2008).

Applied to paid teacher residencies, the TSS framework serves as a common policy environment that enables, but does not prescribe, a single implementation pathway (Texas Education Agency, 2025). Within this environment, districts function as “laboratories” by designing strategic staffing models that address residency compensation and staffing needs simultaneously. In this study, school leaders' perceptions are interpreted not simply as opinions but as indicators of whether strategic staffing configurations yield a credible return, balancing preparation quality with district budget realities and workforce demands (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2021; Podolsky *et al.*, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2025).

Taken together, the literature and theoretical framework highlight both the promise of paid teacher residencies and the persistent challenges districts face in sustaining these models within existing fiscal and staffing constraints. Although substantial research demonstrates the effectiveness of paid teacher residencies, existing studies primarily focus on outcomes rather than the district-level decision-making processes that enable these models to persist over time. The literature and theoretical framework suggest that strategic staffing policies may serve as a critical mechanism for sustaining residency compensation. However, little is known about how these policies are perceived, adapted, and implemented across diverse district contexts. To explore this gap, the present study utilizes a convergent mixed-methods design to investigate district and campus leaders' perceptions of paid teacher residencies and the organizational conditions that support their sustainability.

Methodology

This convergent mixed-methods study employs qualitative focus group interviews alongside quantitative multiple-choice and scaled survey items to identify strategic staffing practices that support paid residencies and the benefits these models provide to residents and districts. Participants shared their perceptions of paid residencies and identified existing or desired conditions and policies that facilitate them. The integrated analysis highlighted best practices in strategic staffing models for statewide replication to strengthen residency programs.

The following research questions guide the study:

- RQ1. How do district and campus leaders perceive the value and impact of paid teacher residencies?
- RQ2. How do leaders describe the perceived benefits of paid residencies for staffing, instruction, and student outcomes?
- RQ3. What models, conditions, or organizational supports do leaders identify as necessary to sustain paid residencies?
- RQ4. What guidance, tools, or policy flexibilities do leaders report as most helpful or most needed to support residency implementation?

Participants

Participants were recruited through established partnerships with a public regional university that operates a yearlong residency with multiple PK–12 school districts. Eight partner districts with at least 2 years of residency were invited to participate. One district declined to participate, and two districts participated in the focus group interview but did not consent to have their comments included. The remaining five districts participated and granted consent.

At least one district- or campus-level leader completed the survey in four participating districts. Respondents included five principals and two human resources directors. Two survey responses were excluded: one from a non-participating district and one from a site coordinator who did not attend the focus group. To ensure consistency, only survey data from participants who completed both instruments were included. [Table 1](#) presents participant demographics.

Demographic profiles of participants

Data collection. Researchers distributed surveys via email to district and campus leadership, including an invitation to participate in focus groups. Protocols were shared in advance to promote transparency, and five focus groups were conducted during the first governance meeting of the year. Sessions lasted approximately one hour, were audio-recorded and

Table 1. Demographic profiles of participants

District	District type	Number of residents	Strategic staffing model	Primary funding Source
District 1	Suburban	4	Substitute-As-You-Go	Substitution model savings
District 2	Suburban	9	Substitute-As-You-Go	Substitution model savings
District 3	Urban	4	Substitute	General funds reallocation
District 4	Rural	4	Substitute-As-You-Go	State grants, general fund reallocation
District 5	Urban	1	Release Time	General fund reallocation, Title I

Source(s): Authors' own work

transcribed, and included district and campus leadership, university leadership, and the site coordinator.

The survey instrument obtained informed consent and collected demographic information, including leadership role, district type, number of residents, staffing model, funding sources, and mentor selection criteria. Thirteen Likert-scale items measured agreement with statements describing paid residencies. The instrument was designed using the TTS framework and the researchers' experience to assess perceived outcomes.

To establish content validity, experienced US PREP coalition researchers reviewed items for alignment with the research questions, and their feedback informed revisions.

Data analysis

The researchers conducted data analysis in four stages: thematic analysis of interview transcripts, sentiment analysis of interview data, descriptive analysis of survey data, and integrated analysis to identify convergence and divergence across data sources. A single researcher first analyzed the focus group transcripts independently of the survey data.

Using an inductive approach, one researcher coded transcripts into emergent themes following [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) six-phase process. To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher used analytic memoing to document patterns and decisions supporting code refinement and theme development ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). Coding occurred across three iterative cycles, with an audit trail documenting analytic decisions and thematic patterns. Themes were aligned with the study's research questions.

The researcher added a sentiment analysis layer to identify patterns in participants' positive or negative perceptions of paid residencies, based on emotive language ([Bordoloi & Biswas, 2023](#)). Survey data were descriptively analyzed using means, standard deviations, and percentages indicating agreement or strong agreement ([Cooksey, 2020](#)). Using a convergent mixed-methods approach, researchers integrated qualitative and quantitative findings by comparing survey results with emergent themes to identify alignment and contrast ([Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013](#)). Integration involved comparing a table of survey items with one summarizing qualitative themes.

Findings

A qualitative analysis of focus group transcripts, integrated with survey responses, was conducted to identify themes aligned with the study's research questions. Five key themes emerged from the analysis: strategic staffing models as organizational innovation; contributions to campus operations; the development of teacher versatility and readiness; increased commitment through compensation; and the infrastructure required for sustainability. [Table 2](#) presents survey item statements, average scores, standard deviations, and agreement percentages.

Strategic staffing models as organizational innovation

This theme addresses [RQ1](#) by illustrating leaders' perceptions of the value and impact of strategic staffing models; [RQ2](#) by describing their benefits for instruction, staffing, and student outcomes.

Building on state policy, district leaders describe how they implement strategic staffing models to support paid teacher residencies within local fiscal and staffing constraints. Leaders consistently expressed positive views of these models, noting their effectiveness in strengthening instructional quality and improving teacher retention, as evidenced by resident performance observations. The Substitute-As-You-Go model, used in three districts, was viewed as especially valuable for attracting and preparing future teachers; deepening residents' integration into school culture, supporting long-term retention, and offering a cost-efficient approach for districts with limited budgets. One superintendent

Table 2. Survey instrument results

Survey item	Mean	Standard deviation	% agree
Paid residencies improve teacher recruitment	4.13	1.19	75
Paid residencies improve teacher retention	4.25	0.89	75
Paid residencies improve instructional quality in host classrooms	4.63	0.52	100
Paid residencies have a positive impact on student outcomes	4.63	0.52	100
Paid residencies expand the pipeline for hard-to-staff areas	4.13	0.83	75
Mentor teachers benefit through instructional growth and leadership	4.63	0.52	100
Paid residencies justify the cost to the district	4.13	0.83	75
Paid residencies support district strategic goals	4.38	0.74	87.5
I recommend continuing/starting paid residencies	4.63	0.52	100
Principals understand how to deploy residents effectively	4.88	0.35	100
There is broad buy-in among campus leaders	4.5	0.76	87.5
Our data systems track outcomes (resident performance, retention, student impact).	3.88	0.83	62.5
The residency model advances district equity goals(e.g.diversifying the workforce)	4.0	0.93	62.5

Source(s): Authors' own work

described the contribution of residents as “a game-changer. We’ve seen how much effort and energy they invest.” Participants reported that paid residents consistently exceeded expectations, thereby increasing their willingness to assume leadership roles.

Urban districts implemented the Substitute and Release Time models through general fund reallocations, with one district supplementing with Title I funds. Leaders viewed the Substitute Model as reducing residents’ apprehension about teaching, whereas administrators praised the Release Time Model for adding instructional value across multiple classrooms. Despite these positive perceptions, leaders stressed the need for mentor buy-in, clear expectations, and performance gates to ensure consistency throughout the residency year.

Contributions to campus operations

This theme addresses RQ1 by capturing leaders’ perceptions of how paid residencies influence school operations; RQ2 by identifying benefits for staffing and instructional capacity; and RQ3 by identifying the conditions and systems needed to support paid residencies.

Districts selected staffing models for paid residencies based on funding and campus needs, with most using Substitute-As-You-Go or Substitute models to cover teacher absences and alleviate staffing shortages (Mishnick, Jones, & Brulé, 2024). These models provided operational flexibility, enabling residents to cover short-term teacher absences. As one principal explained, “When you step into that teacher role, we will ask you to sub-because we need somebody to sub.” Across cases, leaders perceived these models as strengthening campus capacity by increasing instructional coverage while also supporting mentor teachers’ leadership development. Survey data aligned with this perception, with all districts agreeing that residency participation contributed to mentors’ instructional growth and leadership.

Leaders also viewed residencies as effective recruitment tools aligned with anticipated vacancies, and all partner districts have hired residents based on observed initiative and effectiveness during the residency. Principals, all of whom felt confident deploying residents, described the residency as a “yearlong interview,” particularly valuing residents’ flexibility to substitute in high-need areas. Survey findings aligned with these perceptions: 75% of respondents agreed that residencies help fill hard-to-fill roles.

At the same time, leaders noted that the operational benefits of substitute-based models depended on intentional coordination. Strategic matching of residents and substitute assignments was viewed as a way to strengthen both operations and hiring outcomes.

However, limited confidence in existing data systems documenting resident contributions (62.5%) and long commutes posed challenges to post-residency retention. These findings underscore the importance of placement decisions that consider geography, staffing goals, and resident commitment.

Development of teacher versatility and readiness

This theme addresses [RQ1](#) by illustrating how leaders evaluate the impact of residencies on teacher development and [RQ2](#) by describing perceived benefits for instruction, teacher confidence, and student learning.

Districts unanimously agreed that paid residencies build resident versatility and readiness by exposing candidates to diverse instructional settings. Participants praised the Substitute-As-You-Go model for providing residents with “*extra tools in their tool belt*” through increased exposure to varied management styles, classroom structures, behavior strategies, and grade-level curricula. Leaders also perceived that increased familiarity with multiple campuses reduced residents’ hesitation to sign early commitment letters. At the same time, experience in STAAR-tested grades helped demystify curricular expectations and expand hiring options.

One principal explained that encouraging residents to substitute across multiple grade levels expanded hiring possibilities and revealed previously unrecognized strengths, stating, “*I would have never thought to put her in a testing grade. . . when she subbed in those testing grades, I was like, Where’d that come from?*” Leaders further emphasized the value of residents stepping out from the mentor’s “protective wing” to apply strategies independently, describing this transition as critical to developing resident confidence and teacher identity.

At the same time, one principal raised concerns about inconsistent expectations and unclear performance gates across the residency year. The principal described a resident who “*made it to second semester, but then was really struggling, and asking for support. . . they put her on a growth plan, and then all of a sudden, magically she hit her mark,*” suggesting that clearer criteria for resident readiness and advancement following growth plans may be needed.

Increased commitment through compensation

This theme addresses [RQ1](#) by capturing leaders’ perceptions of how compensation influences professionalism, engagement, and value-added contributions, and [RQ2](#) by examining how compensation is associated with instructional quality, student outcomes, and post-residency hiring.

Compensation was widely seen as a key factor in boosting resident commitment. Principals noted that paid residents “*try a little bit harder,*” and stipends for both residents and mentors reinforced the value of their roles. In some districts, especially those using the Paraprofessional Model, paid residencies supported staff retention by allowing paraprofessionals to remain employed while earning certification ([Mishnick et al., 2024](#)). Although some leaders initially questioned compensating residents, their views shifted after observing residents’ professionalism and dedication. Leaders reported that paid residents consistently exceeded expectations, increasing willingness to entrust residents with additional responsibilities.

Survey data showed unanimous agreement that compensation improves instructional quality and student outcomes. However, only 75% viewed paid residencies as effective long-term recruitment and retention tools. The statement that paid residencies improve teacher recruitment had the highest standard deviation (1.19), suggesting recruitment and retention outcomes are highly contextual. While some districts retained 100% of paid residents, one retained none from the previous year. One urban district, despite limited post-residency hires, emphasized the instructional impact of having two university-trained educators in one classroom as an undeniable value-add. One urban district noted limited post-residency hires

but emphasized perceived student impact, highlighting “*the power of having two... a university-trained, second educator in the classroom at \$20,000... yes, that is value added.*”

Infrastructure needed for sustainability

This theme addresses RQ3 by identifying the funding structures, organizational supports, and conditions needed to sustain paid residencies, and RQ4 by highlighting the guidance, tools, and policy flexibilities leaders viewed as essential for effective implementation.

Districts reported using varied funding approaches, including LASSO Cycle 4 grants, creative budgeting, and resource reallocations to finance paid residencies. Districts rely heavily on support from university partners, US PREP, and regional service centers to navigate funding complexities. While LASSO Cycle 4 expanded funding options, matching requirements may create additional barriers, especially in smaller districts, even as state funding offsets some costs. This tension was underscored by a leader from the rural district, who noted, “*Funding from the state is great, but the matching piece, from a district standpoint, is still a financial hurdle.*” Although 77.8% of districts agree that paid residencies are worth the cost, some hesitated due to financial constraints. One district emphasized the need for stronger post-residency retention to justify continued investment.

Sustainability challenges were particularly evident in Grow Your Own paraprofessional pathways, as current coursework and fieldwork requirements frequently compel paraprofessionals to leave their salaried positions (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). In response, districts and universities are piloting flexible placement models, particularly in high-need areas such as special education and bilingual education, that distribute fieldwork across settings. Some districts are also adopting apprenticeship and release-time models to enable paraprofessionals to remain employed full-time while earning certification, though clearer guidance on coursework and entry requirements is still needed.

Analytic lens

In presenting the findings, districts’ descriptions are interpreted as evidence of local policy learning. Leaders’ accounts reflect how districts assess the feasibility, contextual fit, and perceived returns of strategic staffing models for paid teacher residencies while operating within fiscal, staffing, and policy constraints.

Originality/value

This study contributes to the literature on paid teacher residencies by examining how districts use state strategic staffing frameworks to support high-quality teacher preparation while meeting their own staffing and instructional needs. Although previous studies have examined the benefits of yearlong residency for teacher preparedness and retention (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Saunders *et al.*, 2024), few studies have investigated how districts perceive and implement yearlong residency models within the state’s strategic staffing framework. This study addresses this gap by analyzing paid residencies from a district leadership viewpoint and examining how local implementation affects the sustainability of strategic staffing models.

Using the Texas Strategic Staffing (TSS) framework, the findings illustrate how districts serve as laboratories of democracy, adapting state guidelines, reallocating resources, and creating models that add value for their districts and students. Rather than viewing TSS as a directive with no room for innovation, districts engage in collaborative design sessions that reflect Dewey’s (1927) theory of democratic problem solving, in which communities refine practices in response to specific needs. This practice allows individual districts to adapt the TSS framework to meet their needs while ensuring that residents receive a high-quality residential experience.

By examining district perspectives within the broader state guidelines, this study offers new insights into how the state education agency (SEA) framework can guide paid residencies and support teacher recruitment while maintaining high standards for teacher preparation and meeting district needs. This study extends existing residency research by examining how residencies can benefit school districts and serve as a sustainable solution to staffing shortages.

Findings in relation to research questions

Across districts, leaders viewed paid teacher residencies supported by the Texas Strategic Staffing (TSS) framework as a value-add. Leaders described residents as improving instructional quality, strengthening school culture, and serving as a resource of qualified candidates. These perceptions reflect how TSS shapes districts' understanding of residents as emerging educators who support student learning and district goals.

Leaders also noted that strategic staffing models, particularly substitution-based models, helped address immediate staffing needs while also expanding residents' instructional readiness. Exposure to multiple grade levels and content areas supported residents' development while helping districts meet staffing demands, illustrating how SEA frameworks allow districts to develop models that support classroom instruction and strengthen their pipeline.

Leaders identified several conditions that support sustainability, including consistent mentorship, flexibility in staffing models, and data systems to track resident placement and retention. Variation across districts highlighted where TSS provides useful structure and where additional guidance may be needed to support long-term implementation.

Finally, districts identified areas where additional state-level guidance could strengthen paid residencies, including greater flexibility for paraprofessional pathways, clearer funding options, and continued technical support from regional partners. Together, these findings demonstrate how district feedback can inform refinement of TSS and guide the development of similar SEA-led approaches in other states.

Implications

Research implications

Findings from this study extend the current research on yearlong residencies by shifting the focus from student and residency impact to district-level implementation within a state education agency (SEA) framework. While prior research has established that yearlong residencies improve teacher preparedness, retention, and instructional effectiveness (Bland *et al.*, 2023; Guha *et al.*, 2017; Saunders *et al.*, 2024; US PREP National Center, 2023), these findings illustrate how district leaders view paid residencies and utilize strategic staffing models to meet district needs.

Findings suggest that paid residencies should be examined not only as educator preparation models, but also as an ongoing staffing structure embedded in partner districts. District leaders described how staffing models, specifically the substitution and release time, allowed residents to refine their teaching practices while also meeting district needs. Further studies examining district-level residencies are necessary as state agencies continue to refine frameworks and guidelines for paid residencies.

Practical implications

Findings offer several practical implications for districts, educator preparation programs, and state education agencies looking to strengthen and sustain paid, yearlong residency models.

School districts

For districts, this study highlights the importance of aligning paid residency structures with long-term staffing strategies. District leaders viewed residents as valuable to their campus. Consistent with previous research indicating that yearlong residency can improve recruitment and retention (Guha, Hylar, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Saunders, Darling-Hammond, &

Podolsky, 2016), leaders in this study reported that residents improved instructional quality, covered classes when necessary, and contributed to the hiring pipeline. Moving forward, strategically placing residents in hard-to-staff areas or in areas where vacancies are anticipated may increase the likelihood of post-residency employment and reduce staffing shortages. Additionally, clear communication and expectations for both mentor teachers and residents can ensure high-quality instruction and consistency across the program in classrooms and facilitate a smooth transition for individuals moving from resident to teacher roles.

Educator preparation programs

For educator preparation programs (EPP), the findings reinforce the importance of deep, meaningful partnerships with districts. Prior literature emphasizes that residencies are most effective when responsibility for mentoring and coaching is shared between universities and districts (Bland *et al.*, 2023; US PREP National Center, 2023). This perspective was reflected in leaders' calls for continued university support, including guidance on strategic staffing models, tools to track resident use at the campus level, and clear expectations and performance gates for residents. Therefore, EPPs should continue to build mutually beneficial partnerships with districts and look for ways to support districts in intentionally designing paid residency experiences to ensure all stakeholders, residents, district leadership, K-12 students, and mentor teachers are trained and supported.

State education agencies

For state education agencies, including the Texas Education Agency, these findings highlight an opportunity to strengthen strategic staffing frameworks through clearer tools and guidance. Districts benefited from the structure provided by TSS but requested resources, including sample budget models, cost calculators, and additional funding sources, such as grants that did not require matching funds. Leaders also requested a stronger data-tracking system to monitor long-term resident placements, substitution use, and retention rates. A statewide system, such as a dashboard, could help districts demonstrate long-term return on investment for retaining residents.

Additionally, districts emphasize the importance of policy flexibility, particularly for paraprofessional pathways. Districts were concerned that paraprofessionals would be required to leave their current paid positions to complete residency requirements. SEA guidance that supports paraprofessionals in remaining in their current positions while earning their certification may lead to additional vacancies being filled and increased retention rates, as paraprofessionals are already integrated into the district's culture and climate.

Social implications

Beyond organizational and policy considerations, this study has social implications for financial access to teacher preparation and for school staffing. Paid teacher residencies, supported through state strategic staffing models, help reduce financial barriers associated with a yearlong residency experience, allowing pre-service teachers to complete their residency year without taking on jobs outside of the school. Removing financial barriers allows residents to focus solely on their studies, enhancing preparation and the likelihood of post-residency employment within the district, thereby increasing district stability.

More broadly, the Texas Strategic Staffing framework illustrates how state education agencies can function as laboratories of democracy by establishing state policies and guidelines while still allowing district-level flexibility, particularly as states assume greater responsibility for sustaining educator workforce initiative. As other states seek sustainable approaches to addressing teacher shortages, the Texas model offers a framework for establishing and maintaining yearlong teacher residency programs.

Table 3. Strategic staffing models

Staffing model	District considerations	Funding stream	Value add	Factor to monitor
Substitute-As-You-Go Model	Persistent substitute shortages; mentor flexibility; administrative coordination	Residents are paid the daily substitute rate when they sub; maintaining a primary mentor placement	Financial sustainability; broad instructional exposure; flexible staffing support	Substitute coverage rates; alignment with anticipated vacancies; post-residency hiring and retention
Dedicated Substitute Model	General fund reallocations; consistent substitute demand; clear instructional expectations	Residents embedded within substitute staffing structures with predictable placements	Instructional continuity; increased resident confidence; campus staffing stability	Classroom continuity; resident instructional independence; staffing stability
Release-Time Model	Strong mentor capacity; leadership buy-in; staffing flexibility	Mentor release time supported through reallocations; residents extend instructional support across classrooms	Expanded instructional reach; leadership development	Classroom coverage; mentor workload sustainability; student access to additional instructional support

Source(s): Author's own work

Replicable strategic staffing models for paid teacher residencies

Building on the implications, this section summarizes how participating districts structured and used strategic staffing models to support paid teacher residencies. These models illustrate how state guidance was interpreted and implemented in practice. Table 3 presents the most popular models, along with information on funding streams, value added to districts, and factors to consider.

Limitations

This study acknowledges limitations that should be considered. The sample comprised five Texas districts that partnered with a single university and employed the Texas Strategic Staffing Framework. Therefore, findings reflect a specific framework and partnership and may not be generalizable to all residency models or state frameworks.

Additionally, the study used self-reported data; Likert-scale items are susceptible to socially desirable responding (Kreitchmann, Abad, Ponsoda, Nieto, & Morillo, 2019), and focus group participants may have felt pressure to respond favorably in group settings (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). However, integration across data sources strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Future research should examine strategic staffing frameworks across a broader range of districts and partnerships and use longitudinal designs to track resident placement, retention, and student outcomes over time.

Ethical statement

This research involved human participants and was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Tarleton State University. The study was determined to be exempt from full IRB review under IRBNet ID: 2,361,390-1. All research procedures complied with institutional guidelines for ethical research with human participants. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

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