

# For the Public Good:

## Quality Preparation for Every Teacher

### — Executive Summary —

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New teachers want and deserve to be well prepared to take on the duties of their profession before becoming the teacher of record for a class. Across the country, teacher preparation providers have strengthened their programs for aspiring teachers, but many new teachers continue to report being less prepared than they would like to be.<sup>1</sup> Expectations for students and teachers have continued to rise, but we have not yet committed the additional time and resources necessary for all teacher candidates to learn and practice sufficiently before becoming responsible for their own classes. Aspiring teachers need sustained clinical experiences, working alongside expert practitioners, to build links between educational theory and hands-on classroom practice so that they are ready for the rigors of the job on the first day of school.

When teachers are not well prepared, student achievement suffers. Turnover rates are high, costing billions and requiring districts to hire more new, underprepared teachers the following year. In particular, high-needs schools, where new teachers disproportionately get their first jobs, often face a revolving door of staff, which thwarts the development of a stable environment necessary for school improvement efforts and places an additional demand on established teachers who must compensate for the needs of their new and underprepared colleagues.<sup>2</sup> For teachers who remain in the profession, a foundational year of teaching without quality support can entrench unproductive survival habits and undermine confidence.<sup>3</sup>

Too many of the nation's new teachers are not set up for success in our current preparation systems. Although they arrive with many skills and work extremely hard—often heroically—the vast majority are denied the time and resources necessary for the clinical preparation that would give them the strongest possible start as professionals.

Fortunately, this is a problem we can address. When aspiring teachers experience a year of clinical practice under the daily guidance of expert practitioners, they learn to translate the best of educational theory into effective practice. By teaching in a well-functioning classroom alongside an effective educator, they gain a deeper understanding of techniques and strategies that are proven to help children learn. By becoming part of a school community, experiencing professional collaboration, and participating in a school's improvement efforts for an entire year, candidates emerge with a solid professional foundation.<sup>4</sup> If we want an educational system where all teachers are effective, such models—generally called “residencies”—should become the norm, an integral part of teacher preparation programs and a preferred qualification in districts' hiring decisions.<sup>i</sup>

In countries where school systems have improved dramatically, such as Finland and Singapore, one of the shifts their nations embraced was to integrate teacher preparation with K-12 school systems. Aspiring teachers are paid to practice under the guidance of an effective classroom teacher for a full year before seeking certification.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, evidence from the United States also indicates that such a model is an effective way of addressing persistent challenges facing schools and districts including

- *Attracting* a diverse group of promising candidates into the profession,<sup>6</sup>
- *Ensuring* all teachers have the skills they need to promote student growth and learning,<sup>7</sup>
- *Retaining* effective teachers, especially in schools serving low-income and diverse families, and <sup>8</sup>
- *Creating* a teacher development continuum that offers meaningful leadership and learning opportunities for all teachers<sup>9</sup>

However, scaling these high-quality programs is an ongoing challenge. Most programs with a yearlong clinical practice for aspiring teachers are funded through grants, making them difficult to sustain and grow. A few programs have designed ways to embed *unfunded* residencies, but in those cases, aspiring teachers do not receive a stipend or other payment for their work and must rely on family resources, take out loans, or work additional jobs on top of their full-time residency in order to cover daily living expenses.

<sup>i</sup> Because terminology varies vastly between contexts, we have also included a glossary at the end of this document to facilitate a common understanding of the terms used throughout the report.

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Many programs avoid establishing residency requirements because they can increase financial barriers for entry into the profession and make it more challenging to attract and retain a diverse pool of strong teacher candidates.

Ensuring all aspiring teachers have access to quality preparation programs that include a year of residency will require finding the dollars to provide financial support for candidates. Doing so would improve the diversity, efficacy, and retention of new teachers—and, in turn, improve our educational system.

States, districts, the federal government, and foundations have all recognized the power of this approach, providing tens of millions of dollars over time to support residencies throughout the nation. But most programs are small, short-lived, and not sustained beyond initial grant funding. The result is a paucity of stable, quality residency programs across the nation—and a plethora of new teachers who have had less preparation than the most effective practices would prescribe.

It is time for the nation to recognize teaching as a “clinical practice profession,” ensuring that candidates successfully complete rigorous academic and clinical training before being approved to practice.<sup>10</sup> In years past, detractors of the profession may have seen teaching as little more than babysitting or a career of convenience; today, though, education is recognized as a key responsibility of every government in the world and, ultimately, a public service that grows a nation’s economy and well-being.<sup>11</sup>

We could show our commitment to ensuring every child has access to good schools in the same way we have offered governmental support for medical preparation. Because having well-prepared physicians is in the public interest, the federal government guarantees funds to support every doctor we prepare, providing stipends for individuals and subsidies for medical teaching hospitals. States also support these medical education efforts. We could make a similar investment in teacher residencies, helping us achieve our national goal of providing a quality education for every child and youth. Realistically, though, we do not yet have the structures, research, or political will necessary to do this at scale. This is the work that the Sustainable Funding Project—along with our partners—seeks to take on.

We believe that districts and teacher preparation providers, working

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together, can help to build the momentum we need to move towards the professionalization of teaching by creating more publicly funded, sustainable residency programs. Across the nation, preparation providers and districts have begun to reallocate existing resources to fund teacher resident positions that address student and district needs. They have developed creative staffing configurations, redirected professional development and recruitment dollars, and created closer ties with preparation providers to create “exchange of services” models, where programs offer supports to districts in exchange for resources that support candidates in their programs. Districts that currently fund quick-entry programs—programs that enable candidates to enter classrooms as teachers of record with minimal clinical practice—have a special opportunity to help build political will for this sector shift. They could develop a plan to transition the funding spent on quick-entry programs to support high-quality residencies.

Districts stand to benefit significantly from funding residencies and establishing this type of preparation as the desired norm for their new hires. Residency stipends can increase the diversity of the teaching pool, helping attract and retain strong candidates who reflect the backgrounds of the students they serve.<sup>12</sup> These yearlong placements also provide districts and schools with an opportunity to gather detailed, performance-based information that can inform later hiring decisions and, by preparing teachers who stay in the profession longer, they can lead to long-term staff stability that would improve schools.<sup>13</sup> Residencies also have the potential to impact student achievement in other critical ways. As co-teachers, residents effectively reduce class size, providing students with access to well-prepared, relatively inexpensive instructional staff. Residency programs also enhance broader school improvement efforts

by providing mentor teachers with leadership roles that develop their “professional capital.”<sup>14</sup> Residencies can also incentivize teacher preparation providers to design programs in the fields and geographic locations where districts have the highest need.

We can make a very good start on this effort by more efficiently using existing district funds. For example, substitutes and teacher assistants make up 18% of the instructional staff in the nation,<sup>15</sup> positions that residents could effectively fill. Annual professional development expenses are estimated to be \$6,000-\$18,000 per teacher<sup>16</sup>—some portion of those dollars could also be redirected to support the residency model.

Improving teacher quality by providing high-quality preparation for aspiring teachers also offers potential long-term cost savings. It could reduce supplemental student support costs—from tutoring to summer school—that are attributable to poor instruction. Administrators could spend less time providing on-the-job training for under-prepared teachers. Ultimately, districts could also save some of the \$2.2 billion a year that is currently spent on teacher turnover, since graduates from quality residency programs tend to stay in their positions longer—with research documenting retention rates as high as 93% after 4 years.<sup>17</sup>

Aspiring teachers need access to quality preparation that includes sustained clinical practice. We have every reason to believe this key investment would be a productive step in our nation’s effort to transform schooling from the industrial models we inherited to a professionalized system where every school consistently develops the intellectual, practical, social, and emotional skills our youth deserve.