

# Santa Maria-Bonita School District and California Lutheran University

## Introduction

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School districts across the country have embraced teacher residency programs as potential solutions for pressing teacher shortages. Residency programs are “district-serving teacher education programs that pair a full year residency teaching alongside an expert mentor teacher with coursework about teaching and learning that is tightly integrated with clinical



practice.”<sup>1</sup> Paid teacher residencies hold the promise of developing a more diverse and effective teaching workforce, in part because they provide financial support and deep on-the-job training to teacher candidates.<sup>2</sup> This is significant for candidates of color and candidates from nontraditional backgrounds who often face barriers such as financial constraints and insufficient training when entering the teaching profession.

As teacher residency programs expand throughout the country, strong Local Education Agencies (LEA) and educator preparation program (EPP) partnerships result in innovative and effective residencies that provide robust preparation experiences for teacher candidates. Education First created the [Partnering on Paid Residencies Toolkit](#) as a resource to support LEAs and EPPs interested in building successful residency programs.

This case study complements the toolkit by showcasing the Pathways to Teaching residency program, a strategic initiative born from the collaboration between the Santa Maria-Bonita School District (SMBSD) and California Lutheran University (Cal Lutheran). This partnership not only underscores several key recommendations from the toolkit but also serves as a powerful example of how local collaboration can drive educational outcomes.

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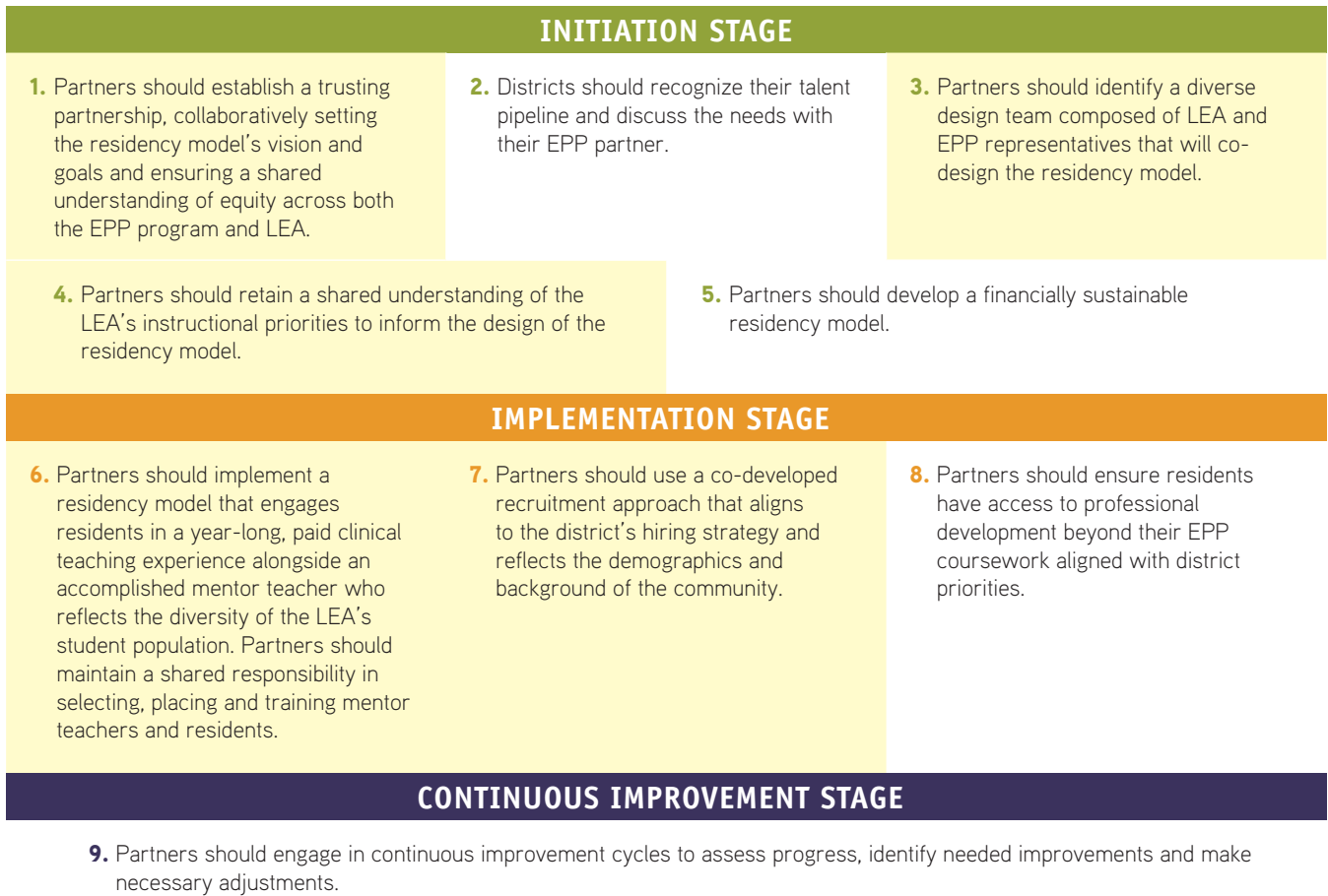
1 Education First, 2024

2 Learning Policy Institute, 2024

# Recommendations for Strong Partnerships

**Partnering on Paid Residencies** outlines three stages for establishing effective paid teacher residencies: initiation, implementation and continuous improvement. The toolkit provides targeted recommendations for LEAs and EPPs to follow at each

stage. This case study spotlights how the SMBSD and Cal Lutheran collaboration exemplifies the best practices highlighted in the graphic below, bringing the toolkit’s guidance to life.



# Program Background

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Located in the heart of the Santa Maria Valley, SMBSD is the largest school district in Santa Barbara County. The district serves 16,703 students across 21 schools, with the majority of students being English Language Learners.<sup>3</sup> SMBSD has developed multiple teacher pipeline initiatives intended to increase the number of local teachers and leaders within the district. The district’s partnership with Cal Lutheran is one such initiative.

Cal Lutheran and SMBSD have a long-standing partnership that began several years ago with an administrative program they co-led and hosted. However, the partnership that created the Pathways to Teaching program was forged by several state-level forces. In 2018, California significantly increased its investment in teacher residency programs, allocating **millions of dollars in grant funding** to residency programs targeting high-needs areas such as STEM and bilingual education.<sup>4</sup> California also implemented a plan for universal transitional kindergarten (TK) in 2023, creating an urgent need for thousands of new teachers. Given this context, leadership at SMBSD began deliberations to support current

district staff in earning a teaching credential. As part of their considerations, SMBSD leadership surveyed instructional aides and paraprofessionals in the district to gauge their interest in a potential residency program, smartly pressure-testing their stakeholders before moving forward with the program. The response from staff was overwhelming and positive.

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*“Within 24 hours, we had 115 of our employees respond... saying, ‘Yes, please build this program.’ And then it was a moral imperative [for us to develop the program].”*

Shelli Hart, SMBSD

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As a result, SMBSD began to seek a university partner that was willing to align with the district’s program model. Cal Lutheran, though located more than 100 miles from the SMBSD, was interested in building a program that truly meets the needs of district students. Together, the partners collaborated to apply for capacity-building and implementation grants from the state and began to address SMBSD’s need for more pre-kindergarten, bilingual and special education teachers by developing a paid residency program.



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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Learning Policy Institute, 2023

Partners should establish a trusting partnership, collaboratively setting the residency model's vision and goals and ensuring a shared understanding of equity across both the EPP program and LEA.

During their initial meeting, SMBSD and Cal Lutheran leaders recognized a strong alignment of values, particularly in their shared commitment to creating a rigorous training program that leverages local talent by engaging district administrators and teachers as adjunct professors for the residents. Both partners also experienced ease in working with the other, as they felt they had compatible personalities that allowed for authentic and reciprocal relationships. Together, Cal Lutheran and SMBSD created a cohesive vision to increase access to the teaching profession for first-generation Latinx candidates in the district. They also articulated a set of shared goals: 1) increase the number of TK teachers in the district, 2) increase the number of bilingual teachers in the district and 3) increase the number of teachers who reflect the demographics of the predominantly Latinx student body.

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*"We had a stroke of good fortune of having the right people in the right room that are willing to work really hard."*

Mike Hillis, Cal Lutheran

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*"We are like-minded and we have a commitment to the work. At least for me, it doesn't feel like work."*

Shelli Hart, SMBSD

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## 3

### Identify a diverse design team composed of LEA & EPP representatives that will co-design the residency model.

From there, the leadership implemented a shared governance structure with a regular weekly meeting schedule that includes a professor, an admissions representative and a dean from Cal Lutheran; a Program Specialist of Teacher Development, a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) for Teacher Development and a Budget Manager from SMBSD; and a technical assistance provider, the Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED). Weekly meetings demonstrated the partners' commitment to the program's success and proved beneficial as the

two teams worked to co-design the residency. These meetings continue to provide a structure for the group to regularly discuss the barriers that emerge when implementing a new program. For example, a Cal Lutheran representative consistently keeps the team informed on students' progress with coursework and identifies any challenges students face. This proactive approach enables the partnership to collaboratively problem-solve and develop tailored support systems that help students overcome obstacles and stay on track.

## 4

### Retain a shared understanding of LEA's instructional priorities to inform the design of the residency model.

Partners have demonstrated a willingness to shift how teacher preparation is traditionally conducted by co-designing a program that reinforces SMBSD's instructional priorities. As part of the program, SMBSD staff serve as adjunct faculty at Cal Lutheran. This arrangement enables Cal Lutheran to tailor instruction to meet SMBSD's needs and helps facilitate collaboration between the two campuses, which are located hours away from each other. As Cal Lutheran adjunct faculty, instructors attend in-person training at Cal Lutheran several times a year and then teach in-person at the district the rest of the year.



We co-develop a recruitment approach that aligns to the district’s hiring strategy and reflects the demographics and background of the community.

The Pathways to Teaching program is one component of a more extensive set of Grow Your Own strategies developed by SMBSD. The model is focused on 1) recruiting teachers with backgrounds similar to those of SMBSD students and 2) promoting economic mobility within the community. As a result, the program initially focused on recruiting bilingual TK teachers and later expanded to focus on special education teachers from within the district.



Partners should implement a residency model that engages residents in a year-long, paid clinical teaching experience alongside an accomplished mentor teacher who reflects the diversity of the LEA’s student population. Partners maintain a shared responsibility in selecting, placing and training mentor teachers and residents.

Operating on a cohort model with multiple residents in each school, Pathways to Teaching aims to place residents in cohorts in schools to foster a sense of community and support. In the coming year, the program is implementing a model in which residents substitute on Mondays and Fridays and student-teach Tuesday through Thursday until they start their full-time practice with mentor teachers. This shift is being made to give school principals flexibility to manage their staffing needs and to create a more sustainable model long-term.

In addition to their substitute pay, residents receive a \$20,000 cost-of-living stipend and an additional \$17,500 for tuition. Upon completing their degree, which includes an option to earn a master’s, they can expect to start as first-year teachers with a salary of \$64,000. Currently, the program is funded by a combination of the California Teacher Residency Grant Program, which provides \$40,000 for cost-of-living stipends and tuition for each resident. Residents can also apply to the [Golden State Teacher Grant Program](#) for an additional \$20,000, to Cal Lutheran’s Manken Family Scholarship for an additional \$10,000 and to [California’s Classified Employee Grant](#) for an additional \$4,200.

## Partnership Impact

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Although it's still in its early stages and, thus, lacks extensive data on program impact, it has shown promising outcomes. In its first year, Pathways to Teaching successfully recruited candidates who reflect the community's demographics; all participants were Latinx and certified as bilingual, early childhood teachers set to start in the 2024-2025 school year. This has been instrumental in expanding the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program at SMBSD, meeting a critical need within the district. These accomplishments have enhanced the program's reputation as a viable route to becoming a teacher in the community.

Furthermore, the partnership has allowed Cal Lutheran to establish a presence in a new part of the state, broadening its influence and capacity to train future educators. The program expanded this year with a cohort of 19 residents pursuing TK certification in the Fall of 2024 and plans for a new cohort of special education candidates to start in Spring 2025.

As the program continues, the partnership intends to strengthen data collection systems and practices to measure and track resident progress and student outcomes, thus supporting continuous improvement and sustained impact over time. In the meantime, they have begun sharing their work with the field and plan to continue supporting others in developing teacher residencies. With these efforts, the partnership will continue to transform and strengthen teacher preparation in SMBSD and serve as an example for other residency programs.

### BranchED's Partnership Role

BranchED works with partnerships to design, implement and continuously improve teacher residency models. In support of Cal Lutheran and SMBSD's Pathways to Teaching program, BranchED outlined sustainability measures and highlighted the structures and benefits of multiple strategies. These discussions led to the transition from teacher residents as instructional assistants to teacher residents as permanent substitutes, a model that improved financial sustainability and provided additional benefits to school communities. Furthermore, BranchED views data empowerment as a key component of quality teacher residency programs. As new teachers graduate from this partnership, BranchED is supporting them in strengthening their data collection and review processes, ensuring it can effectively demonstrate its long-term impact.

## WORKS CITED

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