

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
**TEACHER
RESIDENCIES**

INNOVATIONS IN TEACHER PREPARATION

Boettcher Teacher Residency's Rural Expansion

CASE

STUDY



Just as their counterparts in urban areas struggle to find and keep highly effective teachers, rural districts — which comprise more than half (57 percent) of all operating U.S. public school districts and enroll 12 million students, or 24 percent of total U.S. public school enrollment (NCES, 2010) — are the hardest to staff with highly effective teachers (McClure & Reeves, 2004). Equally challenging for these schools is keeping these teachers on board. The social and geographic isolation common in rural areas makes rural districts a tough draw, particularly for young teachers seeking opportunities more commonly found in suburbs or larger towns.

Around 2011, a combination of factors created a perfect storm for Boettcher Teacher Residency’s burgeoning interest in rural school districts. The program had been serving urban districts with its teacher residency program since 2004, but was also well aware of the recruitment and retention challenges rural districts face.

“We were hearing that they couldn’t get highly qualified teachers,” recalls Boettcher Teacher Residency executive director Belle Faust.

Several members of the board of Boettcher Teacher Residency’s managing partner, Public Education & Business Coalition (PEBC), had been encouraging Boettcher to explore the possibility of becoming a statewide teacher preparation program; at the same time, the U.S. Department of Education issued requests for proposals from rural-facing teacher preparation programs. The PEBC Board suggested that a federal grant aimed at rural teacher preparation could be the leverage that Boettcher Teacher Residency needed to scale its efforts across Colorado. And Tim Schultz, president of the Boettcher Foundation, the residency program’s lead sponsor and funder, was the perfect liaison to rural Colorado; he has deep ties to rural communities, developed from ranching experience and through his former role as Commissioner of Agriculture for Colorado in the 1980s.

“He knew the rural needs probably better than most... [and] had relationships around the state,” Faust explains. *“So when we were talking about our options for scaling the program, it seemed like rural expansion rather than urban was something to consider. Part of it was where we could get additional funding. Did we always want to compete for grant funding at the urban level or carve out our own space?”*

Once Boettcher Teacher Residency had committed to the rural expansion and targeted school year 2013-14 as the first year of implementation, program leaders knew several next steps were critical. First, they needed a university partner with close ties to rural communities. *“Often a university in a small community is the biggest employer, and often people [in those communities] feel loyalty and have relationships with the university,”* Faust explains.

Boettcher also had to create a funding structure that would support the rural expansion, and begin conducting a needs analysis to find the best school and district matches for the rural residency. And, not least of all, they needed to build relationships with staff, teachers and principals within the districts and schools they were targeting.

“We were truly interested in learning more about [rural schools’ and districts’] challenges and partnering to help solve them,” Faust says.

Boettcher Teacher Residency Rural District Partners

During its first two years of operation, Boettcher Teacher Residency’s rural program has prepared 36 teachers in partnership with the following districts. The program has 37 residents enrolled for the 2015-16 school year.

San Luis Valley

**Alamosa School District
Center Consolidated School District
Moffat Consolidated School District
North Conejos School District
Sierra Grande School District**

Southwest Colorado

**Dolores Country School District
Durango School District
Montezuma-Cortez School District
Ignacio School District**

Southeast Colorado

**East Otero School District
Rocky Ford School District**

Building a University Partnership

That needs-driven mindset helped Boettcher land a new university partner in Adams State University (ASU), a collaboration that was facilitated in part through the professional relationship that Tim Schultz already had with the school. Their work with ASU, Faust says, has been a critical element in the implementation of the rural

residency program, in part because Adams State is located in rural Colorado.

“Adams State was very open to what needed to happen with our residents and our curriculum. And they are in the area and know each of the small towns, so they could help us figure out what’s going on in each of the communities and understand more about what underlies some of the [rural] issues,” Faust explains.

In addition, the university’s teacher education program realized how important it would be for the faculty it was dedicating to the residency program to have practical classroom experience. So teacher education staff chose faculty who had been K-12 teachers to help design and teach the residency curriculum. *“They could teach the theory-to-practice seminars underlying the residency curriculum,”* Faust emphasizes. *“They weren’t separated from the reality of the classroom.”*

But the key to the successful ongoing working relationship between Boettcher and ASU, Faust says, has been the partners’ mutually sincere desire to serve Colorado’s rural communities, which in turn has created a collaboration marked by deep trust. *“[Adams State’s teacher education department personnel] always tell me, ‘You come down here and work with us. You listen to us and our needs and trust that we know what we’re doing.’ It’s a partnership that helps us understand and provide context for what we’re hearing in the communities we serve.”* The partnership was so successful that Boettcher eventually adopted ASU as its university partner for its urban residency as well.

Two additional factors made a partnership with ASU seem the most logical choice. As Boettcher Teacher Residency searched for a university partner for the rural program, residency program staff began delving into best practices for financially sustainable residency programs, aided in part by National Center for Teacher Residencies’ (NCTR) financial modeling module and strategic consulting for residencies. The answer to the funding question came via Adams State. ASU was willing to dedicate faculty to the residency program so that Boettcher did not have to fund those individuals (eventually, Boettcher began offering a stipend to ASU faculty who support the residency), which meant a substantial cost savings for the residency program. Additionally, the cost of an ASU degree was well within the dollar range NCTR stipulated as a best practice toward financial sustainability. That, in turn, enabled Boettcher to reduce the amount of its stipend for rural residents, a major cost outlay in the residency model.¹

¹ In the residency model, living-expense stipends are often used as one tool to recruit high-potential candidates. The living-expense stipend provides financial support that often allows candidates to make the full-time commitment to the

Surveying the Landscape

As Boettcher created the financial structures to support a rural program, program staff conducted a multi-pronged needs assessment of districts and schools in rural Colorado. They met with superintendents of rural districts to discuss their specific needs and presented their rural expansion plan to the Rural Education Council, which consists of superintendents from regions across Colorado. Boettcher moved to identify the southern region of the state, an economically depressed region with significant teacher turnover, as the target area for expansion. Program staff then presented their expansion plan to the rural Superintendent Advisory Councils.

At the same time, Boettcher Teacher Residency staff and faculty from ASU visited potential districts and school sites, looking for schools and districts with strong leaders who were committed to participating in professional learning with the residency and to developing shared understandings of effective instructional practice. Boettcher also prioritized schools with enough prospective mentor teachers who demonstrated a growth mindset and the willingness to be flexible and open to learning as co-educators with their residents.

Another critical factor in identifying potential school and district training sites for Boettcher residents is finding school cultures that are free, or actively working to free themselves, of racial and ethnic tension. Some schools, Faust says, are *“not where I feel residents of color would be accepted and nurtured, so I don’t place them there unless they come from that community and initiate [their placement there] and are used to navigating”* racially or ethnically charged environments, she explains.

Faust says that as the rural residency has grown, the program’s assessment of rural districts’ needs and rural schools’ cultures, balanced against Boettcher’s capacity to provide what each rural district needs, has been key to finding districts that are ripe for the program.

“We have found that this is useful because as we get to know districts, some are more prepared to have residencies than others...and it will take longer to build capacity in some very high-need districts. When you’re looking at one small community and trying to compare it to another small community next door, it can look very different. Neighboring districts often have very different levels of instruction,” she explains.

residency, which spans one full year of training in a high-need school. ASU also offered to provide a per-credit scholarship to residents that amounted to nearly half of the previous stipend’s amount, which made up for the reduced amount of the new stipend.

Building Capacity

The dearth of highly qualified teachers in rural districts has resulted in these varying levels of student-centered instruction. In response, Boettcher Teacher Residency has crafted a differentiated approach to implementation.

“Some districts have much more teacher-centered instruction than student-centered,” Faust says, “and they’re just not ready for a residency yet, so we approach residency development very slowly in those districts. And before we were going to place residents in a school or district, we were going to provide training and introduce them to our approach to instructional best practices.”

So a year before starting the rural residency program, Boettcher’s managing partner, PEBC (a provider of professional learning for teachers, school leaders and district superintendents) began providing professional development focused on expanding subject-area expertise and mentoring skills. The professional development included job-embedded coaching for teachers in prospective residency sites. Faust estimates that Boettcher has invested more than a million dollars in professional development in its rural districts over the last three years.

Not only did these professional learning opportunities help Boettcher Teacher Residency build professional capacity among teachers in the schools and districts it was targeting for the rural residency, it also helped them identify potential mentors. *“PEBC provided an opportunity for schools and districts in the rural areas, where there are not as many [professional development] opportunities as there are in urban areas, to get that extra capacity built,”* Faust says. *“Teachers were delighted to have those opportunities. And as word of mouth got out, we had more people interested in being mentors.”* Faust adds that the enthusiasm that the pre-residency preparation builds among mentors extends beyond their initial year; every one of the 21 mentors Boettcher worked with during the 2014-15 school year requested to be reinstated for the 2015-16 school year.

Additionally, Boettcher has offered the PEBC Dynamic Leadership Series, along with job-embedded leadership coaching, in the rural districts it serves. In this three-part series based on a framework of nine essential facets of leadership, leaders explore both technical and adaptive leadership responses that effective leadership teams consider before making decisions and taking action. By engaging with superintendents, principals and their leadership teams, Faust says, Boettcher is better able to understand the needs of the districts and schools and to vertically

align the residency and professional development to meet those needs.

Creating Responsive Recruitment Practices

Initially, Boettcher Teacher Residency aimed to recruit 20 residents for the rural residency’s inaugural year, focusing on recent college graduates and career changers from outside rural Colorado. But the residency soon learned that rural teacher recruitment presents its own set of challenges.

Boettcher discovered that rural areas do not tend to attract young people at the start of their careers. *“Trying to recruit from outside the area is very difficult,”* Faust emphasizes. *“Some parts of Colorado are arid, a totally different environment than some people are used to. Some of the areas are one-stoplight towns. So when you think of a young adult from another region of the country...it’s not necessarily a draw to go to these places.”* So Boettcher staff tapped into connections that Adams State faculty had in the community and began marketing both the lifestyle opportunities Colorado offers and the nuances of each rural locale. *“We had to market each area separately so we could entice people to be interested in each district,”* Faust explains. *“So we needed to get to know the community and to understand the draw for each area,”* such as nearby mountain ranges that appeal to people who like to spend time outdoors.

At the same time, Adams State’s teacher education department was struggling to keep its enrollment numbers up. But this challenge quickly became an opportunity both for the department and Boettcher. *“The teacher preparation program became a feeder for the rural residency program,”* Faust explains. Most of Adams State’s teacher education students were from rural Colorado, which lessened the need for external recruitment. So the program and Boettcher created a pact wherein the students could complete the teacher education program minus student teaching and then apply to the residency program. This recruitment plan ultimately yielded ten residents for the rural residency’s inaugural year.

Recognizing the strong need for teachers in rural schools, districts within the rural areas that Boettcher had chosen to work with and outside of those locations were trying to recruit the exact teachers Boettcher had identified from Adams State’s program. Consequently, Boettcher found itself competing for teacher candidates with the rural districts it was aiming to serve. Wanting to avoid competition, Boettcher decided to offer an induction support model for the residency’s first year. Instead of recruiting college graduates for a traditional residency year, Boettcher

offered undergraduate education majors who had completed student teaching the opportunity to apply to receive induction support (which research shows is critical during a teacher's first years on the job²) during their first year as teachers of record. If accepted into the induction support program, these teachers would be supported by an induction coach but would not teach under the guidance of a mentor using a gradual-release model, as the traditional residency model dictates.

Faust says the initial recruitment challenges and the small number of residents selected in the rural residency's first year were a mixed blessing, particularly because all stakeholders had the chance to move through their respective learning curves at a reasonable pace. *"It ended up working well because in having a smaller pilot in a new area, we could give more personal attention. And we were all learning different things. The local faculty were learning how to run a residency program, and we were learning how to support them. So we were all in a learning mode. Starting small helped us learn how to transplant the lessons we learned to the other rural areas."*

By the second year of implementation, the rural residency was maintaining the induction support model but with a smaller percentage of teachers, while transitioning back to a modified version of its originally proposed "four-plus-one" model for Adams State undergrad teacher education majors. The difference: Boettcher now offers a "four-plus-two" model wherein college graduates (whether those with an education degree from Adams State or an undergraduate degree in another major and/or from another school) complete a residency year, followed by a year of induction support during their first year as teachers of record.

Securing Funding to Continue Expansion

Toward the end of the rural residency's first year, Boettcher received a Colorado Department of Education Quality Teacher Recruitment Program Grant, which helped facilitate further expansion of the rural program. *"The grant permitted us to increase the number of residents in the San Luis Valley and expand into the southwest corner of the state,"* Faust explains. The funding also enabled Boettcher to build overall capacity in the districts served by its rural program by investing in professional development, developing a strong mentor pool and exploring instructional strategies and best practices in student-centered learning.

² Ingersoll R., Smith T. (2004). Do teacher induction and mentoring matter? *NASSP Bulletin*, 88 (638), 28–40. Smith T., Ingersoll R. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41 (3), 681–714.

Looking Toward the Future

"Our overarching goal is to create a statewide pipeline of excellent teachers for Colorado," Faust says. Ultimately, Boettcher hopes to prepare 150 teachers by 2018 and add several more rural Colorado districts to its roster.

Not only is the program recruiting and preparing residents to be teachers of record in rural Colorado schools, Faust says; Boettcher's rural work also is aligned with one of the seminal goals of NCTR's Network programs — serving districts' human capital needs.

"By integrating the Boettcher Teacher Residency with PEBC's leadership and professional development institutes and coaching, we are working with rural districts at a systems level, from superintendents and district administrators to instructional leaders and coaches, and supporting teachers across the continuum of their careers, from preparation to leadership."

Recommendations

Teacher preparation providers considering expansion to serve rural schools or within an existing market may consider the following recommendations drawn from Boettcher Teacher Residency's experience.

Partnerships are Essential

Form partnerships with organizations that know the community.

There is value in collaborating with locally focused entities that can provide perspectives informed by intimate knowledge of the community and its needs. Boettcher credits Adams State University as a continual source of local context to inform their planning and implementation processes.

Use data and outreach efforts to develop a human capital initiative.

Boettcher expanded its residency into Colorado regions in which a clear need exists for effective teachers. Yet program staff did not move forward on that knowledge alone; they made sure they had local advocates for their rural residency and did their due diligence in researching sustainable funding opportunities.

Conduct a needs assessment with prospective stakeholders.

Before Boettcher created definitive rural expansion plans, program staff met with numerous stakeholders in the targeted community, from regional superintendents to teachers and administrators at

the school level, to learn more about the challenges rural schools and districts face. This process helped the program draft well-informed solutions and identify the schools and districts that would be the best sites for the rural residency program.

Develop a financial model and sustainability plan with all partners.

A sustainable financial model is key to any residency program's success, so program partners should develop a multi-year scaling and sustainability plan that reflects the specific needs the rural residency will satisfy. Creating a clear value proposition, clarifying the major cost centers, and identifying potential areas for cost savings and economies of scale are essential first steps.

Know the Market

Create a recruitment strategy that highlights the target community's assets.

Recognizing that recruiting to rural towns requires a specific, tailored message to appeal to young adults just starting their careers, Boettcher program staff drew on Colorado's scenic and outdoor attractions as a recruitment tool for the rural residency program.

Practice mindful matching of residents to districts and schools.

Boettcher intentionally matches residents with school districts and schools so that residents do not face tensions that contradict the program's beliefs about race and equity.

Practice a Continuous Learning Mindset

Acknowledge gaps and seek to understand.

Boettcher Teacher Residency credits the unassuming approach with which they explored a rural expansion as key to both their successful collaboration with their university partner and to the success of the expansion into rural Colorado. For example, after conducting a needs assessment with prospective schools and districts, they first presented their draft solutions to their university partner to get locally informed feedback. Faust and other program staff also began with the assumption that residency programs are not one-size-fits-all; they were careful to not simply replicate their urban residency's programming in rural districts. Instead, program staff worked closely with rural partners to understand how to contextualize the model in ways that acknowledge local needs and assets.

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About NCTR

NCTR is a not-for-profit organization that serves a growing national network of high-performing residency programs. Founded in 2007, NCTR is the only organization in the country dedicated to developing, launching and supporting the impact of residency programs. NCTR partners with school districts, charter management organizations, institutions of higher education, not-for-profits, and states to develop and support teacher residency programs as quality pipelines of effective and diverse new teachers.
