



Advancing Curriculum Literacy Through Teacher Residencies

Insights from Phase 2 of an NCTR-EdReports Partnership to
Change How Pre-Service Teachers in Teacher Residency
Programs Choose and Use High-Quality Instructional Materials

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About NCTR

The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing, launching, supporting, and accelerating the impact of teacher residency programs. Headquartered in Chicago, NCTR's mission is to disrupt historical educational inequities by advancing the teacher residency movement to prepare effective, diverse, culturally responsive educators. For more information about NCTR, please visit nctresidencies.org.

About EdReports

EdReports is an independent nonprofit designed to improve K-12 education. EdReports.org increases the capacity of teachers, administrators, and leaders to seek, identify, and demand the highest quality instructional materials. Drawing upon expert educators, EdReports' reviews of instructional materials and support of smart adoption processes equip teachers with excellent materials nationwide. For more information, please visit edreports.org.

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Photo on the Cover: Nycole Bradshaw earned her teaching license through the PEBC Teacher Residency. This photo was taken at Crawford Elementary in Aurora Public Schools.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
About NCTR	1
About EdReports	1
About the Authors	2
Introduction - Curriculum Literacy & Teacher Residencies	4
SIDEBAR: How to Identify High-Quality Instructional Materials	5
About the Project	7
SIDEBAR: Lessons from Phase 1	8
SIDEBAR: Gap Analysis Activity	11
Lessons Learned	12
1. Begin by Improving Teacher Residencies' Own Understanding of Curriculum Literacy	12
2. Stronger Partner Collaboration and Feedback are Key to Curriculum Literacy	14
3. Teacher Residencies Need More Collaboration Across the Board	18
Conclusion and Call to Action	19
References	22

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Introduction - Curriculum Literacy & Teacher Residencies

Curriculum makes a major difference in student learning. Several studies show that high-quality materials can support better outcomes for students and how teachers use them affects those outcomes (Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012). When teachers are given high-quality, standards-aligned curricula as well as the knowledge and support they need to use it well, they can transform learning and opportunities for all students, including those in the most marginalized and under-resourced communities.

The positive effect of curriculum in the hands of well-prepared teachers is magnified when it extends across grade levels and teachers over time. “An excellent education is not just what gets taught today,” notes former teacher Robert Pondiscio (2020), a visiting fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. “It’s the cumulative effect of a coherent, thoughtfully sequenced, and knowledge-rich curriculum that broadens and deepens over time, within and across grade levels.”

But what is curriculum and what does it mean to be “curriculum literate?” Scholar David Steiner, the executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, has defined “curriculum” and “curriculum literacy” as such:

Curriculum is the means to achieve the goals expressed in the standards. It is the teaching and learning program, and can include lesson plans and activities, scope and sequence documents, textbooks, computer programs, and even related pedagogical advice and embedded formative assessments.

Curriculum literacy is the ability of teachers to identify and remedy deficiencies in instructional materials they are given to teach (Steiner, 2018).

Although policymakers and leaders across many states and school districts are increasing the selection and use of high-quality materials, and supporting the country’s 3.5 million existing teachers with training on specific pedagogical approaches and chosen curricula, few are focusing on how to ensure that pre-service teachers are curriculum literate (Doan et al., 2022). This includes teacher preparation programs themselves, which have historically approached curriculum at an atomic level rather than a systemic level. “Teacher candidates are graded on

their ability to create a lesson from scratch, with professors looking for criteria such as learning objectives, cognitively demanding questions, and opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery as measures of successful planning,” says Jared Myracle (2021) of the Tennessee Department of Education. “The focus is almost entirely at the individual lesson level; rarely is a teacher candidate challenged to sequence lessons into coherent units of study.”

Indeed, most teacher preparation programs include various methods courses but nothing specific to curriculum. “Teaching methods courses offer some background to the organization of a lesson irrespective of the content being taught, while methods courses that focus on a single subject offer widely different approaches to conveying that subject matter to students,” notes Steiner (2018).

“But central to effective teaching – as underlined by the standards applicable in each subject domain – is the capacity to translate knowledge about a subject, and a generic understanding of teaching techniques, into effective teaching of specific content to children.”

Teachers' instructional materials and the understanding of standards are interconnected and affect each other, while both influence teachers' standards-aligned practices (Kaufman et al., 2018). A 2016 RAND survey reveals that almost half of all the teachers surveyed, and two-thirds of high school teachers, create their own lessons – and almost half of them spend at least four hours a week doing so with little time remaining to ensure their quality (standards-alignment, rigor,

How to Identify High-Quality Instructional Materials

Users, evaluators, and designers of well-aligned materials identify the following “look-fors” of high-quality materials:

- Clear articulation of learning goals aligned to standards and instructional shifts as well as incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy.
- Adult-level explanations of the content to support content knowledge and practices for teaching.
- Insights into how students might think and how student knowledge and experience might interact with the content.
- A set of instructional activities and tasks well-aligned to the learning goals with assessments that show evidence of student growth toward those goals.
- A comprehensive (yearlong), coherent (lessons connected to one another day-to-day, unit-to-unit), sequenced learning path to prepare students for grade-level mastery.

Adapted from University of Michigan professor of education Deborah Loewenberg Ball's presentation on the use of instructional materials in practice (Ball, 2020)

etc.). With so many resources readily available, teachers reflexively use what is most comfortable, therefore, HQIM become one more resource as opposed to what is preferred (Opfer et al., 2016). In doing so, teachers may inadvertently limit students' opportunities to do grade-level work. A landmark 2018 study by TNTP, "[The Opportunity Myth](#)," found that students spent more than 500 hours per school year on assignments that weren't appropriate for their grade — the equivalent of six months of wasted class time in each core subject — but students with greater access to stronger instruction and assignments gained more learning and caught up to their peers quicker if they were behind (TNTP, 2018). Follow-up studies of math in 2021 (TNTP, 2021) and literacy in 2022 (TNTP, 2022) found that this trend has not only continued, but actually worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The absence of curriculum literacy poses both a challenge and an opportunity for teacher residency programs, which consist of partnerships between educator preparation programs and school systems to prepare pre-service teachers through a yearlong clinical experience. This is an ideal setting in which to address curriculum literacy. During their teacher residency year, teacher residents are immersed in the culture and pedagogy of a partner school district by working regularly in an assigned classroom alongside a trained teacher mentor. At the same time, they are also taking preparation courses in content and teaching methods — which are ideally aligned with the clinical experience and structured to give residents opportunities to apply learning in real classrooms. Gradually and intentionally over the course of the year, teacher residents assume greater teaching responsibilities from the teacher mentor. By the time they earn their degree and credential at the end of the teacher residency year, teacher residents have demonstrated readiness to step into the role of full classroom teacher on day one of their career, particularly in the school system (and in many cases, the school) where they were trained.

Ideally, this readiness should include curriculum literacy, so teacher residents feel confident and competent in choosing and using high-quality curricula from day one and throughout their careers. Indeed, Steiner (2019) argues for this very approach in his paper *Curriculum Literacy for Future Teachers*:

“To provide the curriculum literacy that candidates need in our nation’s teacher preparation programs, changes will be needed in teacher preparation coursework and clinical training to build teacher candidates’ ability to: (1) identify high-quality curricular resources; (2) skillfully use curricular resources that are provided to them; and (3) adapt curricular resources to meet the diverse needs of students while maintaining rigor and coherence. This approach will require teacher preparation programs to develop deeply integrated partnerships with the school districts (and in some cases charter management organizations) in which their graduates will serve as teachers, including an understanding of the range of curricular materials that they will encounter.”

Advancing Curriculum Literacy Through Teacher Residencies

[Toward this end, in 2020, NCTR and EdReports forged a partnership to address the need for teacher awareness of high-quality instructional materials \(HQIM\) during their pre-service training.](#)

The goal of the project is to provide teacher residency programs with support to help their teacher residents become savvy consumers and users of HQIM (Hirsch & Grossman, 2021).

Within teacher residency programs, each individual has a role to play in helping pre-service teachers master curriculum literacy:

- **Methods professors within the institution of higher education** can *teach* the content and skills necessary to choose and use high-quality curricula;
- **Teacher mentors employed by the school district** and paired with a resident can *model* the use of HQIM within the resident's assigned classroom; and
- **Clinical supervisors and other instructional leaders (including principals, instructional coaches, and teacher mentors) in the teacher residency program** can help *develop and refine* residents' curriculum literacy skills by providing feedback as they observe how residents teach and assess with those materials.

The benefits of this approach include not only the K-12 students who stand to receive more equitable and rigorous educational opportunities, and the teacher residents who will be more well-versed in curriculum literacy, but also teacher preparation programs themselves. Teacher residency programs that effectively teach curriculum literacy can influence the broader teacher preparation landscape, ensuring that future generations of new teachers are equipped to choose and use quality instructional approaches and materials.

About the Project

In 2020, the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) and EdReports forged a partnership to address the need for teacher awareness of HQIM during their pre-service training. NCTR is the only organization in the country dedicated to developing, launching, supporting, and accelerating the impact of teacher residency programs. EdReports is an organization committed to increasing the capacity of teachers, administrators, and leaders to seek, identify, and demand the highest quality instructional materials.

Phase 1 of the project included three teacher residency programs: [Alternative Pathways to Education Certification Program \(APEC\) \(South Carolina\)](#), [Kern High Teacher Residency \(California\)](#), and [William Carey University School of Education \(Mississippi\)](#). During this first phase, teams from each teacher residency program participated in three workshops and coaching sessions (Hirsh & Grossman, 2021).

Lessons from Phase 1

The report from the first phase of this project highlighted key strategies for how teacher residency programs and any teacher preparation program might advance curriculum literacy within its program, across all stakeholders, including program staff and instructors as well as the residents themselves (Hirsh & Grossman, 2021). These include:

- **Examine your new teacher graduate profile.** Determine the role curriculum literacy plays in it and whether it is time to rethink what constitutes a graduate of your program.
- **Convene a “great” team.** Begin with “willing” or “interested” educators. Such curriculum work requires an intentional, functional partnership between an IHE and school district(s) or charter management organization (CMO) determined, in a large part, by the extent to which the school district(s) or CMO is committed to using high-quality instructional materials and how it will prioritize its use for teacher residents in both their course preparation and their teacher residency year experience.
- **Collect baseline data to focus early conversations.** Collecting and examining data relevant to the curriculum literacy agenda offers a starting point for the learning journey. Data is key to surfacing problems as well as opportunities for addressing project goals and expectations.
- **Rethink selection, preparation, and support of cooperating teachers and teacher mentors.** A 2020 NCTR research brief affirms the significance of the role of the teacher mentor on resident success as well as benefits that accrue to teacher mentors from their supervisory experience. (Azar et al., 2020) Carefully consider both the extent to which teacher mentors are curriculum literate and additional support you can give them so they may continue to advance their own curriculum literacy.
- **Flip the script in learning experiences.** More career- and college-ready standards demand different learning experiences for students. Few teachers were prepared with those types of experiences in mind. Flipping the script and asking participants to enter professional learning as “students” while their learning facilitators use state- or school district-selected HQIM brings multiple benefits.
- **Document the progress and impact of your efforts; be prepared to share your findings.** The more rigorously teacher preparation program administrators and school district decision-makers assess impacts of new preparation practices on teaching and learning outcomes, the more there is to learn from these new behaviors.

The partnership's second phase included teams from five teacher residency programs, who participated in four workshops over the course of the 2021-2022 school year. These workshops were designed to develop a shared understanding of curriculum literacy and to make that literacy a reality by integrating it into the teacher residency programs' methods courses as well as the teacher residency year experience.

The programs participating in the second phase were:

- [Black Educator Teacher Residency at California State University - Bakersfield](#), a virtual teacher residency founded in 2022 that is preparing 23 new teachers in its first two cohorts for grades TK-9, with an emphasis on Afrocentric cultural competency, in partnership with school districts across California;
- **Clarkson University**, whose [Master of Arts in Teaching program](#) was founded in 1989 and prepares about 30 new teachers per year for roles in New York State;
- [Memphis Teacher Residency](#), founded in 2009 and prepares approximately 45 new teachers per year for Memphis-Shelby County Schools through Christian Brothers University;
- [Seattle Teacher Residency](#), founded in 2013, prepares about 25 new teachers per year through partnerships with Seattle Public Schools and the University of Washington College of Education; and
- **William Carey University's** [Mississippi Teacher Residency Program](#), founded in 2019 in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Education, which prepares approximately 35 new teachers per year to work in one of eight partner school districts across the state.

Together, these programs prepare nearly 200 new teachers for work in a variety of school settings. Participant teams from each program included combinations of teacher residency stakeholders including teacher residency program staff (such as the program director), school district leaders in charge of curriculum, course instructors, and teacher mentors.



Staff members of the Memphis Teacher Residency (MTR) present at a workshop during Phase 2.

The work began with a virtual session with NCTR and EdReports in late November 2021 and culminated with an in-person workshop in April, with two virtual workshops in between, as well as hands-on coaching by NCTR. Workshops included:

- **Workshop 1: Defining Curriculum Literacy as a High-Priority Residency Practice.** This workshop focused on creating a shared understanding of curriculum literacy and its related competencies:
 - Competency 1: Recognize the benefits and foundational characteristics of HQIM.
 - Competency 2: Identify, analyze and skillfully use HQIM effectively.
 - Competency 3: Adapt HQIM to meet the diverse needs of students without compromising or weakening expectations (Steiner, 2019).

Participants discussed how educator preparation programs teach these competencies through coursework and clinical practice, and began to consider implications for their own program. The coaching session following this workshop included a review of basic competencies and a curriculum landscape analysis, asking programs to reflect on their knowledge of their school district partners and existing collaboration structures.

- **Workshop 2: Designing for Curriculum Literacy: Using and Navigating Curriculum.** In this workshop, participants explored curriculum examples and considered how they connected to candidate preparation, as well as the use of curriculum among their partner schools or school districts. The coaching session following this workshop included a review of a gap analysis activity that identified potential program gaps and solutions that programs could focus on.

Gap Analysis Activity

The gap analysis activity was a team activity facilitated by NCTR coaches in a breakout session during the second workshop. After a review of NCTR’s [“Characteristics of Effective Partnerships,”](#) partners were encouraged to reflect on their partnership work around curriculum literacy. Teams were then guided through an activity with coaches where they looked at the basic competencies of curriculum literacy and identified program gaps, solutions, rationale, potential resources needed, and anticipated challenges for their teacher residency program’s curriculum literacy work.



Part of this activity’s success was the diversity of perspective and voice in the makeup of the design team, which provided a holistic view across the teacher residency program. The collaboration and conversation allowed meaningful dialogue toward brainstorming potential solutions and ultimately led to each team selecting a context-specific goal for the Phase 2 project.

- **Workshop 3: Formative and Summative Assessment of Resident Learning of Curriculum Use.** This workshop explored the use of HQIM in several states, school districts, and educator preparation programs across the country, and then looked at how candidates would assess students and adapt materials accordingly. Team also spent time

working on their project implementation planning. The coaching session following this workshop helped program leaders identify and finalize project outcomes and prepare for whole-group presentations during the fourth and final workshop.

- **Workshop 4: Curriculum Literacy in Action.** In this final workshop, participants put their learning to work by engaging in some role-playing activities related to recognizing, training, and advocating for HQIM. Each program also shared the work they had done via coaching to make curriculum literacy-centered learning more explicit and consistent across their coursework and clinical learning experiences. During the final coaching session following this final meeting, coaches helped program leaders follow up on the next steps identified in each program's project.

Lessons Learned

The second phase of this project dove deeper than the first, and yielded a number of important lessons about how best to support teacher residency programs as they seek to become more curriculum literate – and to impart that literacy upon their candidates.

The five programs ranged widely in location, size, history, and emphasis, and so determined specific goals and plans based on their unique contexts. Two of the five programs had participated in the prior year, but participated again with new intentions: CSU-Bakersfield had launched a new virtual teacher residency focused on Black educators and Afrocentric cultural competency, and William Carey had engaged several new school partners. Programs focused on not only learning about curriculum literacy but also on taking action based on that learning into programmatic changes, both during workshops and with NCTR coaches between sessions.

Phase 2 lessons included:

1. Begin by Improving Teacher Residencies' Own Understanding of Curriculum Literacy

Creating the conditions for teacher candidates to master curriculum literacy starts with teacher preparation program staff; they must attain a deep understanding of curriculum literacy in order to convey it to beginning teachers.

Teacher residency program staff and faculty need to know not only which curriculum their partner schools or school districts are using and the instructional shifts it requires, but must also have a general understanding of whether the available curricular resources are rated as high quality. They also must know which skills teachers need to evaluate, adapt, and implement instructional materials. This goes far deeper than understanding lesson planning, and includes the full scope of what a partner's chosen curriculum (or available resources in the absence of a

prescriptive curriculum) delivers as well as the places where it may need to be adapted or scaffolded to meet the needs of local students.

Sometimes we have to think about what the outcomes are and what the students need before ‘shoving’ a lot of curriculum in front of our candidates. This helps us become more focused on ‘how to do it’ and ‘what to use.’

- Teacher Residency Program Director

This understanding for programs is a vital precursor to teachers' understanding. It also takes time to internalize the impact for teachers and what it will take to apply it to a program's coursework and clinical experiences. Ideally, the very beginning of a partnership is the best time to align views of curriculum across organizations and stakeholders in a teacher residency program or other teacher preparation program, which is why NCTR is taking steps to focus on curriculum and instructional materials in the design of teacher residency programs. For example, although California State University (CSU) - Bakersfield had been operating another teacher residency program (including the [Kern High Teacher Residency](#), which participated in

the first phase of the NCTR-EdReports project), its Black Educator Teacher Residency (BETR) was in the process of launching its first cohort of diverse educators. Just four percent of California teachers are Black, compared with five percent of students statewide (and much higher percentages in some school districts) (Tadayon, 2022). This virtual teacher residency for grades

TK-9 operates in partnership with several school districts across California and its focus on Afrocentric cultural competency had already required significant learning among CSU-Bakersfield faculty. The design team realized that to carry their view of curriculum literacy into their candidates' instruction, they needed to consider how teacher residents placed in school districts across the state would apply and enact their curriculum literacy learnings. Thus, they focused their



Staff members of the California State University - Bakersfield's Black Educator Teacher Residency (BETR) present at a workshop during Phase 2.

project on the clinical experience, specifically the way in which teacher mentors support teacher candidates in the development and application of curriculum literacy knowledge and skills.

The BETR team developed content for teacher mentor professional development that addressed gaps in common language for curriculum, HQIM, and resident learning goals through a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens. The content included a 10-month scope and sequence that mapped each curriculum literacy basic competency across the session topics including coursework connections, co-teaching strategies, phase-in schedules, and formative data (observation). The team also applied for and received a grant to purchase text resources for teacher mentors focused on culturally responsive instructional and curricular practices. To measure success, the BETR team intends to collect data from teacher resident and teacher mentor surveys and from resident observations using the Danielson Rubric.

However, teacher residency programs that have been around for a while may have existing programmatic structures that allow for easy integration of curriculum literacy. For example, Memphis Teacher Residency (MTR) has been operating since 2009. MTR recruits, trains, and supports teacher residents for high-need schools in the Memphis, Tennessee area through Christian Brothers University. During the second workshop, MTR staff completed a gap analysis activity (see *Gap Analysis Activity sidebar*) and identified a need to create a common and unified language around curriculum literacy throughout their program. They had already established a set of high-priority resident practices they call “maturities” and were able to draft a maturity related to curriculum literacy for consideration as part of the organization’s strategic planning process, as well as a rubric for assessing candidates’ competency as they moved from novice to effective levels of teaching. This would ensure that curriculum literacy language would be infused throughout the teacher residency year experience in multiple ways, including in course syllabi and teacher mentor and instructional coach feedback.

MTR’s short-term goals for the 2022-2023 school year are to incorporate curriculum literacy and HQIM into K-12 literacy coursework, and to support in-service teachers at MTR’s school-based partnerships in their implementation of HQIM. In the future, MTR staff hopes to integrate professional learning opportunities around curriculum literacy for professors and teacher mentors, and to align coursework in other content areas (such as STEM) to the curriculum literacy maturities.

2. Stronger Partner Collaboration and Feedback are Key to Curriculum Literacy

Relatedly, there is a significant need for stronger collaboration between school district partners, institutions of higher education, and teacher residency programs – including a critical need for feedback from school district partners about graduates’ mastery of curriculum literacy.

The awareness and task to collaborate opened doors to future collaborations. We built relationships around a working understanding of curriculum literacy.

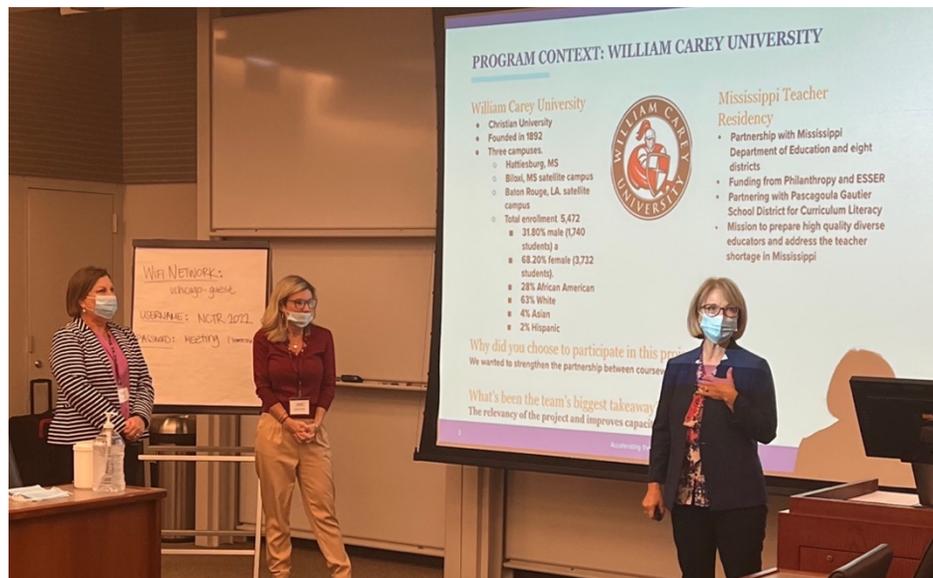
- Teacher Residency Program Director

One of the advantages of teacher residency programs over traditional teacher preparation pathways is that they are tightly partnered with not only institutions of higher education – who are skilled in preparing new teachers – but also with school districts and CMOs, who employ and direct the work of in-service teachers. It is this partnership that makes this work ideally situated in a teacher residency program, but also points to the ongoing need for educator preparation programs to develop and nurture strong partnerships with school districts. Teacher residency programs deliver traditional higher education coursework in

pedagogy, but also immerse teacher candidates in the culture and practices of a specific school community and context – including its approach to curriculum and instruction.

The teacher residency program leaders who gathered together at these workshops raised important questions about the role of school district leaders in teacher preparation, the role of education preparation programs in raising awareness of the importance of high-quality school district curriculum, and how these stakeholders can and should interact around resident learning. There is a need to put in place routines and structures for stakeholders to collaborate to discuss curriculum literacy regularly, through meetings and more formal learning communities.

For example, William Carey University’s (WCU) Mississippi Teacher Residency Program returned to the NCTR-EdReports program a second time with new team members and a new partner school district, the Pascagoula-Gautier School District. The teacher residency program was founded in 2019 in partnership with the Mississippi



Staff members of William Carey University’s Mississippi Teacher Residency Program present at workshop during Phase 2.

Department of Education. The program team wanted to build common language around HQIM amongst faculty at WCU and school district leadership at Pascagoula-Gautier, and to embed curriculum literacy in coursework throughout the program, including in the initial summer training provided by adjunct instructors. The WCU team included a school leader and teacher mentor, both of whom provided real-time input and valuable feedback on the feasibility of the resulting project deliverables, including:

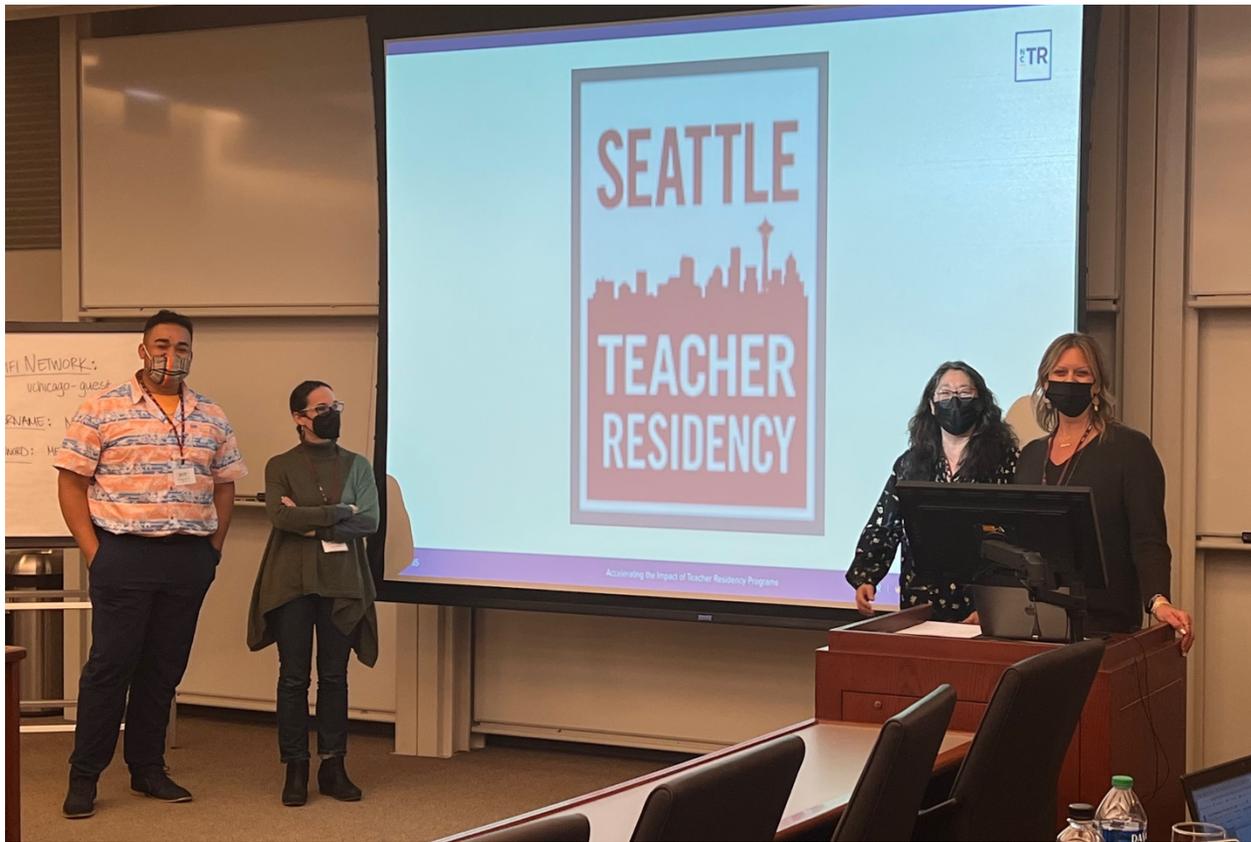
- Lesson plans for university coursework on curriculum and HQIM to be delivered to pre-service teachers;
- A professional learning presentation and lessons for P-12 teachers (residents and teacher mentors) and university faculty;
- A matrix demonstrating when and how instruction on each basic competency is delivered across the teacher residency experience;
- Lesson plan templates for residents to use in planning; and
- Additional teacher resident-facing HQIM support resources.

These tools and resources will be implemented in the 2022-2023 school year, and the team intends to collect feedback from teacher mentors, residents, and professors on their effectiveness. The collaboration between the partners allowed them to develop a comprehensive set of curriculum literacy-building tools that can be implemented across differing aspects of the teacher residency year's clinical and coursework experience.



Indeed, feedback from these school district partners is critical in helping teacher residency programs improve their preparation of teachers, and can prove valuable in strengthening their approach to curriculum literacy. For example, the Seattle Teacher Residency (STR) has regularly engaged and collaborated with their school district partner, Seattle Public Schools, and has gathered a range of additional feedback as part of a continuous improvement effort that has always been critical to their partnership. STR was founded a decade ago, in 2013, to accelerate student

achievement through the preparation, support, and retention of exceptional teachers who reflect the rich diversity of Seattle Public Schools. The 14-month program prepares approximately 25 new teachers each year for the district's schools that serve students furthest from educational justice. Recent data-gathering and analysis have provided STR with insight into what STR residents and graduates do well and where there is need for improvement. Lesson planning and differentiating instruction are two areas where improvement is possible. This perspective was



Staff members of the Seattle Teacher Residency present at a workshop during Phase 2.

echoed by a design team member from the Seattle Public Schools district who is charged with new teacher induction supports and has also been a participant in the STR program as both a resident and a teacher mentor.

The design team chose to identify how the STR team models the use of HQIM and high-quality instructional practices (which they refer to as “HQIP”), and to consider what adjustments they could make to coursework that would engage teacher mentors more as teacher educators and hold them accountable for supporting the use of HQIM and HQIP in the clinical setting (classroom). Modeling with the course instructor on the team, they developed a plan to engage instructors in course review and revision to align courses with HQIM characteristics. They also identified a need to deliver HQIM content to teacher mentors and to

It has motivated us to change what we are doing to ensure that residents leave the program feeling supported and cared for, and that they know how to evaluate and modify curriculum in order to meet the needs of their students.

- Curriculum Manager

Advancing Curriculum Literacy Through Teacher Residencies

“assign” related activities to residents to complete with the support of teacher mentors. Finally, the team considered how they might revise teacher mentor expectations for daily lesson planning support that integrates HQIM and HQIP. Having identified these needs, the team held an instructional retreat with the STR faculty and staff to discuss HQIM and HQIP course objectives, and a course model that would better prepare residents to engage in discussions around HQIM and HQIP.

To date, STR’s Instructor of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, also a member of the project team, is working on collaborating and co-teaching with Literacy Methods and Math Methods course instructors in order to pilot ideas around HQIM and HQIP, particularly in supporting multilingual learners. In future implementation, the STR team plans to work with other faculty to refine monthly teacher mentor professional development and adjust methods courses related to special education and English language learners so those residents can learn how to evaluate HQIM and HQIP and modify instruction for differentiation. The resident gradual release has also been significantly modified to specifically align with STR’s [Core Practices](#) and support resident learning through a series of coaching cycles that scaffold and focus the expectations for development of HQIMs, evaluated by both teacher mentors and coaches. To ensure these changes improve STR graduates’ understanding of curriculum literacy and their ability to leverage HQIM and HQIP in the classroom, it will be vital that STR staff continue to collect school district feedback once residents are placed in the classroom as teachers of record.

3. Teacher Residencies Need More Collaboration Across the Board

Moving forward, teacher residency program staff and faculty would also benefit from greater ongoing collaboration within their own programs, and with other teacher residency programs, around curriculum literacy.

One of the lessons learned from these workshops is that the program teams valued the opportunity for structured, dedicated collaboration with one another, outside of their daily work. This time allowed them to reflect upon curriculum literacy, build relationships, and develop strategies for embedding curriculum literacy into their programs’ coursework and clinical experiences. For example, Clarkson University in New York offers a Master of Arts in Teaching with a full-year teaching residency



A staff member of Clarkson University present at a workshop during Phase 2.

that partners with a number of school districts to place and prepare approximately 30 graduates per year. The Clarkson team discovered that their program staff and faculty not only needed to deepen and align their understanding of curriculum literacy, but that this understanding and its associated practices need to be made more explicit to teacher residents from the very beginning of the program.

The networking and learning from each other is irreplaceable. I changed my instruction and content immediately after attending the session.

- Methods Course Professor

The gap analysis activity during the second workshop showed the Clarkson team that its residents need explicit preparation on evaluating curriculum and linking it to the New York state learning standards. They decided to start by completely overhauling several of their introductory courses, including their summer Teaching Lab to ED 540/541 and Methods Courses. Coursework was revised to include direct instruction on the standards, opportunities for differentiation, standard texts, and alignment with the methods course and teaching lab. The team also considered how they

will collect targeted data on their residents' curriculum literacy preparedness and decided to focus on reviewing methods course grades, reviewing resident and alumni surveys, and comparing final grades from summer coursework to performance in first semester teacher residency placement.

Program participants also expressed interest in learning from other teacher residency programs about how their programs embed curriculum literacy. Specifically, they are interested in greater learning and collaboration about how teacher residency programs' partnerships with school districts operate; how teacher mentors are supported; and how they align coursework and clinical experiences.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Ensuring that teacher candidates are prepared to evaluate, adapt, and implement high-quality instructional materials is not an easy task, but it is an important one. The work to embed principles of curriculum literacy must be intentional, and requires time, resources, and a focus on preparation programming and school district partnerships.

In the course of this project, NCTR and EdReports have recognized that this conversation may start with leaders of educator preparation programs such as teacher residencies – and should also include other stakeholders including faculty and leaders of school district partners – but it should not end there.

Philanthropy can provide funding for teacher residency program staff, faculty, and school district partners to learn from and alongside other teacher residency program teams about curriculum literacy and other aspects of educator preparation. They can also provide funding for revisions to teacher preparation coursework and to the teacher residency year experiences that prioritize curriculum literacy and ensure teacher residents develop the curriculum literacy competencies they will need to be effective in their instructional practice.

Education Preparation Programs should evolve their thinking about curriculum and instruction, away from the development of individual lessons, and toward greater understanding of how curriculum works over a full year (or more) to develop students' knowledge and skills. These educator preparation programs should immerse aspiring teachers in a full year of clinical experience, as well as in curriculum literacy competencies—including how to evaluate the quality of curricula, how to assess students' understanding and needs, and how to implement the adopted curriculum in a school or school district. Educator preparation programs of all types can benefit from these considerations. In reviewing data from work with four California teacher residency programs in 2021, NCTR found that the implementation of quality teacher residency objectives can be scaled to impact all candidates trained by the teacher preparation program, even those in traditional and non-residency pathways. Key aspects and practices of the [teacher residency model](#) include the yearlong clinical experience with a particular focus on coursework and clinical alignment. Additionally, a particular element of the teacher residency model that seemed to be applicable to all pathways was the teacher educator development and support. Ensuring that teacher mentors are trained in curriculum literacy competencies would benefit the teacher mentor, teacher resident, and perhaps most importantly the students they serve. Where there is not an adopted curriculum, pre-service teachers need to understand what makes a curriculum high-quality, identify what is missing, and leverage existing tools and materials (i.e. open source curriculum that has been [green lit](#) as high-quality instructional materials by organizations such as EdReports) to meet students' needs. This hands-on experience is essential to ensuring that teacher candidates are better prepared on day one.

School District Leaders can continue to adopt high-quality curricula and involve educators and other stakeholders in a thoughtful, thorough adoption process. Key steps outlined by EdReports (n.d.) include establishing an adoption committee, establishing an instructional vision within the current context that orients school district priorities, examining available materials through this lens, selecting, and creating an implementation plan that includes professional learning that not only introduces teachers to the adopted curriculum but also focuses on how teachers will learn to teach using the new materials. School district leaders can also ensure that in-service teachers have the training they need to use those curricula rather than distributing those materials without support and

professional learning focused on how to use them. “Because inquiry-based classrooms use challenging texts and require students to take an active role, they draw on instructional knowledge, habits, and skills that are outside most traditional teacher preparation and professional development programs,” note authors Jim Short and Stephanie Hirsh (2020) in *The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning*. “District and school leaders and curriculum designers can promote inquiry-based learning by ensuring that instructional materials and professional learning experiences help teachers bridge the gaps in their preparation. ... Instead of redesigning lessons, they spend their limited time preparing to use high-quality instructional materials nimbly, freeing up energy to foster relationships with students and push them to meet rigorous standards.” When strong curriculum is paired with strong professional learning, one study found that students’ test scores improved by 9 percent of a standard deviation — about the same effect caused by replacing an average teacher with a top performer or reducing class size by 15 percent (Jackson & Makarin, 2017).

State Policymakers can continue to incentivize the adoption of high-quality instructional materials and set aside funds for professional development that ensures teachers deeply understand any instructional shifts and are prepared to adapt materials to their students’ context and needs. For example, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has established a High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development (IMPD) Network made up of more than a dozen states that are actively working with their school districts to fuel HQIM use. State-level actions include the development of policies and funding streams that signal the importance of quality curriculum, those that incentivize HQIM adoption by school districts, those that support professional learning aligned with HQIM, and those that support or compel educator preparation programs to build preservice teachers’ capacity to use HQIM. More recently, some of these states have used their federal [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund \(ESSER\)](#) set-aside funds to support the adoption of HQIM and associated professional development: by supporting school districts’ use and/or purchase of HQIM; by establishing large-scale tutoring, literacy instruction and learning acceleration policies; and by funding various professional development opportunities for teachers, school leaders, coaches and other stakeholders (“Restart & Recovery,” 2022).

“
Pre-service teachers need more explicit instruction about curriculum. I think we had taken much of their knowledge for granted over the years and assumed that they knew and understood much more than they actually did.
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- Residency Program Director

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- The capacity to recognize when specific lesson materials are either not standardized aligned or lacking in academic rigor or strong content – or all three;
 - The ability to remediate weak instructional materials by selective replacement using targeted strong materials as required;
 - The understanding of how to use on-line resources to identify the strongest instructional materials for a given student population; and
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