

Modeled on medical residencies, teaching residencies ease transition into classrooms

By Pauline Liu
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Adam Cabana, 38, worked as a substitute teacher and teaching assistant in the Hoosick Falls Central School District for more than a decade before he got what he considers the offer of a lifetime.

Cabana was selected to participate in Classroom Academy – a two-year, paid residency in which an aspiring teacher is paired with a mentoring or “attending” teacher.

Cabana said the program, which pays him \$22,000 annually, is enabling him to realize his lifelong dream of becoming a full-time teacher. He spent four years as a substitute teacher in Hoosick Falls and then served as a teaching assistant there for seven years.

“This is what I wanted to do,” said Cabana, who’s in his first year of the program. “I’ve spent 11 years trying to get here.”

Cabana began his residency in the Cambridge school district last fall with teacher Jason Sutliff, who teaches 11th grade English language arts and Advanced Placement English. One recent day, the two took turns standing in front of the classroom to discuss Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” with students.

The program is modeled on medical residencies. Akin to an attending physician, Sutliff is called an “attending teacher” and is paid an extra \$4,500 for his mentorship and participation in additional professional development. School principals get a \$750 or \$1,500



In the Cambridge Central School District, resident teacher and master's degree candidate Adam Cabana (seated) leads a discussion on Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" with attending teacher Jason Sutliff. *Photo by Pauline Liu*

“building leader stipend” for their supervisory role.

The program is supported by a \$738,000 grant from the National Education Association, which paid for 50% of the personnel costs during year 1 and 30% in year 2 (the current year). Next year, the final year of the grant, NEA will pay 10%.

Local superintendents have reported that new teachers from traditional programs are not ‘classroom ready’ so they consider the residency a cost-effective option,” according to Classroom Academy Director Colleen McDonald. The program operates under a state-

a retired Cambridge teacher with experience as a district and building-level administrator.

A residency program allows districts to train potential hires to fill anticipated vacancies due to retirements or target high-need areas such as math or science, she said. McDonald is seeking grant funding to expand the program into urban districts next year.

The Classroom Academy is designed to be financially sustainable after the start-up grant support expires, McDonald said. The program operates under a state-

approved BOCES Contract for Shared Services, which means districts can get their BOCES reimbursement aid rate on the cost of the program the following year with their state aid.

“Districts invest in the residency program to meet their district hiring and professional learning needs, knowing they will get their BOCES reimbursement aid the following year, so they can grow it by reinvesting that reimbursement each year,” McDonald said. “Districts can invest at whatever pace works.”

The Classroom Academy and other kinds of teaching residencies are designed to better prepare aspiring teachers and address the growing problem of attrition. About 40% of novice teachers leave the classroom within the first five years, according to a report by the Rockefeller Institute of Government (see sidebar).

The Classroom Academy’s two-year residencies far exceed the current state minimum requirement of 40 days of student teaching, increasing time in front of students by more than 500%. (The Regents just voted to increase requirements beginning in the 2025-26 academic year; see story, page 11.)

So far, all participants are SUNY Plattsburgh master’s degree candidates. The Sage Colleges Esteves School of Education will offer the Classroom Academy to its graduate students in its elementary/special education dual certification program this fall, and SUNY Empire State College plans to offer it as part of its three-year program with placements starting in September 2020.

According to the U.S. Education

Department, teacher residency programs have existed for years in major cities, including New York, Chicago and Boston. About 20% of those becoming certified are being prepared through such alternative teaching programs.

New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development has a teacher residency program with the Albany City School District, and SUNY Buffalo plans to launch a residency program this summer.

The Classroom Academy stands out for piloting their model in rural districts. Currently, 11 resident teachers are working in four participating districts: Cambridge, Hudson Falls, Beekmantown and WSWHE BOCES.

The fact that the residency lasts two years is also unusual, since many such programs are only one year long. “This extended timeline allows residents to observe, participate, practice, and lead under the guidance of the attending teacher,” McDonald said. That includes participating in parent conferences, which often are challenging for new teachers.

Throughout the 2-year period, residents can substitute in their classrooms for their attending teachers.

During the spring of the second year they can be used to substitute for up to two days per week in their certification area throughout the district.

A two-year program makes sense, according to Jim Dexter, district superintendent of WSWHE BOCES.

“The first year, they’re still figuring out what to do,” he said. “The second year is when you really see the growth and they’re really ready for the classroom. When they get hired, we want them to be able to be high quality teachers from day one.”

When a Classroom Academy participant earns his or her master’s degree and is hired by a school district, he or she



As she nears the end of a two-year residency in the Cambridge Central School District, Kayleigh Ward says the experience “makes me want to teach forever.” *Photo by Pauline Liu*

may enter at year 1 of the salary schedule. However, the district is getting someone with two years of classroom experience.

What does it cost each district to participate? “The budget is determined by each district depending on how many residents they place,” said McDonald, the program director. “Each placement costs approximately \$31,000, including the \$22,000 resident stipend, \$4,500 attending teacher stipend, \$750 or \$1,500 building leader stipend, and associated payroll costs like FICA as well as a 5% BOCES coordination fee.” McDonald is currently paid \$30,000 annually through grant funding, which will transition to become part of the district BOCES program cost across all participating districts in 2020.

Key decisions are made by the Classroom Academy’s steering committee, which has a shared governance structure. It includes school

administrators, teachers, teacher union leaders, higher education representatives, BOCES leaders and state officials.

“Our goal is not to grow too fast,” Dexter said. “The program can be replicated. A toolkit is being developed (for districts that might be interested). What we want is as many (graduate) students from as many different interests. It’s great for them because you get a living wage.”

New York State United Teachers has voiced its support for the Classroom Academy as a viable pathway for teacher preparation. “At a time when we’re facing a teacher shortage, we want to do everything we can to encourage people to enter the profession and most importantly, help them succeed,” said

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango.

Program participants contacted by *On Board* expressed a high level of sat-

isfaction. Kayleigh Ward, 27, described her experience as invaluable and said it has sold her on the profession. She said the experience “makes me want to teach forever.” She will get her master’s degree from SUNY Plattsburgh in May and is seeking full-time employment.

“It really immerses you, and the experience it gives is well beyond other programs,” according to Ward, who is doing her residency in the Cambridge School District with sixth-grade teacher Therese DeCan.

“There’s tremendous collaboration,” said DeCan. “It’s great for the kids, and the collaboration has made me a better teacher,” she said.

“As attending teachers, we have to articulate our professional thinking and explain (to the resident teachers) why we do what we do,” she explained. “We’re looking at it again with a different lens.”

The State Education Department is supportive of the Classroom Academy and helped facilitate its development.

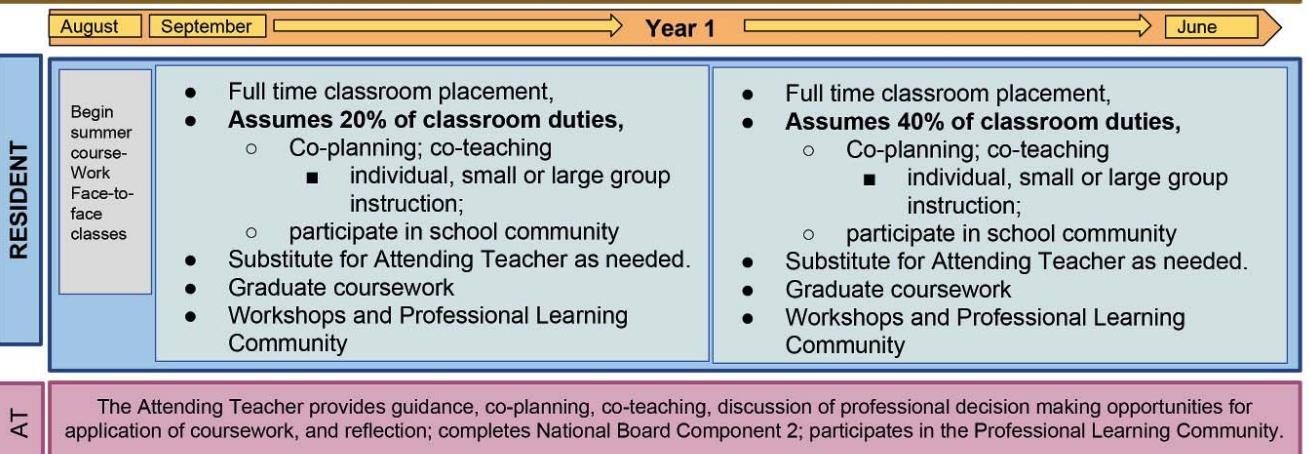
“The department is supportive of this program, and in fact advanced a change in regulation to provide a specific residency certificate for individuals enrolled in the program,” according to SED’s communications office. “The department supports programs that continue to advance initiatives and solutions to address challenges in ensuring the high quality preparation of teachers and other critical professions within the education system including, but not limited to, pilot programs including The Classroom Academy.”

For more information, go to www.classroomacademy.org.

Editor’s Note: McDonald and WSWHE BOCES administrator Tony Muller will present on the Classroom Academy model at NYSSBA’s Annual Convention in Rochester at 9:15 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 25.

The Classroom Academy: A 2 Year Pathway - Year 1

Prior Winter/Spring: Application, acceptance into graduate program, residency; interview, & match to Attending Teacher



Description of the first year of an aspiring teacher's two-year residency. Year 2 includes 50% to 100% co-teaching and substitution of up to two days a week in the teacher's certification area.

Rockefeller Center sees need to support novice teachers

Novice teachers benefit from support, especially in the early years of their careers. They frequently report feeling isolated, without supportive partners, at times working within a school environment that is more competitive than cooperative. The literature reveals that novice teachers often decide to leave the profession because of some key school-level factors: low pay, lack of support from school leaders, problems with student discipline and motivation, and lack of professional autonomy.

Studies indicate that roughly 40% of novice teachers leave the classroom within the first five years. The statistics are even more troubling in high-poverty schools, where attrition rates are roughly 50% higher compared to wealthier schools.

Source: Rockefeller Institute of Government, “The State of the New York Teacher Workforce,” March 28, 2019 (<https://rockinst.org/issue-area/state-new-york-teacher-workforce/>)

In NYS, fewer candidates seek masters or bachelors in education

