

Relay Graduate School of Education

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

By Charles Barone and Heather Cope



Above: Relay/GSE San Antonio Residents

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Founded initially as Teacher U in 2007 by three charter management organizations in partnership with Hunter College in New York, the Relay Graduate School of Education became an independent, accredited institution in 2011 after receiving approval from the New York State Board of Regents. The founding charter networks — Achievement First, KIPP, and Uncommon Schools — initially focused on developing the teacher pool and pipeline for their respective schools and sought a higher education partner willing to create a practice-based program. They found one in then-Dean David Steiner and the Hunter College School of Education, where they created Teacher U outside of Hunter College’s traditional teacher preparation programs.

Location	Atlanta Baton Rouge Chicago Connecticut Dallas-Fort Worth Delaware Denver Houston Indianapolis Memphis Nashville Newark New Orleans New York City Philadelphia & Camden San Antonio Washington, DC
Program Length	2 years
Credential Awarded	Master’s degree Initial teaching license
Cost to Participants	\$14,000
Annual Enrollment	1,000
Total Program Graduates	1,000
Completion Rate	81%

T

“The Relay Teaching Residency has helped me make professional connections with master educators that serve as both my professors and mentors in the field.”

— YMANI BELCHER, RELAY TEACHING RESIDENCY ALUM

Three years later, as part of New York State’s federal Race to the Top application, then-Commissioner of Education Steiner led the revision of state policies which opened up teacher preparation to non-traditional schools of education. These policy revisions, in addition to a desire for additional autonomy, prompted the leaders of Teacher U to launch Relay as a stand-alone, non-profit graduate school of education. After receiving its charter from the New York Board of Regents in 2011 and earning regional accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 2012, Relay began to offer master’s degree and certification programs for teachers. Later, Relay added fellowships for school leaders, teacher residencies, and exploration programs for college students. Relay also expanded geographically over the last decade and now operates 17 campuses across the country and serves school leaders nationwide.

RELAY TEACHING RESIDENCY

Relay offers a two-year master’s degree program that includes a one-year residency in 16 of its 17 regions. In Connecticut, the residency program is a one-year, certification-only program. Program participants spend the first year as residents at a partner school in their respective region, completing graduate coursework and training in the evenings and on weekends. Partner schools predominantly serve low-income students and are selected based on a number of factors, including mission, pipeline, and programmatic alignment; and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Residency participants typically earn their initial teaching license at the end of the first year. In the second year of the program, participants serve in lead teaching positions and complete additional graduate coursework.

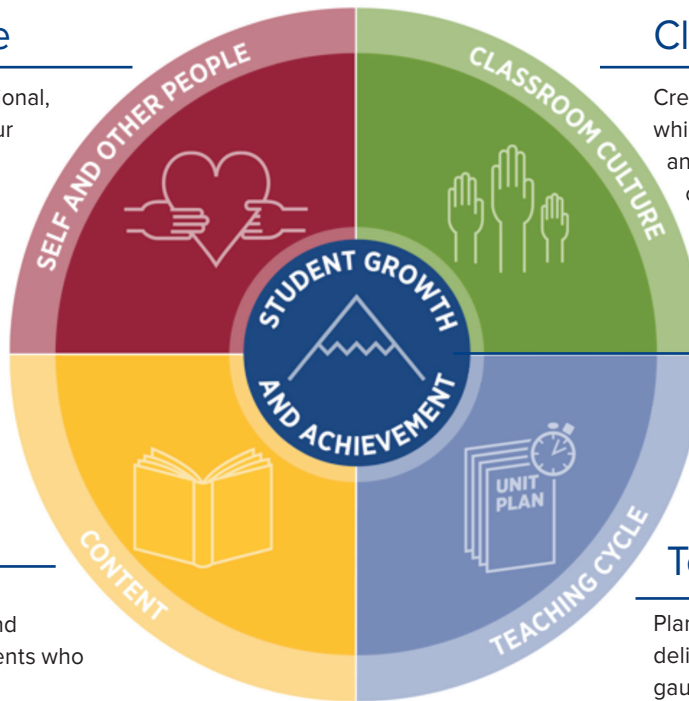
To enroll at Relay, participants must have a full-time resident position at a partner school. Partner schools vary by region and include both district and charter schools. Relay helps applicants without positions to find a placement. Additional criteria include a bachelor’s degree with a minimum 3.0 GPA; demonstration of content knowledge, professionalism, and commitment to the mission; cultural responsiveness; and openness to feedback. There is no minimum SAT/ACT requirement. Certain regions may have additional requirements, including passage of state licensure exams. Approximately 30% of participants are male and 70% identify as people of color.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The program curriculum centers around four elements — building subject-specific knowledge (Content), cultivating a fun and productive learning environment (Classroom Culture), developing personal connections with students and families (Self & Other People), and creating high-quality lessons (Teaching Cycle). These four elements center around and support student academic growth and achievement. Coursework is delivered in-person (60%) and online (40%), with the majority of assignments consisting of video submissions of participants teaching and classroom work samples. Coursework is evaluated using program-created rubrics with a standard five-category scale.

Self & Other People

Be aware of yourself as a professional, reflect on your ability to reach your students, and be mindful of who they are as individuals.



Classroom Culture

Create a joyful, engaging environment in which students are meaningfully on-task and feel ownership of their individual and collective success.

Student Growth & Achievement

Identify learning outcomes and align assessments to those goals. Continuously track student progress and verify achievement of outcomes.

Content

Apply the strongest teaching techniques to specific subjects and grade levels, and to helping students who struggle and have special needs.

Teaching Cycle

Plan your lessons carefully. Refine how you deliver instruction. Use assessments to gauge learning and shape next steps.

In the summer before participants begin their residencies, coursework focuses on introducing participants to the four elements of the curriculum and establishing strong foundations for effective teaching. Participants learn about theory related to mindsets of effective teachers and establishing classroom culture, as well as the practical skills derived from research and prior experience. Participants also establish a vision for their classroom culture, plan the routines and systems they will use in their classrooms, practice communicating and reinforcing expectations, and craft lesson plans.

I “It’s absolutely critical for our children to be taught by a diverse teaching workforce. At Relay, we’re actively creating a space that is affirming for historically underrepresented educators, like our Black and Latinx teachers.”

— DR. REBECCA GOOD (RIGHT), FOUNDING DEAN, RELAY CONNECTICUT



In the fall and spring of the first year, while participants serve as residents, coursework focuses on critical teaching skills and practices essential for novice teachers, including data-driven instruction, developing and administering assessments, measuring student learning, strengthening student engagement, building an inclusive classroom culture, developing relationships with students and families, exploring teacher identity, and content-specific strategies. Participants also learn about strategies specific for teaching exceptional learners and English language learners.

In addition to coursework in the first year, participants also gradually take on more classroom and teaching responsibilities. By the spring, participants teach at least one period a day and demonstrate readiness for lead teaching the following year through school and program assessments. Participants also teach a minimum of three weeks of a full-time teaching schedule to ensure they build teaching stamina. Throughout, participants receive regular support from assigned resident advisors who model and co-teach lessons, assist with curriculum and lesson planning, provide weekly feedback, and score assessments. Participants also engage in deliberate practice sessions, which are intensive sessions of trying out a lesson, receiving feedback from faculty and peers, and trying it again, three to four hours each week.

During the first year, participants are assessed through gateway performance assessments, observations, portfolio assignments, lesson plans, student work and data, and reflections. Gateway performance assessments serve as checkpoints throughout the first year of the program, assessing residents’ proficiency in mindset, professionalism, classroom culture, and instruction. Gateways communicate to participants whether they are on track to become lead teachers; repeated poor performance on Gateway assessments may result in dismissal from the program.

N “Now, more than ever, I feel confident walking into my classroom ready to fight the good fight for my students. I thank Relay for helping me to continually increase my effectiveness and impact.”

— ARIEL PAGE, RELAY TEACHING RESIDENCY ALUM

Participants typically earn their initial teaching license at the end of the first year of the program, with exact requirements varying by region. Toward the end of the first year, participants will also apply for full-time teaching positions for the following school year.

In the second year of the program, while participants serve as full-time classroom teachers, coursework focuses on unit planning, incorporating literacy in all content, rigor, character, measuring long-term student progress, and culturally responsive teaching. Participants also prepare for their master's defense, which is a capstone assessment that includes a video of an outstanding lesson, analysis of student performance and character growth, reflections on their development as a teacher, and delivery of an oral defense. Assessments during the second year include observations, portfolio assignments, lesson plans, student work, and the master's defense. Master's degrees are awarded after successful completion of the second year.

Relay is authorized to award degrees and/or recommend teachers for certification by the state education agency or department that oversees its residency program regions. Relay also holds regional accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and programmatic accreditation with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Relay is in the process of obtaining accreditation with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, the accrediting body that replaced NCATE.

COST

The total cost for the two-year residency program is \$35,000. Costs are covered through a combination of sources, including AmeriCorps education awards, philanthropic funding, and tuition. Participants pay no more than \$14,000 in tuition over the two years and are eligible for federal financial aid.

Participants earn a stipend or salary from their placement school during their residency in the first year of the program. Amounts vary by region and school but are typically less than first-year teachers (\$20,000 to \$40,000). Participants earn a teacher's salary during the second year of the program.

OUTCOMES

Of participants, 84% are hired into lead teaching roles in the second year of the program. Of participants who successfully pass the second gateway assessment in the fall of the first year, 89% are hired into lead teaching roles in the second year. Among the first two cohorts, over 75% remained in teaching after successfully completing the program.

Over 40% of program completers earn certification in elementary education, 37% earn a secondary subject-specific certification, 10% earn certification in early childhood, and 5% earn certification in special education.

Certification Area	Percent of Participants
Elementary Education	42%
Secondary ELA	14%
Secondary Math	11%
Early Childhood	10%
Secondary Science	7%
Middle School (General)	6%
Secondary Social Studies	5%
Special Education	5%

Of employers hiring Relay graduates, 92% are satisfied, and 96% of program participants agree the program prepared them to be full-time teachers. In 2016-17, participants who successfully completed their master's defense saw their students grow by 1.3 years in reading.

SOURCES

Relay Graduate School of Education (<https://relay.edu>)