

Lessons From AIR’s Ongoing Evaluation of the Denver Teacher Residency

Ryan Eisner, Eleanor Fulbeck, Glenance Green, Kelly Hallberg, David Manzeske, Bo Zhu, and Martyna Citkowicz

For years, the job of drawing high-quality teachers to struggling schools has relied mostly on incentives: money, prestige, or better professional development.

Those lures have typically been met with halting success, but a different approach—aimed at college graduates who didn’t study education in college—is showing some promise in addressing the thorny issue of getting a high-quality teacher in every classroom. Launched in 2001, the model is based on the simple idea that our educators should be trained the way we train our doctors, through hands-on clinical practice and expert supervision—teacher residencies.

Residencies typically involve close collaboration between area universities and a local school district. During an intensive year in the classroom, teacher-residents shadow experienced teachers, at first just watching them work but gradually taking on more responsibility through the school year. At the same time, teacher-residents are taking coursework toward master’s degrees at the partner university. It’s a substantial commitment. When they graduate, residents usually are required to serve between 3 and 7 years in their host districts. In exchange, the residents often earn stipends or forgiveness on their student loans.

The teacher residency program in Denver, currently being evaluated by American Institutes for Research (AIR), provides a pipeline of teachers committed to hard-to-staff schools. The **Denver Teacher Residency** (DTR) has enrolled 360 residents through its first seven cohorts.

As part of the evaluation, AIR conducted interviews with DTR residents and mentor teachers. More than six in 10 of those interviewed gave the program high marks for rigor—it lasts one year, as opposed to 10 weeks of student teaching for traditionally prepared teachers—and for its continuous, side-by-side training with mentor teachers.

A second-year mentor said the program shows teacher-residents “what a classroom looks like from before kids arrive until the last day of school. . . . I think other student-teaching programs where it’s 10 weeks, or eight weeks, or whatever else it is, give [only] a snapshot of the year.”

In the 2015–16 school year, 100% of principals in Denver who responded to a survey from the National Center for Teacher Residencies indicated that they would hire another candidate from DTR and would recommend candidates from DTR to a colleague. Ninety-one percent of principals said the DTR graduates they hired were more effective than the typical new teacher.

Preliminary results from AIR’s ongoing evaluation suggest the residency program in Denver has promise. DTR graduates from the first six cohorts of DTR were more likely to remain in teaching roles in DPS and more likely to remain in Title I schools than other teachers who started at the same time, controlling for teacher- and school-level characteristics. In addition, AIR found that DTR graduates received slightly higher ratings of their teaching in their first year than other first-year teachers in the same schools. The effect of DTR on student achievement have been inconclusive. Students taught by DTR alumni scored slightly lower on the 2014–15 PARCC examination for mathematics than a comparison group of students also taught by teachers with similar years of experience. However, there were no differences in their achievement in reading. In the remaining years of the evaluation, AIR will continue to analyze student achievement data to better understand the potential effect of the program on student learning.

For additional information about DTR, please contact [Laney Shaler](#).

For additional information about AIR and the DTR evaluation, please contact [Ryan Eisner](#), [Eleanor Fulbeck](#), or [David Manzeske](#).