



Saint Mary's College

CASE STUDY

Humanizing Teacher Residencies



EDUCATORS WITH A HEART FOR SERVICE

Saint Mary's College of California is redefining teacher preparation through an equity-centered residency model grounded in trust, relationships, and a deep commitment to developing thriving educators. Education and teacher preparation are evolving quickly, yet urgency and intention are often at odds when responding to the tensions of a diminishing teacher workforce. However, at Saint Mary's College, the Kalmanovitz School of Education has innovated and moved forward with a bold, human-centered approach to addressing their communities' needs. With over \$2 million in grant funding supporting teacher residency programs, Saint Mary's has launched and scaled multiple equity-driven residencies in 1 year while making no concessions for quality. The college's strong commitment to their mission, coupled with deep alignment with district partners, has allowed them to prevail in the face of every challenge they meet.

The teacher residency programs at Saint Mary's College take a humanizing approach to diversifying the teacher workforce by recruiting candidates who represent the local community, removing barriers to entry through paid clinical experiences; meeting district staffing needs; and providing

over 1,200 hours of high-quality, mentored classroom preparation.

Sally Hawkins, EdD, and **Cynthia Goin, EdD**, have led the redefining work of teacher residencies at Saint Mary's in collaboration with the California Educator Preparation Innovation Collaborative at the Thompson Policy Institute. Their synergistic energy is electrifying, and their passion for empowering teachers is nothing short of inspirational. This team—or dream team as they might call it—has implemented three high-quality residency programs with different district partners, cocreated and designed intentionally to address the subject needs of each partner. Dr. Goin noted, “When you work with a team where everybody is that level of committed, it's what makes it awesome. And it is part of what makes you able to move at a quicker speed.” Most notably, each program is community rooted and adopts a grow-your-own model where paraprofessionals and other district employees are encouraged to apply for the residency program. Their secret to success is transformative: move at the speed of trust, prioritize people, and orchestrate conflict.

WHY RESIDENCIES?

A teacher residency is a 1-year-long, immersive teacher preparation program where aspiring educators coteach with experienced mentor teachers while earning a teaching credential. Teacher residences, like Saint Mary's, provide hands-on experience, foster strong mentorship, and increase teacher retention and effectiveness. Many of Saint Mary's leadership and faculty come from the local communities, having lived and worked in the districts they now serve.

Dr. Goin reflected, "I think for me, it was working in the district for 20 years at several different sites. I know how badly this is needed. I could see the legs and the potential in something like this. This is the district where it could become like oxygen."

When speaking with the current cohort of residents, many noted they would not have been able to pursue teaching if not for this program. Residents are awarded a living stipend, assisting with the financial burden many preservice teachers face.

"One of the things that I want to say out loud is when we're looking at people who go into education, there is a cost to that decision that we all pay ourselves," Dr. Goin acknowledged. "I remember doing my undergrad and watching everybody in every other major get a paid internship, get money for the train, get bus fare, free lunches, and we were paying to student teach for 12 units in the field. And that's a barrier to entry. That has just been

common in education. And so, I want to acknowledge that piece that gets partially addressed by the stipend that we can offer a resident who's committing to this level of work. I don't want to say it's all about the money, but I don't want to ignore the fact that there's a stipend there."

What makes the Saint Mary's residency program stand out is their dedication to their mentor teachers through ongoing professional development and financial support. Drs. Hawkins and Goin hold weekly professional learning sessions with mentor teachers with the goal of cultivating a community of support as they learn alongside their residents.

Dr. Goin emphasized how immersive the experience has been for their mentor teachers, noting, "The things beyond traditional student teaching that we're able to do, a stipend for the mentors really helps engagement and commitment. We are able to ask for a little more professional development and more collaboration."

She continued, "[The residency] model of one placement all year, same mentor teacher, highly trained, everybody's collaborating regularly. That's really strong because it allows for a lot of consistency in communication. It's not like someone's going to go out there and visiting several times a semester, which is great, but we are able to get together a lot more often and share."

MOVE AT THE SPEED OF TRUST

Saint Mary's navigated the intricacies of working with multiple district partners, each with their own goals and strategies for a residency program. Drs. Hawkins and Goin attributed much of their success to one principle: moving at the speed of trust. Despite the seemingly insurmountable barriers to launching multiple residencies in a short timeframe, the college community did more than endure; it thrived.

"I would say the way we've been able to move quickly is by moving at the speed of trust," Dr. Hawkins shared. "We established a real authentic base of mutual respect and trust with everybody. And from there, we were able to move quickly because we had a real foundation. We were very sincere, all of us. About what we cared about, what we needed, what we wanted. But I think that the trust piece was the foundation."

Dr. Goin added having a shared purpose was equally important, sharing, "Having that kind of common knowledge, but also the common passion, made all the difference." That shared foundation not only ignited the project's momentum, but it was also essential for its long term success. She continued, "In terms of sustainability, that's who you have to bring in, other people who embody those values and will commit to the importance of running a program in that way. And

anything less than that would really undermine the integrity."

This ethos is embedded in the culture of Saint Mary's, anchored in the Lasallian Core Principles by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who dedicated his life to providing education for impoverished children. These five principles are (a) faith in the presence of God, (b) concern for the poor and social justice, (c) quality education, (d) inclusive community, and (e) respect for all persons. Saint Mary's approach to residency models advocates for teaching as a deeply human, transformative practice, or, as Dr. Hawkins called it, "a heart for service." Dr. Goin emphasized, "You need the trust and the strength in that to move through whatever, whatever's going to come at you. And you know in schools, that's anything."

Trust was not always immediate, especially when reengaging with former partners. In one high-needs district, rebuilding trust meant starting from scratch, showing up consistently, and extending grace. Dr. Hawkins said, "They had experienced Saint Mary's in a different way. People at Saint Mary's were new [when Dr. Hawkins reached out]. They were like, 'Who are these people?' So, we just had to show up, do the work, and give grace. It takes time."

PRIORITIZE PEOPLE

The Saint Mary's way is to operate with a deep love for people—students, families, community members, and each other. Dr. Goin shared, “What I love about residencies is the kind of inherent grassroots of ‘grow your own’ educators from within your community. I love that for a million reasons because communities get to have teachers that look like where the teachers look like students or students look like teachers and people are seen.”

Dr. Hawkins added, “Just write down love. It's love – for other people and because we need it ourselves. We give it because it's in us, but we get it because we need it. It's like this self-fulfilling, mutually fulfilling experience.” She attributed this love to the culture at Saint Mary's, sharing, “I think it served this human need that I had for connection. I felt it at St. Mary's. I felt it with the professors. I felt it in such a way that when I was given the opportunity to work for the school that filled up my heart in such a big way,” she added. “Then to be able to turn and share it with our partners in residency, it's easy.”

Partnerships were nurtured intentionally from the beginning and throughout the planning process to spend time with each other as people, not just professionals. Dr. Goin shared,

“I think we were really good about creating opportunities in the beginning to really connect well with our partners.” She explained further: “Because the thing is, things are going to go wrong and you need that relationship. You need that bond because it's like a marriage in some ways in that there's going to be things that you don't agree on, like I wouldn't have made that decision that way, and you need that relationship to fall back on.”

Saint Mary's does not make the work of relationship building complex; the college community members remember to bring the fun to the work. Dr. Goin elaborated: “Doing a writing retreat, having a little breakfast together. Let's just be people together and connect.” Building on this idea of authentic connection, Dr. Hawkins reflected on the importance of values-driven relationships: “In any organization in our teacher ed department, we want to establish relationships where people see what your core values are so that authentic conversations can happen.”

At Saint Mary's prioritizing people lays the groundwork for everything else, including the hard parts, because when relationships come first, the partnership is strong enough to face conflict together.

ORCHESTRATE CONFLICT

With any program, especially one with such rapid growth, conflict is inevitable. At Saint Mary's, conflict is valuable. It is seen as a critical tool for continuous improvement. Instead of avoiding feedback, Drs. Hawkins and Goin described creating structures to invite it and grow from it.

Dr. Hawkins shared, "We do the mentor trainings also. We were both teachers. And so, I recognized the teacher in me that would sit at professional development and think I could have done this better. And so, we asked for feedback a lot."

Feedback came from all stakeholders, residents, mentor teachers, and district administrators. Although the feedback was not always easy to hear, it was always embraced. "When we are the front-facing team, which we are, we get it all," Dr. Goin reflected. "I kind of equate it to being a principal. When somebody comes in and they are furious, and it may have nothing to do about anything you did or was even remotely in your control. But it doesn't matter. You're going to hear about it."

Saint Mary's approach was not to deflect or defend, but to listen and view feedback as a tool for strengthening the entire ecosystem. As Dr. Hawkins explained, "This is about program improvement. This is about the whole program.

It's about everything. And even working with the residencies, we're constantly going back. How can we make this program better for all the students?"

For Dr. Goin, staying resilient in the face of honest feedback was her personal commitment. She shared, "For me, it's really just trying not to let my fire go out. It's looking at feedback and being open to it and humble to it and allow it to make this program better because it is so new."

Saint Mary's College is charting a bold and human-centered path toward equity-centered teacher preparation, one rooted in trust, relationships, and a shifting paradigm of conflict. Their work serves as a reminder that real transformation is not about how quickly teacher preparation programs scale; it is measured by how deeply we build.

TRANSFORMING TOGETHER THE CALEPIC JOURNEY

CalEPIC is committed to enhancing the capacity of California's diverse educator workforce to promote equity, inclusivity, and the whole child. Through trusted partnerships, we design and deliver innovative supports for educator preparation programs that focus on serving traditionally underserved students, including those with disabilities, Black, Latinx, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and students experiencing poverty.

OUR APPROACH

Strengthening Partnerships

Together, we work to enhance the relationship between EPPs and LEAs to support pre-service and new teachers, improve teacher retention, and promote professional learning among faculty to increase equity and access in education.

Building a Diverse and Thriving Workforce

Our focus rests on the development of a strong educator workforce through improved training and support for teachers, ensuring they are well-prepared to provide high-quality education, particularly to historically underserved students, while also promoting inclusive school environments and social-emotional learning.

Program Transformation

We support EPPs in creating relevant programming to address the needs of traditionally marginalized students, emphasizing continuous improvement, stakeholder collaboration, and financial sustainability.

Strategic Staffing

At CalEPIC, we believe in the power of Teacher Residencies. Strategic staffing builds on the residency model so that everyone in our schools - from new teachers to their mentors, administrators and teacher teams, as well as students - are best served. EPP partners develop strategic staffing teacher residency models to proactively address future pipeline needs and bring greater diversity into the workforce to reflect student demographics.

References:

Hawkins, S., & Goin, C. (2025, February 19). *Humanizing Teacher Residencies*: Zoom Interview by CalEPIC.

Recommended Citation:

Hawkins, S., Goin, C., Stratz, T., Bryer, N., Russell, D., & Cosier, M. (2025). *Saint Mary's College case study: Humanizing teacher residencies*. Thompson Policy Institute on Disability. <https://blogs.chapman.edu/tpi/2025/07/10/saint-marys-humanizing-teacher-residencies/>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CalEPIC would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Sarah (Sally) Hawkins and Dr. Cynthia Goin of Saint Mary's College of California, Kalmanovitz School of Education, for sharing their time, wisdom, and deep commitment to equity in educator preparation. A special thanks to Nykeisha Bryer for so thoughtfully facilitating the interview and contributing her editorial insight and care to this case study.



“We’re looking at people who go into education - there is a cost to that decision that we all pay **ourselves.**”

Dr. Cynthia Goin
Residency Lead at Saint Mary's College of California

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