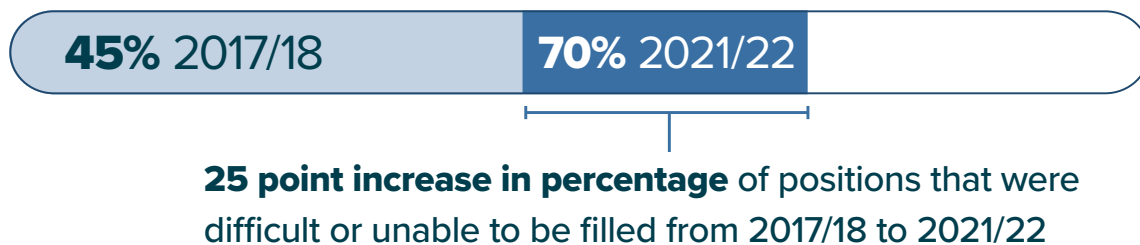


Redesigning the Educator Workforce in Montana

Across Montana, students are experiencing a shortage of highly qualified, effective teachers. A 2019 study found that, even before the pandemic, Montana schools struggled to find qualified applicants for open teaching positions—especially in rural areas.¹ That shortage is even more acute today: the percentage of positions that were difficult or impossible to fill increased from 45 percent in 2018 to 70 percent in 2022. Combined with high turnover at the principal and superintendent levels, the teacher shortage threatens the quality and stability of education offered to Montana students.



Source: Author analysis of Montana Office of Public Instruction data (2021/22); see <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598943.pdf>, p. 8 (2017/18).

To address this complex issue, Montana's Office of Public Instruction (OPI) partnered with Region 17 Comprehensive Center to explore a teacher residency project that would redesign how people are prepared to join the educator workforce. Beginning in October 2021, OPI and Region 17 Comprehensive Center began laying a foundation for the new residency program to help prospective teachers earn their degrees, develop instructional skills, and create lasting connections in communities across the state.



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Convening an Education Think Tank

Before designing the residency program, the OPI wanted to understand exactly what was needed to make the initiative a success—not only for prospective educators but also for the students and communities they would serve. The OPI and Region 17 Comprehensive Center brought together diverse partners with expertise in teacher preparation to serve as a think tank for the new project. This included local partners, such as the OPI, Montana universities, school districts, the Montana School Boards Association, and legislators. In addition, representatives from successful teacher residency programs in Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., were invited to share lessons they learned while implementing their own residencies.

After months of discussion, the OPI was ready to develop the new teaching residency—the first of its kind in the state.

The Montana Teacher Residency Demonstration Project

Launched in summer 2022, the Montana Teacher Residency Demonstration Project supports pre-service teachers in earning their credentials and ultimately securing a job at a school in Montana. Through coursework, professional development, targeted support, and a year collaborating in the classroom of an established teacher-leader, the resident teachers connect theory to practice, becoming effective practitioners who are prepared to lead their own classroom on day one.

Over one academic year, residents engage in an in-school apprenticeship under a teacher-leader as well as summits to develop and refine their teaching skills. Meanwhile, residents continue to complete undergraduate coursework toward a bachelor's degree from their university.

All residents commit to teach in Montana schools for two years after the program ends. In exchange, residents receive a stipend, a partial tuition waiver, and complimentary housing in the community where they teach. These supports are possible due to the collaborative nature of the residency project. The OPI's Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) dollars fund the stipend, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education offers the tuition waivers, and participating school districts provide housing support. Participating teacher-leaders also receive a stipend in exchange for engaging in professional development and coaching residents.

In its first year, the project recruited 21 residents and their teacher-leaders to serve in 12 schools across the state.²

Evaluating Progress for Growth and Success

Like any new program, the Montana Teacher Residency Demonstration Project will experience successes and challenges in its first few years, and the unique context of Montana schools will impact how the program operates—and dictate what needs to change to make it a success.

Region 17 Comprehensive Center is collaborating with the OPI to develop a plan and tools to evaluate the program. At its core, this involves identifying clear goals and benchmarks against which the program can measure success. Using these benchmarks, Region 17 Comprehensive Center will develop baseline surveys and interview questions to help the OPI track progress toward short- and long-term goals.

In year one, Region 17 Comprehensive Center will lead the formative evaluation with members of the OPI staff, building OPI's capacity to conduct future evaluations on its own. Gathering data from surveys and interviews, the team will be able to identify and address issues as they arise. This will improve immediate conditions for participating residents and teacher-leaders. It will also provide the OPI with insight on how to enhance the residency to better support future participants.

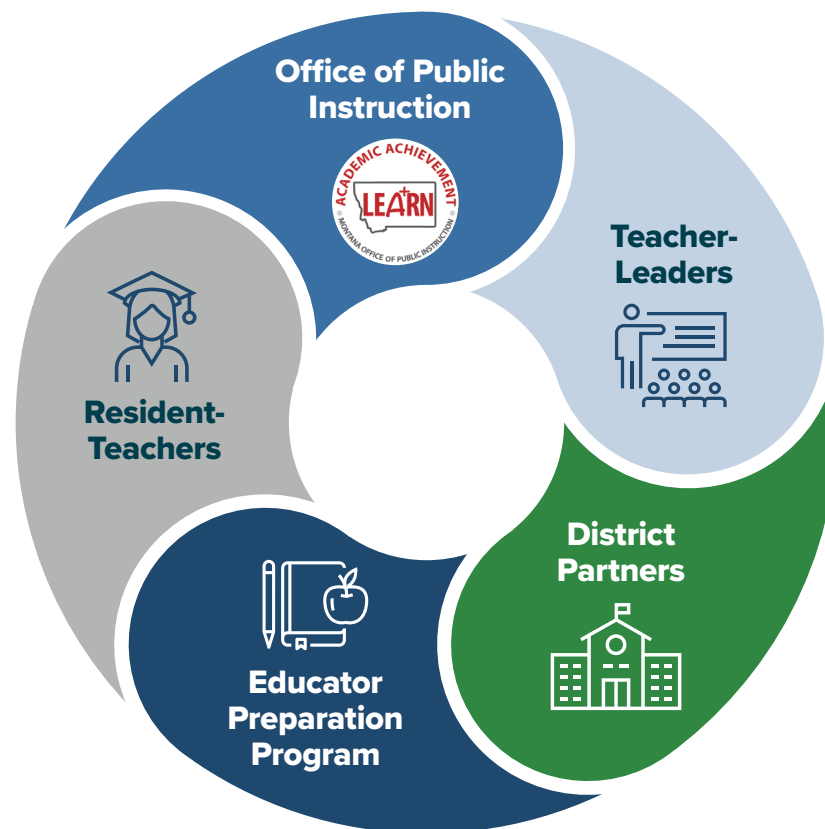
By the end of the first year, the OPI expects that residents, teacher-leaders, and participating school administrators will have a clear understanding of program benchmarks. The OPI staff members will also understand and be able to implement program evaluation components, including surveys and interviews. With a shared vision and understanding of program goals, everyone can work toward making a stronger educator workforce a reality.

A Stronger Educator Workforce for Montana's Future

In the long run, the OPI hopes this program will be part of the solution to address educator shortage and turnover in Montana. With ESSER funds slated to expire in 2024, the OPI will also need additional funding to continue offering stipends to resident teachers. With data from the Region 17 evaluation, the OPI can demonstrate how the project is making a difference on the state's teacher shortage—and possibly secure additional funding to continue the work.

- Undergraduate education majors
- Participate in a two-week summer institute followed by a one-year in-school residency under a teacher-leader
- Receive a stipend, partial tuition waiver, and housing in exchange for committing to teach in a high-needs rural Montana school for two years
- Participate in yearly evaluations

- Recruit and select resident teachers
- Provide flexible course delivery and partial tuition waiver to support resident teachers
- Provide partial stipend to teacher-leaders
- Lead and participate in project evaluations



- Sponsors summer institute and summits throughout residency year
- Recruits school districts in consultation with higher education partners

- Participate in coaching model instruction
- Engage in portions of the summer institute for resident teachers
- Participate in a teacher-leader academy cohort
- Receive a stipend

- Provide housing support for resident teachers
- Provide funding for teacher-leader summer institute
- Participate in teacher-leader academy, coaching model instruction, and teacher-leader academy cohort
- Engage in portions of the summer institute for resident teachers
- Participate in yearly evaluations

Endnotes

¹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598943.pdf>, p. 8

² <https://dailyinterlake.com/news/2022/sep/06/teacher-resident-headline/>

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