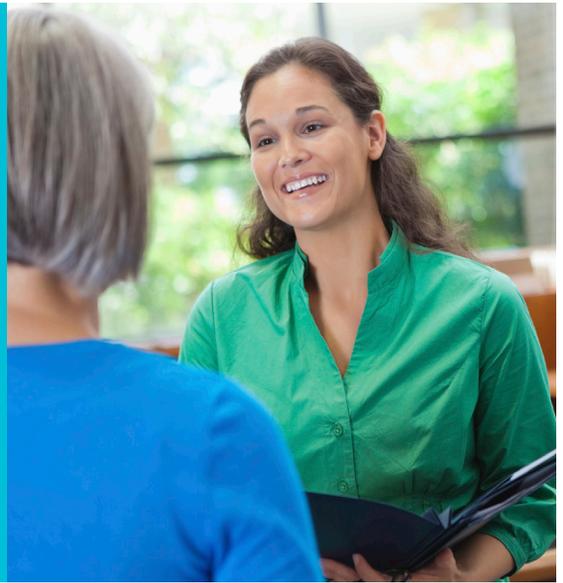




McREL evaluates Teacher Quality Partnership-funded teacher residency programs



The Challenge

The U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program helps new teachers improve their skills through mentor programs partnering higher education institutions with high-need school districts. Two 2009 grant recipients, Old Dominion University and Western Kentucky University, turned to McREL to provide high-quality, customized evaluations of their programs that met federal criteria and could be used to make informed program-improvement decisions.

Old Dominion University's Teacher Immersion Residency (ODU-TIR) program participants are core academic teachers who are placed in high-need middle and high schools in two Virginia districts. Western Kentucky University's Graduate Southern Kentucky Teach (GSKyTeach) participants are math and science teachers who are placed in high-need secondary schools in Louisville, Kentucky. In both programs, the new teachers work alongside mentor teachers for one year while finishing their graduate studies. Upon completion, they receive teacher certification, a master's degree in education, and, ideally, a contract to teach in a partner district.

Strategic Solution

McREL used a cohort-based design to assess differential outcomes in classroom practice, student achievement, and employment retention over time. For GSKyTeach, McREL compared outcomes to a group of beginner teachers who entered the profession at approximately the same time and in the same content areas. For ODU-TIR, pass rates on the state assessments for the participants were compared to the pass rates across the partner secondary schools.

Each program's progress was documented by McREL with a variety of data collection strategies and customized tools, including focus groups with multiple stakeholders, classroom observations, principal and mentor teacher surveys, and student achievement data.

Dr. Tara Donahue, McREL's managing evaluator for both projects, said the data give "the full story" of what's happening in the programs and allow staff "to celebrate what they are doing well and to develop strategies to shore up areas that aren't quite as strong."

Results

The evaluations helped program staff refine the curriculum, the types of mentor and participant support, the mentor selection process, and professional development for future participants. Data gleaned from classroom observations and teacher performance assessments "helped us identify what areas our residents did well in and the areas [in which] they need more support," said Dr. Sharon Judge, ODU-TIR project director. Similarly, Dr. Martha Day, executive director of GSKyTeach, praised the 5EOR observational tool (part of the classroom observation protocol McREL used for GSKyTeach), saying that it enabled the administrative team "to identify the most critical teacher behaviors for teaching inquiry." As a result, they've incorporated peer evaluation into one of their courses in which teachers learn how to critique inquiry-based pedagogical techniques.

The evaluation process also helped staff know that their programs had significant impact. Nearly 100 percent of both programs' completers have received teaching contracts in their partner districts, and classroom observation data shows that they are using highly effective teaching strategies in their classrooms. Participants said the programs eased their transition into full-time teaching, making them feel like second-year teachers when they started their jobs.

Next Steps

The project staff are using the evaluations to make adjustments to their programs going forward (both programs applied for grant extensions from the U.S. Department of Education).