

HOW INNOVATIVE STAFFING CAN ADDRESS TEACHER SHORTAGES, PERMANENTLY—AND BOOST LEARNING

BY PUBLIC IMPACT

Although debates continue about exactly what teacher shortages exist each year across the U.S., staffing woes have plagued some schools for decades and began to grow overall after the Great Recession. In one recent five-year period, the share of schools that tried but failed to fill a vacancy tripled¹. For districts with ongoing vacancies, or those forecasting shortages, can innovative staffing designs help—while boosting learning, too?

Innovative staffing means thinking differently about instructional roles and available funding to improve academics, creating new career options for teachers and addressing persistent teaching vacancies. By reallocating funding from these vacancies, existing budgets can fund new staffing models that increase teacher collaboration and pay, extend the reach of excellent teachers, give aspiring teachers a paid residency to set them up for a successful first year, and create school-day schedules that incorporate high-impact tutoring for all students. While some staffing design efforts accomplish one or two of these goals, the most innovative staffing models accomplish all of them, within regular budgets.

This is what the **Opportunity Culture** initiative aims to do. Working within the **Opportunity Culture Principles** (page 3), schools and system leaders gain new tools to address staffing shortages, including high-paying advanced roles, improved support for new teachers, and staffing models that do not require filling every teacher vacancy to ensure that students have access to excellent instruction.

The foundation is the **Multi-Classroom Leader** role, or MCL—a teacher with a track record of high-growth student learning who leads a small teaching team for substantially higher pay. The MCL continues to teach students directly in various ways for a portion of each day; leads lesson planning, data analysis, instructional changes, and small-group tutoring assignments; coaches team teachers; and co-teaches and models great teaching.

But the innovative staffing doesn't stop with this teacher-leader; other roles include **team reach teachers**, who use rotation strategies to directly teach more students and earn more for doing so. Master team reach teachers may take on some leadership responsibilities to assist MCLs and reach even more students. These roles increase collaboration and expand the career ladder of a classroom teacher, while boosting teachers' satisfaction, according to surveys².

Multi-Classroom Leader teams get support from any existing teacher assistants and the addition of instructional paraprofessionals called reach associates. **Reach associates** play a key role on MCL teams, spending the bulk of their time providing instructional support, such as tutoring small groups and supporting students on skills practice and other assignments—all with strong MCL guidance and coaching.

"She adds so much value to our team," MCL Kylie Hankinson said about her team's reach associate, whose time is focused on small-group tutoring. "She pulls groups for us all day long based on student need... The data says it all—these kids are growing."

Reach associates provide crucial support to a teaching team, Principal Christin Reeves said. "I know the collaboration that we are able to put in place through our Opportunity Culture system, with our MCLs and reach associates being able to support so many of our teachers...has really made such a difference."

District leaders see the immediate value of advanced paraprofessionals in the classroom as well as the opportunity to use the role as a grow-your-own pipeline. In Edgecombe County, North Carolina, **Delmonika Vick** decided to work first as a reach associate before fulfilling her dream of becoming a teacher—and stayed in the role for two years because she so loved it. The role "led me into going



Working as a reach associate, Delmonika Vick developed skills to become a stronger classroom teacher, and now teaches high school math.

into the classroom as a stronger teacher than I would have been if I went with my initial plan to go straight into the classroom,” said Vick, now a high school math teacher.

Districts can also work with traditional education prep providers to supply MCL teams with **teacher residents**, who get paid for a role that would otherwise be played by a reach associate. Unlike the short stints of standard student teaching, these teacher candidates learn on the job for a full year, with heavy MCL guidance and feedback.

Two sites using Opportunity Culture models, including teacher residencies, to great advantage are Ector County and Midland independent school districts in Texas.

Ector County Superintendent Scott Muri **said** he understood the power and potential of Opportunity Culture models from seeing them in action since they began, through district-level posts in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Fulton County Schools, and as superintendent of Spring Branch ISD before going to Ector County in 2019, which faced extreme teacher shortages.

“Eighteen percent of our teachers were missing on the first day of school in 2019, and we did not replace a single one. So that’s 356 teacher vacancies day one and subs all year,” he said.

Muri knew Opportunity Culture implementation could help the district reduce that reliance on substitute teachers, generate a pipeline of teachers, improve academically, and provide better career opportunities for teachers to “spread their wings.”

“Opportunity Culture provides that scenario in which our very best teachers have the opportunity to lead and teach at the same time, so your two passions get to come together in the same job—that’s a huge win for teachers,” Muri said. “More kids today have access to our very best, our most effective teachers. ... so, teachers are winning, and kids are winning, and when that happens, you know, that’s the formula for success.”

Muri’s district began in the 2019–20 school year with eight Opportunity Culture schools and 27 MCL roles; by 2022–23, that had expanded to 20 Opportunity Culture schools and about 75 MCL roles.

In Texas, 10 districts and one charter management organization in 2022 were using yearlong, paid teacher residencies as part of their Opportunity Culture models, including Houston ISD, in part to address teacher shortage concerns.

“More kids today have access to our very best, our most effective teachers. ... so, teachers are winning, and kids are winning, and when that happens, you know, that’s the formula for success.”

—Ector County Superintendent Scott Muri

“Statistically, in the United States, 60 percent of teachers teach within 25 miles of the high school from which they graduated,” Muri said. “Our future teachers are our students today—they are sitting in our classrooms, and we have to generate a healthy pipeline and then develop those students today into the teachers tomorrow. ... Our teacher residents that are in college right now have an opportunity to learn from our very best teachers.”

Offering paid, yearlong residencies can **broaden the teacher pipeline, attracting and retaining more people of color**—also benefiting students—and those who otherwise struggle with the costs to become a teacher.

The Midland and Ector County districts work closely with the University of Texas Permian Basin (UTPB) to place residents in schools, and guide and support residents throughout the residency year. Site coordinators from the university routinely observe and check in with residents and the MCL to ensure the best residency experience and education possible, said Chris Hightower, the former Opportunity Culture director for Midland ISD, who now works at the Region 18 Education Service Center.

“One of the great things that has come out of our partnership with UTPB is the connection between what it means to be a student at UTPB—learning about what it is to be a teacher—and then, actually, the implementation of that, so, from theory to actual implementation,” said Ashley Osborne, Ector County’s executive director for talent development. “They want to produce graduates that fill our needs and that are in line with our campuses from day one.”

With a yearlong residency and intensive MCL guidance, aspiring teachers can jump in right away to provide small-group tutoring while also having the time to gain the skills needed to lead a whole class. Teacher residents become a key piece to solving the staffing and scheduling puzzle of how to provide **high-dosage, in-school tutoring for all students**.

Ector County teacher resident Audriana Munoz, for example, had opportunities to teach whole-class lessons, but her team focused on small-group instruction to make academic gains. A typical day was filled with rotations of small-group instruction, in which, she said, “we’re able to see all of our kids every single day, and we’re really proud of that.”

The need to organize those groups exposed Munoz, in depth, to how to analyze and respond to student data and plan instruction, through both team planning meetings and MCL guidance.

“The experience and the wealth of knowledge that they obtain under a teacher is so much more impactful than just student teaching. ... She’s going to be head-and-shoulders above first-year teachers because this basically was like a first year for her,” Principal Micah Arrott said of Munoz, to whom she offered a full-time teaching job after the residency ended.



After completing her yearlong teacher residency, Audriana Munoz was hired by the school district as a full-time teacher.

Being able to **grow her own pipeline of teachers** is more critical than ever: “The teacher shortages out here are no joke,” Arrott said.

“We are setting these people up for success,” Hightower said. “We really want to make sure they stay in the profession, and I think this gives them a wonderful place to start.”

The districts have results to trumpet from their first two Opportunity Culture years. For example, in August 2022, Muri announced the district’s **best recruiting year** in over a decade, with the hiring of more than 400 educators, attributing that in part to Opportunity Culture implementation. And Ector County ISD asked Texas Tech University researchers to conduct an independent review of its first eight Opportunity Culture schools. They **found** that students served by MCL teams achieved learning growth in the top quartile team-wide, on average, highlighting how positive the results were for all students, and especially for English language learners and students considered socioeconomically at risk.

As districts continue to feel the pinch of persistent educator shortages, taking this approach to innovative staffing can not only ease the burden on educators, but lead to **dramatic learning improvements**, for all students, consistently.



OPPORTUNITY CULTURE PRINCIPLES:

For Teachers Extending Their Reach

Teams of teachers and school leaders must choose and tailor models to:

1. Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams
2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach
3. Fund pay within regular budgets
4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development
5. Match authority and accountability to each person’s responsibilities

Endnotes

1. Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2020, October 15). Examining the factors that play a role in the teacher shortage crisis. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED61183.pdf>
2. See: the teacher and staff perceptions tab of the Opportunity Culture Dashboard at <https://www.opportunityculture.org/dashboard/survey/>

Acknowledgments

This brief was written by Sharon Kebschull Barrett of Public Impact. Thank you to Stephanie Dean for feedback and Beverley Tyndall for production.

©2023 Public Impact, Chapel Hill, NC.

Public Impact encourages the sharing and copying of these materials, but we require attribution for all use. If you adapt the materials, you must include on every page “Adapted from OpportunityCulture.org; © 2022 Public Impact.” Materials may not be sold, leased, licensed, or otherwise distributed for compensation. See our Terms of Use page or contact us for more information.

Please cite this publication as: Public Impact: Barrett, S.K. (2023). How innovative staffing can address teacher shortages, feed educator pipelines. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from https://www.opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/How_Innovative_Staffing_Can_Address_Teacher_Shortages_Permanently_And_Boost_Learning.pdf