



Montana Teacher Residency Program Handbook

2025-2026

Program Overview

Founded in 2022, the Montana Teacher Residency Program (MTRP) is a year-long student teaching opportunity for higher-education students in Montana seeking initial teacher licensure. The MTRP provides student participants, Resident Teachers, with a monthly stipend of \$1,400, last-dollar tuition waiver, and guaranteed housing assistance during their year-long, mentored student teaching. In exchange for these benefits, Resident Teachers in the MTRP agree to teach in a Montana public school for 3 years within 5 years of completing their student teaching, Residency Year. This gives Resident Teachers a chance to go in-depth with acquiring knowledge and skills related to the practices of education while being compensated for the commitment. Given the MTRP's structure, Resident Teachers will finish their final degree requirements online, or alternative format, allowing them to effectively complete their studies within their Educator Preparation Program (EPP) while participating in the MTRP.

There are many goals of MTRP. In addition to giving Resident Teachers a more in-depth experience, the MTRP was designed with the goal of incentivizing teaching in a wider range of communities across the state and increasing long-term teacher retention. By working with rural and understaffed districts, it is our hope that the districts, Resident Teachers, and EPPs will all be served with an efficient model of placing teachers in areas where they are greatly needed and appreciated.

The MTRP is made possible through the collaboration of several key partners. The University of Montana Western (UMW) acts as the MTRP's 'Hub', responsible for facilitation and providing core operations. The Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are the institutions where Resident Teachers are enrolled to earn their teacher licensure. Lastly, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) provides the learning labs, professional development opportunities, and funding for the MTRP. Each of these partners play a crucial role in supporting the MTRP and ensuring its success.

Since fiscal year 2025, the Montana State Legislature supplies funding through [MCA 20-4-702](#). For more information on MCA 20-4-702, please visit the official Montana Legislature website.

Roles within the Program

The Montana Teacher Residency Program is a collaborative effort with multiple stakeholders. These stakeholders include: the Resident Teachers (student teachers), Teacher Leaders (Resident Teacher mentors), host school districts, and Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). Furthermore, The University of Montana Western serves as the MTRP's 'Hub' and facilitator, while the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) initiated and distributes funds for the MTRP. Each stakeholder has responsibilities that must be met to ensure individual and collective success with the MTRP. These roles are discussed below in detail.

Resident Teacher

Resident Teachers are students seeking initial teacher licensure who are preparing for their student teaching experience in the upcoming academic year. They begin by participating in the summer orientation after which they enter the Residency Year: a one-year, in-school student teaching experience under the guidance of a Teacher Leader. The Residency Year is completed in an 80/20 time model, wherein 80 percent of the Resident Teacher's time during a school week is in the student teaching classroom and the other 20 percent is dedicated to completing coursework outside of the classroom. Throughout the Residency Year, they receive various benefits which include a monthly stipend of \$1,400 (pre-taxed), a last-dollar tuition waiver, and housing assistance in exchange for their commitment to teach in a Montana public school district for a period of three years, within five, following the Residency Year.

It is important to note that Resident Teachers must sign contracts before beginning the MTRP, representing the commitment to complete the Residency Year as well as teaching for 3 years in a Montana public school following the student teaching portion of the MTRP. Failure to honor these commitments will enact the clawback of the contract, in which case the tuition waiver received will be converted into a loan that must be repaid. After the completion of the Residency Year, they share their classroom experiences as they fulfill the teaching commitment.

Teacher Leader

Teacher Leaders play a crucial role in the MTRP by actively engaging in coaching and modeling instructional practices to assist the Resident Teacher. They contribute to the professional development of aspiring educators by sharing their expertise and providing guidance. Teacher Leaders will participate in evaluations of the MTRP as well as student teaching evaluations set by the Resident Teacher's EPP. Additionally, Teacher Leaders are provided professional development throughout the Residency Year, which offers a collaborative learning environment to support their ongoing growth. As recognition for their important contributions, Teacher Leaders receive up to a \$6,000 (pre-taxed) stipend, highlighting the value placed on their dedication and expertise in the teaching profession.

District / Administration

Districts play a pivotal role in empowering educators, fostering a culture of innovation and leadership, and elevating the quality of education in their county. They demonstrate their commitment to the MTRP by offering various resources and opportunities to the Resident Teachers. One essential benefit provided by district partners is housing assistance during the placement period, ensuring that the Resident Teachers can focus on their student teaching without worrying about housing costs. District partners actively engage in yearly MTRP evaluations, reflecting their commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

Educator Preparation Programs

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are dedicated to nurturing and empowering future teachers and employ a thorough selection process to recruit Resident Teachers. By

meticulously choosing these students, they ensure a diverse and talented pool of individuals passionate about making a positive impact in education. To further support the Resident Teachers' educational journeys, these EPPs offer flexible course delivery options, allowing the Resident Teachers to balance their professional commitments with their studies effectively. Resident Teachers remain a student of their EPP during the Residency Year and fulfill their required student teaching obligations as set by the EPP.

Recognizing the financial challenges many aspiring educators face, EPPs calculate and distribute a last-dollar-in tuition waiver, funded by the MTRP, to the Resident Teachers. This financial support helps alleviate the burden of educational expenses and encourages talented individuals to pursue their teaching ambitions without undue financial constraints.

As part of their commitment to excellence and continuous improvement, EPPs actively take part in MTRP evaluations. These evaluations serve as critical assessments of their initiatives and projects, allowing them to ensure their courses are still relevant, impactful, and aligned with the ever-evolving needs of the education landscape.

University of Montana Western

The University of Montana Western (UMW) acts as the main correspondent and facilitator for the MTRP. UMW has many responsibilities in facilitating the MTRP, a few of which are: working with the EPPs to recruit and place Resident Teachers, supporting Resident Teachers with their housing assistance negotiations, as well as answering questions and giving support to the stakeholders involved in the MTRP. UMW works closely with the OPI to conduct the evaluations of the MTRP and provide the learning labs and professional development to the Resident Teachers and Teacher Leaders.

Office of Public Instruction

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) actively leads MTRP evaluations, sponsors the Resident Teacher learning labs and Teacher Leader professional development, and provides funding for the MTRP including facilitation and participant benefits. Through these monetary benefits, OPI aims to support and recognize the valuable contributions of educators who bring innovation and leadership to the field. By offering these opportunities and incentives, the OPI encourages the development and implementation of innovative teaching practices.

Monetary Aspects

There are numerous monetary benefits to the MTRP, dictated by MCA 20-4-702, which include the following:

Resident Teacher Monthly Stipend

All Resident Teachers in the MTRP will receive stipends in the form of \$1,400, pre-taxed, for 10 months over the course of Residency Year. This stipend is funded by the MTRP and will help offset the cost of living while Resident Teachers participate in the Program.

Housing Assistance

Resident Teachers will receive housing assistance from the district in which they are placed. The purpose of this is to help alleviate or eliminate any housing cost that may accrue while the Resident Teachers are student teaching in the MTRP. There are various kinds of housing assistance, but districts will generally offer one of three types: gas/mileage reimbursement, a set monthly stipend, or district housing. The final housing assistance decision will be made between the Resident Teacher and the district.

Examples of housing assistance that could be provided are as follows: a Resident Teacher who is from out of town may receive either livable housing or a monthly rent stipend that allows the student to seek housing in the area. A Resident Teacher who has available housing already in the area may be provided with a utility or mileage stipend. Regardless of the type of housing assistance, all districts MUST provide some form of stipend or livable housing during the Resident Teacher's participation.

Tuition Waiver

Resident Teachers are eligible for a last-dollar tuition waiver, funded by the MTRP, to eliminate tuition costs during the Residency Year. However, since the tuition waiver is a last-dollar model, not all Resident Teachers will qualify. A last-dollar waiver is one that will cover the cost of all remaining tuition once all other applicable grants or scholarships are first applied to the balance. If after all financial aid calculations have been completed and the Resident Teacher still has a tuition balance, during the Residency Year, they will receive a waiver that amounts to the remaining tuition balance. If there is no unmet tuition amount after all other financial aid is calculated, the waiver will not be disbursed. It is also important to note that the tuition waiver will only cover tuition costs and does not include fees, such as a course fee, accrued through the Resident Teacher's EPP.

Teacher Leader Stipend

Teacher Leaders will be compensated for mentoring a Resident Teacher. The stipend total amount, funded by the MTRP, will be up to \$6,000, pre-taxed, disbursed in a split winter and summer payment. It is important to note that the stipend amount is determined by the number of Resident Teachers in a district, not by the number of Teacher Leaders. Examples of this are included below:

Scenario A: A secondary education Resident Teacher is seeking licensure in science and math and is splitting the Residency Year with a science Teacher Leader and a math Teacher Leader. Because there is only one Resident Teacher, the total stipend for the year is \$6,000 which will be split between the Teacher Leaders.

Scenario B: A district hosts two Resident Teachers seeking elementary degrees and each one works with a single Teacher Leader. In this scenario there are two Resident Teachers, so each Teacher Leader will receive the full \$6,000 stipend.

Flexible Course Delivery

Since the Residency Year occurs during the last year of a Resident Teacher's degree program, the Resident Teacher may take remaining courses online, synchronously, or another modality. To help alleviate the burden of a full student teaching experience while taking courses, the MTRP is run on an 80/20 time model, wherein 80 percent of the Resident Teacher's time is in the classroom fulfilling student teaching requirements and the other 20 percent is dedicated to completing coursework outside of the classroom.

A Resident Teacher may need to take classes from an outside EPP if the course needed is not offered from their home institution. If this occurs, the Resident Teacher must comply with all requirements of the class dictated by the outside EPP.

Orientations and Meetings

Throughout the year, Resident Teachers and Teacher Leaders may be required to attend various summits and informational sessions. These meetings are designed to further enrich the knowledge the Resident Teacher is receiving and establish networks of practice. Please refer to the Montana Teacher Residency Program webpage to view the dates of the orientation, learning labs, professional development, and final gathering, and all other important dates.

<https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Licensure/Montana-Teacher-Residency>



Sample Timeline of Teaching Responsibilities

Following the first year of MTRP, the OPI was frequently asked what a timeline of student teaching should look like on a yearlong model. The simple answer to this is that there is not one timeline that will cover all Resident Teachers and situations. For example, most elementary Resident Teachers are on a year-long model due to the nature of elementary education while secondary Resident Teachers may be on a semester model.

While there is not one catch-all model that can be applied to every Resident Teacher, we can provide a general outline of what the year should look like in MOST scenarios. A sample timeline is as follows:

Month 1: Acclimating to the Classroom

In this month, Resident Teachers will go through PIR or training days to learn the expectations of the district before the beginning of the school year. As the school year begins, the Resident Teacher will start by observing the Teacher Leader, learning their methodologies, grading practices, and other pertinent information for the year. After a week or more of learning the classroom expectations, Resident Teachers may begin to occasionally teach lessons based off the Teacher Leader's lesson plans, as well as learning effective methods of grading assessments.

Months 2-3: Incorporating More Instruction

As Resident Teachers have learned the procedures of the classroom, they should begin to actively teach more of the lessons during the day based off the Teacher Leader's lesson plans. Additionally, Resident Teachers should begin learning lesson planning procedures and may commence some lesson planning of their own.

Months 4-5: Taking the Lead on Instruction

Resident Teachers should now begin to actively teach in the classroom for most of the school day. Lesson plans should be a collaborative effort between the Teacher Leader and the Resident Teacher, with an increasing focus on input from the Resident Teacher. It is important to note that during this time the semester break will occur for most secondary Resident Teachers. Depending on the situation, they may want to revisit all the earlier steps before the new semester begins if the future classes vary significantly from the first semester of classes.

Months 6-8: Continued Classroom Leadership, Reflection

As the school year progresses into the latter half, Resident Teachers should continue to take the lead with teaching and planning, while receiving constant feedback and assistance from the Teacher Leader to hone their skills.

Months 9-10: Finishing the Residency Year

During these months, the Resident Teacher may return some teaching duties back over to the Teacher Leader. This will give them a chance to reflect on their own growth in practice in relation to their mentor's practices. The Teacher Leader and Resident Teacher should be consistently discussing successes, growth, and areas for improvement as the school year ends.

Issues During the Residency Year

If an issue arises during the Residency Year, the Resident Teacher will need to contact the appropriate parties so that it can be resolved. If the issue is academic, the Resident Teacher will need to follow their EPP's protocol and inform those that is dictated. This may be the Resident Teacher's professor or other individuals. If the issue is regarding the MTRP, or placement, concerns must be brought to the director of field experience and Teacher Residency Coordinator while following their EPP's student teaching handbook and policies. If an issue occurs and the Resident Teacher is unsure who to contact, please direct questions to the director of field experience and Teacher Residency Coordinator.

Below are a couple of sample scenarios and who the Resident Teacher or Teacher Leader would contact if they occurred:

Scenario	Who to Contact
The Resident Teacher disagrees with the grade they received on an assignment.	The Resident Teacher will contact the professor of the class and academic advisor if needed. Please follow the EPP's policy.
The Resident Teacher or Teacher Leader does not receive their stipend.	The Resident Teacher or Teacher Leader will contact the Teacher Residency Coordinator and district payroll personnel.
The Resident Teacher is asked to substitute for more than 5 days a semester.	The Resident Teacher and Teacher Leader will contact the director of field experience, Teacher Residency Coordinator, and all other applicable parties while following the EPP's student teaching handbook and policies.
The Resident Teacher has a major disagreement with their Teacher Leader that cannot be resolved between the two parties.	The Resident Teacher and Teacher Leader will contact the director of field experience, Teacher Residency Coordinator, and all other applicable parties while following the EPP's student teaching handbook and policies.
The Resident Teacher is not performing their student teaching duties including having multiple unexcused absences.	The Teacher Leader will contact the director of field experience, Teacher Residency Coordinator, and all other applicable parties while following the EPP's student teaching handbook and policies.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q - What is the payment schedule for the Resident Teacher stipends?

A: Resident Teachers will receive ten \$1,400, pre-taxed, payments during the Residency Year, about once a month distributed by their host district. The exact schedule will be determined by the Resident Teacher's host district.

Q - What is the payment schedule for the Teacher Leaders?

A: Teacher Leaders will be paid up to \$3,000, pre-taxed, in December and June, distributed by their host district. The exact schedule will be determined by the Teacher Leader's district payment schedule.

Q - Will taxes be applied to the Resident Teacher and Teacher Leader stipends?

A: Yes, taxes and state and federal deductions will be applied to each payment. Teacher Leaders will also have TRS deductions taken out of their stipend.

Q - Do Resident Teachers need to complete a FAFSA?

A: Yes, Resident Teachers will need to complete the FAFSA for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Q - What does the last-dollar tuition waiver cover?

A: The tuition waiver only covers the cost of tuition. Resident Teachers are responsible for all other associated course and college fees.

Q - Will every Resident Teacher receive a tuition waiver?

A: As long as they have a tuition balance after all other grants and scholarships are applied, the Resident Teacher will receive a tuition waiver. They would not be eligible for a tuition waiver if they do not have a tuition balance.

Q - How are housing costs being paid?

A: To participate in the Montana Teacher Residency Program, districts must commit to providing housing assistance for the Resident Teachers; however, the amount and type of assistance varies. For example, some Resident Teachers already have housing and receive utility support, while other districts pay fuel for Resident Teachers that have housing but must travel. Others may provide housing that the district already owns. The goal is to have our Resident Teachers incur little to no housing costs during the year.

1.This is what makes rural opportunities viable.

2.The goal is that the Resident Teacher is in a full-time, pre-service opportunity with the focus on learning, applying, reflecting, adapting, and adjusting their practice so each Resident Teacher is prepared on day one as a full-time licensed teacher to enter the classroom with the skills, knowledge, and aptitude to be effective.

Q – Is the Resident Teacher co-teaching with another teacher or filling an open teaching position?

A: No. The Resident Teacher will be partnered with a Teacher Leader and essentially will be fulfilling a year-long student teaching model. A Resident Teacher *cannot* be a Teacher of Record in a classroom or long-term substitute.

Q – Does the Resident Teacher need to teach in Montana after the Residency Year?

A: Yes, Resident Teachers are expected to teach in a Montana public school district for 3 years, within 5 years, following the completion of the student teaching portion of their Montana Teacher Residency Program participation.

Q - What happens if the Resident Teacher does not complete the three-year commitment of teaching in Montana?

A: Per the agreement the Resident Teacher will sign, they will be required to pay back all of the awarded tuition waiver, unless there are extenuating circumstances approved by the Montana Teacher Residency Program advisory team.

Q - What calendar will the Resident Teacher follow, the college calendar, or the district calendar at the location of their Residency?

A: The Resident Teacher will follow the school district calendar and will report on the first PIR day. They will continue teaching until the last day of school regardless of the college calendar.

Q – When will the Resident Teachers and Teacher Leaders begin orientation?

A: The Montana Teacher Residency Program orientation will be in-person in a centralized location sometime in the beginning to mid-August. Please look for emails about the dates or check out the Montana Teacher Residency Program webpage.

Q - Can a Resident Teacher substitute?

A: A Resident Teacher can substitute only in their Teacher Leader's class for up to 5 days a semester. The Resident Teacher does *not* receive payment for substituting

Q - Can a Resident Teacher keep a job during the Residency Year?

A: The Residency needs to be the primary focus. Working outside of the Residency is not recommended.

Q – Is a Resident Teacher provided with release time to complete course work?

A: The Montana Teacher Residency Program is built on an 80/20 time model wherein the Resident Teacher will be released for 20 percent of the scheduled school week to work on coursework.

Q - When a school district has two Teacher Leaders assigned to a single Resident Teacher, will they both be paid the \$6,000 Teacher Leader stipend?

A: No. There is only one Teacher Leader stipend per Resident Teacher. The district, in consultation with their identified Teacher Leaders, may strive to have an alternate plan. That plan would need the Teacher Residency Program team and OPI's approval.

Q - Is there signed paperwork that will need to be completed by the different parties? If so, when should we expect to see that paperwork?

A: Yes, there are contracts that will need signatures. Districts, Teacher Leaders, Resident Teachers, and universities will be provided with this paperwork no later than August.

Q - Who pays the Teacher Leader costs for attending the in-person Teacher Leader Academies (i.e., travel, lodging, per diem)?

A: Lodging and meals during the academy are paid for by OPI. Mileage not included.

Q - Who pays the Resident Teacher's costs for attending the in-person learning labs (i.e., travel, lodging, per diem)?

A: Lodging, meals, and mileage to attend the learning lab are paid for by OPI.

Q - Who are the partners in the Montana Teacher Residency Program?

A: The partners include our national think tank that has been working on this effort since October 2021; the Educator Preparation Programs in Montana, the local school districts, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, The Office of Public Instruction, and the University of Montana Western.

Q - How are/will the partners be informed of progress?

A: The partners will be informed of the progress of the Montana Teacher Residency Program through at least one or more of the following venues:

- Monthly Webinars
- Presentations
- Phone calls
- Emails
- Regular meetings with those affected
- The OPI Compass
- Field visits

Q - How often will MTRP evaluation data collection occur?

A: At least semesterly and through phone calls, webinars, surveys, emails, or field visits.