

Urban Teachers

#4 in a series of ERN issue briefs on innovative approaches to teacher preparation

By Charles Barone and Heather Cope



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Urban Teachers launched in 2010 with three inaugural school partners: two DC public charter schools and the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) system. Urban Teachers was co-founded by Jennifer Green, a former high school English teacher, and Christina Hall, a former attorney and youth advocate. Green and Hall met when both worked in the BCPS central office and observed a lack of preparedness among traditional teacher preparation program graduates and the negative effect that had on schools and students. They envisioned a data-driven approach that emphasized clinical practice to ensure prospective teachers meet the needs of their students, especially students in traditionally under-served school districts.

Urban Teachers' commitment to truly serving the needs of all students is reflected in the fact that it prepares all of its teacher candidates for licensure in both their area of study and in special education. Participants in the Dallas area, where about 40% of students are English Language Learners, also earn certification in English as a second language.

I “I find it offensive that people go into the classroom without any experience. You need to know what you’re doing to do it, that’s someone’s future in your hands...”

TIERRA WOODS, URBAN TEACHERS ALUM



ADMISSIONS

Urban Teachers is highly selective. Applicants to Urban Teachers must have earned a bachelor’s degree with exceptional academic performance and passed any state pre-professional exams, either the Praxis Core (Baltimore, Washington, DC) or Pre-Admission Content Test (Dallas). Applicants must also complete interviews and exhibit core competencies. Core competencies include a commitment to children in underserved areas, perseverance and resilience, a growth mindset, and professional skills. There is no minimum SAT/ACT requirement.

Urban Teachers makes a concerted effort to recruit ethnic minorities and 52% of participants identify as people of color. About 30% of participants are first-generation college graduates, and 40% self-reported receiving a Pell grant as an undergraduate student.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Urban Teachers is a four-year program that operates in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. Urban Teachers is separate from other teacher preparation programs at Johns Hopkins, with dedicated clinical faculty located in each region.¹

Participants who complete the program earn a Master of Science in Education, as well as their teaching license. Urban Teachers offers certification in one of three content areas — elementary education, secondary literacy, and secondary math — and also requires certification in special education. Urban Teachers is one of only a handful of programs, alternative or traditional, that mandates special education certification. Participants in the Dallas area, where about 40% of students are English Language Learners, also earn certification in English as a second language.

Location	Baltimore, MD Washington, DC Dallas, TX
Program Length	4 years (14 month residency + 3 years teaching)
Credential Awarded	Master of Science in Education from Johns Hopkins School of Education Initial teacher licenses in content area and special education for all graduates
Cost to Participants	\$40,000
Annual Enrollment	304
Total Program Graduates	950
Completion Rate	75%

Year 1: Coursework. Coursework begins in the summer, and continues into participants' year-long teacher residencies at partner schools in their respective regions. Participants complete 75% of all required graduate coursework and training in the first year, beginning over the summer and, once the school year begins, in the evening. Coursework focuses on classroom management, assessment, differentiation, special education and inclusion, subject-specific content, and small-group practicums. During practicums, residents provide targeted interventions to a small group of three to five students in the host classroom, administer assessments, use data to inform instruction, and formulate reports that inform their work with students.

For elementary education, content-specific coursework focuses on literacy, mathematics, and special education, with supplemental coursework in science, social studies, educational equity, and trauma. For those seeking secondary literacy certification, coursework focuses on middle and high school English language arts and special education, with an emphasis on addressing common reading challenges. For certification in secondary mathematics, coursework focuses on middle and high school mathematics and special education, with supplemental coursework on literacy in a math context.²

Year 1: Clinical Practice. Host teachers fully incorporate residents into their classrooms, engaging them in the planning and delivery of instruction, and provide regular feedback. Residents complete 1,500 hours of co-teaching and receive 36 hours of one-on-one coaching from a local, designated Johns Hopkins clinical faculty member. Clinical faculty have an average of 10 years of classroom experience. Coaching is conducted through a recurring cycle of support, practice, and reflection. Coaching formats include:



Planning meetings: Dialogues centered around a specific area of teacher practice.



Classroom observations: Coaches provide participants with targeted, evidence-based, constructive feedback.



Comprehensive coaching cycles: A “metacognitive” approach in which the coach works with a participant to develop a lesson, observes the practice of that lesson, and provides feedback.



Focused observation: Coaches observe, for a short duration, a discrete behavior or instructional practice.



Inter-visitations: Participants conduct site visits to other K-12 classrooms viewed through Urban Teachers' clinical practice rubric.



Progress debriefs: Coaches encourage participants to examine available data, identify the successes and challenges in their work, and set their own goals for future practice.

I “I knew [Urban Teachers] would give me a year to grow and make mistakes,” she explained. “Other programs just give you a few weeks of training or put you straight in the classroom on your own.”

— URBAN TEACHERS RESIDENT
CHATOIA MARTIN



Throughout the first year, residents must earn a B- or higher in every class, maintain an overall GPA of 3.0, and demonstrate instructional competence in order to progress through the program. Because Urban Teachers’ standards are high, the program reports that one of their key challenges is identifying enough qualified participants. Urban Teachers is, nonetheless, intentional about rigor and attrition as a means to screen out those who do not meet its high standards for excellence, professionalism, and effectiveness.

Years 2. Urban Teachers’ participants are hired as teachers of record in their placement schools, teaching full time and receiving coaching from Johns Hopkins clinical faculty, while also completing the remaining 25% of graduate coursework. Participants are assessed both on classroom observations by coaches using a teacher performance rubric and on improvement in their students’ academic achievement. Poor performance on these assessments could result in probation and participants who, after a period of intensive support, do not improve are exited from the program.

Years 3 and 4. Participants continue as full-time teachers, with ongoing coaching from Johns Hopkins faculty. Participants who have demonstrated effective instructional practice and, on average, at least one year of student growth for a year of instruction may apply for full certification in their content area and in special education at the end of their third year. In year four, participants may request continued support and guidance from Johns Hopkins faculty as they continue as full-time classroom teachers.

Urban Teachers is authorized to certify teachers through the state education agency or department in its respective regions — the Maryland State Department of Education for Baltimore, the Texas Education Agency for Dallas, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education for Washington, DC. The Johns Hopkins School of Education is an accredited graduate school through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the Maryland State Department of Education.

W “We are very intentional about mid-program attrition, using performance indicators to quickly determine which teachers are not on track to becoming effective and investing our energies in those who are.”³

URBAN TEACHERS' TEACHER PRACTICE RUBRIC FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Effective Teachers

- Build productive and nurturing classroom environments
- Are diagnosticians
- Set precise goals and enact them
- Foster academic talk
- Have a growth mindset
- Exhibit professionalism

COST

Tuition charged to participants is \$40,000. Participants are eligible for, and most receive, financial aid, including federal aid, loans, grants, and scholarships. Participants may also be eligible for AmeriCorps and may use the education awards to cover tuition costs.

Placement schools/districts pay \$25,000 per participant, \$20,000 of which is for the participant's first-year stipend. Urban Teachers also receives funding from private and family foundations, corporate foundations, and individuals. In many instances, funders support operations within a particular geographic region or related to a particular content area (e.g. STEM, early childhood).

Participants earn a stipend of \$20,000 plus health benefits in the first year of the program. In the second through fourth year of the program, participants earn a teacher's salary, averaging at least \$48,000 to start. Some receive an additional increase after earning their master's degree at the end of year two if the state, district, or school in which they teach offers one.

OUTCOMES

Of participants, 75% successfully complete the program. Over half of participants earn certification in elementary education, another 27% earn certification in secondary literacy, and 18% earn certification in secondary math.

Of host teachers working with participants in their first-year residency, 91% believe residents are on track to be highly effective teachers the following year. Of participants, 94% believe Urban Teachers provided them the knowledge and skills needed to be an effective teacher.

In Baltimore, 81% of first-year teachers in the Urban Teachers program received a rating of "Effective" or "Highly Effective" in the city's evaluation system, compared to 68% of all first-year teachers.

Of program completers participating in an alumni survey, 91% are still working as a teacher or teacher leader.

S “Society doesn’t value teachers in a way that is commensurate with their impact. We see this in the way teachers are perceived, compensated, supported, and, most notably, prepared for the profession. This systemic lack of investment is most glaring in urban classrooms, where positions are often filled by under-prepared, novice teachers or, worse yet, left vacant. Not only do educators deserve better, but our children certainly do as well.”

— PETER SHULMAN, CEO, URBAN TEACHERS



SOURCES

Urban Teachers (<https://urbanteachers.org>)

1. Johns Hopkins also offers a more traditional Master of Arts in Teaching and certification program, as well as master's-only programs for alumni of other alternative certification programs.
2. For more on the evidence base for and approaches to literacy in a math context, see: Cappelli, Amanda. (2015). “Implementing Literacy Strategies and Activities to Help Math Students in Geometry.” *Education Masters, Paper 318*. Retrieved at: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1317&context=education_ETD_masters
3. Jackson, C. & Mackler, K. (2016). “Assessing Effectiveness: How Urban Teachers Evaluates Its New Teachers.” Retrieved at: <https://urbanteachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/UrbanTeachersEvaluationModel-April2016.pdf>