

Hard Core: Taking Teaching Farther

Denver Teacher Residency examines urban classroom teacher preparedness

Throwing a seasoned reporter and concert oboist into a hard-to-serve Denver Public Schools (DPS) classroom hardly seems like an effective way to combat teacher turnover and low student achievement. But the Denver Teacher Residency (DTR) does just that, proving that when a district takes on preparing its own teachers within its own classrooms by its own experts, the results are ground-breaking.

“This program is an important part of the Denver Plan – our strategy to focus on the instructional core and effective teachers,” said Tom Boasberg, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools. “The best way for our new teachers to learn how to be successful in a DPS classroom is to learn from an outstanding DPS teacher. We are confident that this program will bring a new generation of first-rate educators into Denver’s classrooms.”

The program is entering its second year, funded largely by Janus Education Alliance (JEA), a public-private partnership with DPS, which has given \$3 million toward a 3-year effort to raise the caliber of education and educators in DPS. Janus, whose own mission is to Go Farther, aligns its giving by helping to enhance teacher preparedness while making a significant impact on the Denver community.

“This class of residents really seems to reflect the mission and values of JEA,” said Casey Cortese, President of the Janus Foundation. “Their success over time will encourage other districts and communities to look inward for solutions.”

An eclectic mix of former concert musician, law firm partner, recent college graduates, Peace Corps volunteer, and Rocky Mountain News reporter to name a few, comprise this year’s residency class of 27. Every one of them has a different story of how they came to the DTR and a unique approach to helping Denver’s kids, but collectively reflect the diversity found in urban classrooms.

Their unique life experiences, enriched by a one-year apprenticeship and tailored classroom instruction from partner University of Denver’s Morgridge College of Education (DU), fuel DTR’s rigorous approach. This deep blend of theory and practice makes the DTR model a unique route into teaching, helping residents draw meaningful connections between their daily classroom work and the latest in education theory and research.



DTR Resident Valerie Clark (right) and Lead Teacher Jenny DuPont (left) collaborate in their third grade classroom at McMeen Elementary School.

“I love spending four days a week in the classroom with kids,” says resident Rhianna Burroughs, who despite becoming a mother shortly out of high school,



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graduated Cum Laude from Regis University with a Bachelor's in Communication. "This is a once in a lifetime experience and I can't wait to put some of these ideas to practice in my own class." Her excitement is contagious, though she and the rest of the residents are less than half way through their residency year, which means a full schedule - four days teaching alongside a master teacher and one full-day intensive - working towards their Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction.

Master teachers pass along the knowledge, skills and values they have gained through their own years of experience in an urban classroom and provide direct feedback. The residents are gradually moving from observer, to co-teacher and finally to lead teacher. Each resident has their eyes on the prize – their own DPS high-needs classroom upon successful completion of their residency year.

Although roughly 50% of all urban public school teachers leave within their first three years, the retention rate for urban teacher residency grads beyond those

crucial first three years is 85%. It's a difference that's transforming districts, and DPS is currently one of only six residency programs in the U.S. Time will tell if DPS is able to significantly improve student achievement by investing in tomorrow's teachers. In the meantime, DTR will progress its inaugural class of residents towards graduation and ensure that at first bell next June, DPS is 27 steps closer to increased new teacher retention.

DTR is accepting applications for its second residency class, which will consist of up to 50 Residents who will be placed in high-need DPS classrooms in the 2010-11 school year. The program is committed to finding talent within the local community and is aimed at career-changers or recent college graduates who have a desire to work in urban education but do not yet have a teaching license; special attention is paid to attracting teachers of color and teachers in high-need areas, such as English Language Acquisition (ELA) and special education. More information on DTR and the application – due March 19, 2010 - can be found online at www.denverteacherresidency.org.