

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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LOCAL • BAY AREA

MONDAY, JULY 4, 2011

EDUCATION

Schools start residency program

Student teachers get mentors, classrooms with Oakland charter

By Katy Murphy

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Today, many rookie teachers find themselves in a classroom with little preparation — in theory or practice — for the daunting task ahead of them.

Aspire Public Schools, an Oakland-based nonprofit that runs 34 charter schools in the Bay Area, Central Valley and Los Angeles, is testing an alternative to the “sink or swim” approach of organizations such as Teach for America.

The idea? To treat teachers-in-training more like doctors-in-training. The residents, as they are called, spend their first year co-teaching with a mentor as they pursue their credential and master’s degree with University of the Pacific. In Year 2, they are placed in a classroom of their own — ideally, in the same school — with a full teacher’s salary.

“We think we’re going to help them feel much more effective much sooner,” said Heather Kirkpatrick, Aspire’s vice president of

education.

Thursday marked the start of the program’s second year, with 19 new teacher residents chosen from a pool of more than 150 candidates. The teachers-in-training make a four-year commitment to Aspire. In exchange, the organization reimburses them for their graduate school tuition and credentialing fees. First-year residents also earn a stipend of \$13,500, plus benefits; mentor teachers receive an extra \$3,500.

The residency model is not cheap. While U.S. Department of Education and Gates Foundation grants are now footing most of the bill, Kirkpatrick estimates it costs about \$35,000 for each teacher resident.

But Kirkpatrick hopes this careful, in-house preparation of teachers will improve instruction and reduce teacher turnover, as well as its associated costs. One in five teachers leaves each year from Aspire’s Bay Area cluster, which includes nine schools in Oakland, Berkeley and East Palo Alto. A 2007 report by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future estimated that for each teacher who leaves a large,

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urban school district, thousands of dollars in recruitment, training and hiring costs go out the door with them.

Schools in Boston, Chicago and Denver have pioneered the residency model, and in 2009 the Oakland school district applied, unsuccessfully, for a federal grant to do the same. Whether Aspire continues the program four years from now, after the grant money is gone, will depend on how well it’s worked — if it’s clear the teachers are staying longer and their principals are happy with them (and their students’ test scores), Kirkpatrick said.

Katie Kelly-Hankin, a 2008 Brandeis University graduate who will be teaching at Aspire’s California College Preparatory Academy in Berkeley, moved to the Bay Area in mid-June

for the program. She sees teaching as a complex and challenging job, she said, and she doesn’t buy into the notion “that anyone who’s had a good university education can automatically become a good teacher.”

Kelly-Hankin said she was inspired by the idea that the qualities and practices of a good teacher can be learned and cultivated. At the core of the residency program, she said, “There’s a reverence for the profession and I think that’s really lacking in the discussions about education in this country. We’re never going to have enough really great teachers unless we treat teachers that way.”

Read Katy Murphy’s Oakland schools blog at www.IBAbuzz.com/education. Follow her at [Twitter.com/KatyMurphy](https://twitter.com/KatyMurphy).