NATIONAL CENTER FOR TEACHER RESIDENCIES

BEI

RESEARCH BRIEF | NOVEMBER 2026

Building the Conditions

Retention Insights from the National Center for Teacher Residencies' Boundless Educators Initiative

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About NCTR

The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) is the leading national organization bringing together universities and P-12 schools and districts to design, launch, strengthen, and accelerate the impact of teacher residency programs. We believe that residencies are the strongest approach to addressing local teacher shortages, increasing the quality of teacher preparation, improving teacher retention, and creating a workforce that will improve educational outcomes and experiences for students in U.S. schools.

As a nonprofit organization, NCTR also supports teacher residency programs in becoming teacher-registered apprenticeship programs. Our mission is to transform educator preparation by advancing the teacher residency movement to prepare, support, and retain more effective educators who represent and value the communities they serve.

For more information about NCTR, please visit nctresidencies.org.

175+

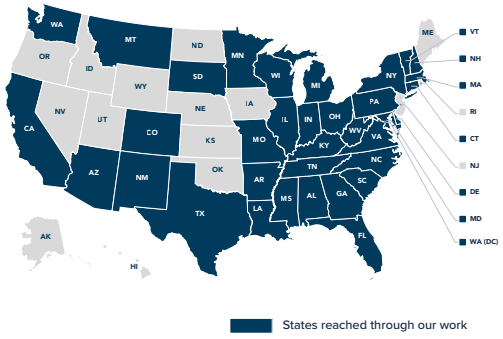
programs **launched or supported**

16,752

teachers **prepared by programs** affiliated with NCTR Network

35 STATES PLUS DC

REACHED THROUGH OUR WORK



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Photos are representative of NCTR's broader work and do not represent individuals or programs who participated in this study or the Boundless Educators Initiative.

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The Challenge of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover has been a persistent and worsening issue across the United States. The national annual turnover rate among U.S. public school teachers between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years was roughly 16%, with 8% of teachers moving to another school and 8% leaving teaching entirely. This is a sharp contrast to the 1990s, when the annual turnover rate hovered around 13%, and the percentage of teachers leaving entirely was around 5% (Taie & Lewis, 2023).

Turnover rates also vary by race and ethnicity, with more Black teachers moving schools or leaving the profession each year than teachers of most other races and ethnicities (Taie & Lewis, 2023). Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, 10.7% of Black teachers—roughly 24,000—left the profession (Taie & Lewis, 2023).

Turnover, both overall and among Black teachers, has significant consequences. Higher turnover rates have been shown to lead to increased teacher shortages and burnout, reductions in instructional quality, and worse student outcomes (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Turnover is also economically costly, with some estimating more than $11 billion nationally when adjusted to 2024 dollars to replace teachers who leave (Carroll, 2007; Tan et al., 2026).

Higher turnover among Black teachers is concerning, given the positive impact of a racially and ethnically diverse teacher workforce on students (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Access to Black teachers, for example, has been shown to positively influence school climate, classroom perceptions, and learning outcomes across various student groups, including Black student achievement and attainment (Dee, 2004; Egalite et al., 2015; Gershenson et al., 2022).

~ 8% of teachers left the profession between 2020–21 and 2021–22

~ 11% of Black teachers (roughly 24,000) left between 2020–21 and 2021–22

$11B+ Estimated national cost to replace teachers who leave (as of 2024)

The current state and consequences of teacher turnover underscore the necessity and importance of understanding the conditions that support teacher retention, particularly among Black teachers.

Several studies have explored factors affecting the retention of teachers once they have officially entered the profession. They identified working conditions; school leadership, culture, and resources; and job satisfaction as some of them (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2026).

Until more recently, there has been less attention to the process of becoming a teacher and how factors, such as one's preparation experience, impact later persistence or retention in the profession (Ronfeldt, 2021).

About This Study

Launched in 2019 with funding from Ballmer Group, NCTR's Boundless Educators Initiative (BEI) was designed to strengthen teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention, and ultimately, student learning. Phase 1 (2019-2023) of BEI supported the recruitment and preparation of teachers from historically undersupported communities by providing funding and consulting and programmatic support to teacher residency and apprenticeship programs.

Initially a five-year initiative, BEI is now in Phase II (2024–2029) with continued support from Ballmer Group. To date, NCTR has supported more than 3,500 individuals toward becoming teachers, while providing direct financial support to over 2,500 of those teacher candidates.

With funding from the Walton Family Foundation, NCTR conducted a series of focus groups in fall 2025 with staff and Black graduates of a subset of early BEI grantee recipients from Phase I. The primary purpose of the focus groups was to better understand the impact of teacher residency and apprenticeship programs, and particularly their programs' participation in BEI, on Black teachers' ability to stay and thrive in their later work as educators.

THE STUDY AT A GLANCE

11 focus groups, fall 2025

40 Black graduates in their first six years of teaching

13 BEI-supported programs

8 states across the Northeast, Midwest, and South

In total, NCTR conducted 11 focus groups with 40 Black graduates in their first six years of teaching. Participants represented 13 BEI-supported programs located in eight states across the Northeastern, Midwestern, and Southern U.S. regions.[1]

Key Preparation-Related Factors Impacting Black Teacher Retention

01 **Cost and extent of financial support provided**

02 **Quality and alignment of pre- and in-service clinical experience**

03 **Professional relationships and programming support**

04 **Financial and socioemotional support, specifically for licensure exams**

1 See the appendix for more information about participants, including demographics, as well as their programs.

KEY PREPARATION-RELATED FACTOR

01 Cost and extent of financial support provided

Many participants shared that financial barriers were a significant factor in their decision to enter their programs and become teachers. They attributed their entry and the successful completion of their programs to a range of financial support, including stipends and salaries; scholarships; funding to cover or subsidize the costs of licensure exams, essential technology and other resources (e.g., textbooks, laptops, licensure preparation coursework); funding to help cover costs of expected and unexpected living expenses (i.e., funds to support emergency and non-emergency situations); and funding to pursue additional or ongoing professional learning and credentials. Participants explained that without financial support, they would have been unable to afford the cost of an educator preparation program and the cost of completing the requirements for becoming a teacher, namely licensure exams, and would have been less likely to be able to complete a program due to increased stress and needing to work additional jobs in order to afford basic living expenses.

Importantly, some described how financial support made teaching a more financially sustainable career by reducing the debt they would have otherwise had to take on and by allowing them to take advantage of professional opportunities necessary to succeed and advance in the profession. Others also shared that becoming a fully certified teacher has meant earning a higher salary than before.

> *[The grants and stipends] allowed me to stay [and live] in the city that I work in. … It's important to me to live in my community. My school's [here], and I live [here], so it allowed me to be a part of the community and to stay here.*

I wouldn't have taken out another degree without [financial support]. … I would have probably stayed an assistant until I was ready to reenter the workforce doing something else. But I would not have sponsored a degree in education because of the cost. … The financial support made it possible for me to move from the assistant role to being a teacher.

PARTICIPANT ONE

Financially speaking, I'm more stable and grounded. I feel like this is a career [even in] this current climate of the classroom…. I could see how this could be something I enjoy with its ups and downs.

PARTICIPANT TWO

I agree with you about the impact. So, I was working as a TA, and there is a noticeable difference in the income. … I don't know what the difference is for you there; I don't know where you are, but where I am, it's more than double the salary. So, you know, with it being more than double and then having the opportunity to do something with the minimum jobs and other stuff in the building, it impacted my income a lot. So, that helps, because I think it brings more Black educators in, and it also gives people stability, you know, so you can go to work and not have to worry about, you know, like, 'can I eat today?'

KEY PREPARATION-RELATED FACTOR

02 Quality and alignment of pre- and in-service clinical experience, particularly in the school environment and culture

Participants highlighted how clinically-oriented preparation gave them a more realistic idea of what being a teacher is like, equipped them with practical skills needed to succeed, and enabled them to build valuable professional relationships, all of which help to support and sustain them in being teachers.

This is especially so when their pre- and post-clinical experiences align in grade level and/or content areas, as well as in the kinds of challenges students and teachers face.

Additionally, those hired at the schools where they completed their clinical experiences (and had a positive experience) suggested this was because they already felt like members of the community and were already familiar with students and the school's culture.

> *They had already placed us in hard-to-fill schools, and we had a clinical instructor the entire time involved, like half of the program. … So, I felt very well prepared to step inside a classroom … as far as knowing what was to come and experiencing it, I felt like they prepared us very well because we were already in [similar] environments.*

> *I feel like with the residency, because we were so immersed even before we were in classrooms, we had so much, like, hands-on practice with each other. … I felt they really prepared us for teaching, you know, with everything, like, in the school.*

> *I have been fortunate enough that my school where I student-taught had a position that opened up around the same time that I finished the residency program. So, I definitely feel like that helped as far as the transition into my teaching experience, and I've been there the whole time. … I think having the whole year in the school and seeing the entire cycle of the school year made it so that it wasn't as harsh of a transition into teaching. I think if I had done what I've seen some of the other schools do with only a semester, or it's like one day in the week [for half the semester], and then five days a week for the rest of the year … it would have felt different. But I think by being there, and then by having to take over a whole unit by the end, really helped.*

KEY PREPARATION-RELATED FACTOR

03 Professional relationships and programming support, particularly with or from those who share similar backgrounds and experiences

Several participants shared that relationships with colleagues have been an important factor in their continuing to teach by reducing feelings of isolation and increasing their motivation to stay in teaching, particularly highlighting relationships with fellow cohort members or alumni from their programs. They described those they met through their programs as familiar and trusted sources of feedback, social and emotional support, professional learning resources, and community and belonging in the profession.

Participants referenced several forms of relationship-based support from their programs, both formal and informal, that have played a role in their decision to remain as teachers. They identified recurring meetings or gatherings with other teacher residents, continued mentorship and coaching or check-ins with former mentor teachers and coaches, and ongoing communications from their program. They explained that these types of program support can reduce isolation, provide more informed and personalized support, and offer opportunities for professional learning that they otherwise would not have had access to.

They shared that continued formal support, such as regular check-ins and observations, has helped them acclimate better and transition more smoothly into their role as teachers. Additionally, some shared that they continue to maintain an informal relationship with their mentor teachers from their teacher residency experience. They explained how, similar to relationships with other teacher residents and program alumni, their former mentor teachers have served as an additional source of feedback, support, and resources that have enabled and motivated them to continue teaching.

> *My cohort, we all talk and we talk about different ways in which we get our students to learn things. Oftentimes you run into things, and you've exhausted all your resources, and other people can help. … That's one of the things that's kept me as a teacher.*

We're new educators in the field. And sharing the strategies, and just kind of talking about the things happening, and having and being able to relate to each other's situation and share those tips and tricks... that's really been very instrumental in me staying in. And it's also like having that ' knowing' that there are people that I can reach out to if I feel like I'm stuck somewhere and I need support. ... Having that support system for me is one of the biggest things.

The coach, even though I had graduated [from] the program like three years ago, ... checks in with me. They have after programs. ... They really, really do a lot of work to make sure that the residents, even once they leave the program, are extremely supported. ... I think that those types of resources, that type of support, that's what keeps me teaching.

We were given a supervisor. ... And she would come out and check on me every couple of months or so, and it was just one of those things where she's like, "Hey, how are you doing, what can I do for you? ... She became a really big resource for me. Because if I had legal questions or just organizational tips, and things like that, like she was there. ... She was a huge resource for me just getting organized and even getting my thoughts organized, and scheduling, and things like that.

KEY PREPARATION-RELATED FACTOR

04 Financial and socioemotional support, specifically for licensure exams

Participants shared that financial support for exams, along with socioemotional support, helped them feel more confident and prepared, financially better positioned, and, in turn, better able to become teachers and continue teaching. They highlighted financial support for additional preparation resources and required exam fees. They explained that funds and vouchers made it possible to afford and complete additional exam-specific coursework and tutoring, as well as pay for all the exams required for their licenses, particularly if they had to retake them.

Additionally, some described the process of preparing for and taking licensure exams as uniquely stressful for Black teacher candidates, knowing the role that race has played in licensure exams (Fenwick, 2021). Given this, they found it valuable when their programs facilitated opportunities to meet with others in their program, particularly other Black teacher candidates, to share experiences with licensure exams. They explained that these social opportunities increased their motivation and morale by reducing feelings of shame and isolation, and helped them access and learn strategies for passing exams.

> *[My program] was a tremendous help. They gave us vouchers to pay for taking those exams. They even provided us with the books that we needed to study. The university also had study groups for individuals that needed that extra support so that we could pass. … All of us passed our test, and I think we were one of the largest groups at that time to be a part of it.*

> *I was part of the affinity group. That was a tremendous help. … I remember I was having a hard time trying to pass my licensing exam to become a teacher. And I just said, you know, 'I feel like an idiot right now,' and I just began balling. Then, I heard other people start saying, 'I can't pass this test, either. What's going on?' … And we're like, 'What is it with us that we can't pass?' … So, we had to learn, and work together, and how to decipher the questions to get to the right answers. … And when it was all said and done—I think our class was 283 students—all of us passed our test.*

> *I think [someone else] was mentioning the Praxis. I had to take it once, and my residency covered that. But I see so many other people starting teaching, and they have to take the Praxis over and over, and it's a hundred and something each time. And I feel like that could deter someone's process. So, the fact that I received that financial package was for sure like, 'Okay, well of course I'm gonna stick it out these four years, like you all are doing all this for me.'*

> *I finished the program, I've graduated, but the Praxis test was still something I had to cross over. … The program came in and helped to pay for my test just to try to see if I can pass it after three attempts. They sponsored me, and I passed this year. And that kind of gave me courage, because if not for them, I would have given up.*

SIX RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

The following recommendations for both practice and policy are drawn from the above findings, as well as NCTR's partnership and decades-long experience designing and supporting teacher residency and apprenticeship programs across the country.

1 Make the Path to Teaching Financially Accessible and Easier to Navigate

PRACTICE

Provide Financial and Emergency Support: Distribute direct pay, stipends, or scholarships, and establish dedicated "emergency funds" to alleviate unexpected financial shocks during the residency year.

Embed Licensure Exam Wraparound Support: Cover exam costs, supply study materials, and integrate academic tutoring and exam preparation directly into program coursework.

POLICY

Scale Registered Apprenticeships and Residency Funding: Expand state Title II and federal workforce innovation funds to sustain earn-while-you-learn models, covering resident stipends, mentor teacher compensation, and tuition subsidies.

Audit Standardized Licensure Barriers: Re-evaluate cut scores and systemic biases inherent in standardized licensure exams, ensuring state licensing policies do not disproportionately exclude qualified educators.

Subsidize Exam Retakes and Offer Alternative Measures: Provide vouchers for multiple licensure attempts and build performance-based portfolio options as alternative pathways to full certification.

2 Strengthen Mentoring and the Quality of the Clinical Experience

PRACTICE

Foster Supportive School Cultures: Partner with school leaders to establish positive environments that offer regular check-ins, stable leadership, and culturally affirming workspaces.

Consider Mentor Placement: Intentionally match residents with mentors who share similar identities and experiences to foster belonging and professional identity development.

Provide High-Quality Clinical Placements: Ensure candidates complete an immersive, full-year residency experience alongside skilled mentor teachers in authentic classroom environments.

POLICY

Fund Sustainable Mentor Compensation: Allocate state and district funding to provide competitive stipends and career-ladder incentives for experienced mentor teachers.

Institutionalize District-Residency Retention Partnerships: Incentivize districts to partner with residency programs to improve working conditions, ensure competitive starting salaries, and build retention-focused administrative practices.

3 Build Lasting Professional Relationships and a Sense of Belonging

PRACTICE

Sustain Cohort Connection: Allocate dedicated space, funding, or virtual platforms to enable alumni cohorts to maintain active communication and collaborative problem-solving post-graduation.

Facilitate Affinity Groups: Host structured spaces for teacher residents and graduates to reflect on shared experiences, combat isolation, and build socioemotional resilience.

Fund Dedicated Graduate Support Staff: Hire full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel specifically assigned to lead graduate induction, organize alumni events, and coordinate post-residency outreach.

POLICY

Sustain Investments That Expand Access to the Educator Pipeline: Philanthropic partners and agencies should continue multi-year grant investments in supports shown to strengthen educator preparation and retention, including community-building spaces, graduate support infrastructure, and dedicated retention-focused staffing.

4 Design a Strong Transition from Preparation to Teaching

PRACTICE

Recruit Candidates with High-Retention Profiles: Prioritize recruitment of local community members, paraprofessionals, special education classroom assistants (SECAs), district alumni, and parents of district students who demonstrate long-term commitment to the local community.

Facilitate "Best-Fit" School Placements: Provide resume guidance, interview preparation, and partner with districts to grant teacher residencies "first-look" hiring prioritization to align teacher residents with supportive school cultures.

Provide Multi-Year Instructional Coaching: Dedicate instructional coaching resources to graduates in their classrooms during their first one to three years as lead teachers of record.

POLICY

Fund Dedicated Post-Residency Coaching: State departments and district partners should co-fund structured multi-year induction and coaching programs that bridge the gap between graduation and full-time teaching autonomy.

5 Invest in Graduates as Learners, Leaders, and Partners

PRACTICE

Develop Graduate Mentors and Classroom Hosts: Train alumni to serve as clinical mentors for new teacher residents, establish formal graduate-resident peer pairings, and open graduate classrooms for resident peer observations.

Host Alumni-Led Conferences: Organize localized conferences where graduates can present, attend professional learning sessions, and extend their professional networks.

Provide Individualized Professional Development Funding: Create competitive application processes or stipends for graduates to access external professional development aligned with their individual growth goals.

POLICY

Support Career Pathways for Educator-Leaders: Establish policies and grant mechanisms that allow early-career teachers to take on leadership roles—such as mentorship, curriculum design, and peer coaching—without having to leave the classroom.

6 Use Graduate Experience and Outcomes to Continuously Improve Preparation and Retention Strategies

PRACTICE

Offer Leadership Paths Through Alumni Councils and Selection: Establish Alumni Advisory Councils to inform program design and recruit graduates to co-host information sessions, facilitate group selection processes, and interview incoming candidates.

Deliver District-Wide Professional Learning: Partner higher education faculty with partner schools to deliver school-wide professional development, improve overall school culture, create mentor pipelines, and establish alternative program revenue streams.

POLICY

Align Data Collection Across Systems: Invest in state and district data systems that track graduate retention, effectiveness, and career trajectories over the long term to continuously inform and refine educator preparation and policy decisions.

Appendix

Table A1. Graduate Focus Group Participant Demographics

	Number of participants	% of participants
Teaching status		
Currently teaching	**38**	**95%**
No longer teaching	**2**	**5%**
Still teaching, or always taught in district/CMO where initially hired	**28**	**70%**
Number of years teaching		
1 to 2 years	**13**	**33%**
3 to 4 years	**17**	**43%**
5 to 6 years	**10**	**25%**
Grade levels currently teaching or last taught		
Early childhood, or pre-K	**5**	**13%**
Early elementary (Kindergarten to 3rd grade)	**14**	**35%**
Upper elementary (4th to 5th grades)	**17**	**18%**
Middle grades (6th to 8th grades)	**13**	**33%**
Secondary or high school (9th to 12th grades)	**10**	**25%**
Content areas currently teaching or last taught		
English language arts	**8**	**20%**
General elementary or multiple subjects	**13**	**33%**
Health and/or physical education	**1**	**3%**
Math or computer sciences	**9**	**23%**
Multilingual learning	**1**	**3%**
Natural sciences	**7**	**18%**
Social sciences or history	**4**	**10%**
Special education	**15**	**38%**
Geographic region where living and teaching		
Midwest	**14**	**35%**
Northeast	**8**	**20%**
South	**18**	**45%**
Race and ethnicity		
Black or African American only, not Hispanic or Latino	**38**	**95%**
Multiracial Black or African American, not Hispanic or Latino	**2**	**5%**
Gender		
Man	**8**	**20%**
Woman	**31**	**78%**
Prefer not to say	**1**	**3%**
Socioeconomic status		
Former Pell or Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant recipient	**26**	**65%**

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