



GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Strengthening the Educator Workforce: Recruiting, Supporting, and Retaining Teacher Candidates from Traditionally Underserved Groups

A Spotlight on Center for Collaborative Education and Mastery Charter Schools

BY LAUREN MATLACH

A diverse educator workforce is a strong educator workforce. Research demonstrates that students benefit greatly from both teachers who look like them and those who do not. Similarly, students benefit from seeing and learning from teachers who bring a range of life experiences to their work, such as career changers and educators entering the profession later in life. However, strengthening the educator workforce by diversifying who is teaching and working with children requires a systematic look both at talent management systems—how we attract future educators, prepare them, and support them throughout their preparation and career—and the values and culture within those systems.

This grantee spotlight features key strategies of two Effective Educator Development (EED) grantees, The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) and Mastery Charter Schools, whose work focuses on broadening the teacher pipeline by identifying and supporting future educators who otherwise may not have seen teaching as a viable option for them. These organizations have created approaches that help position future educators for success while also ensuring that there is a culture supportive of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In recent conversations with them, these organizations emphasized the importance of offering mission-aligned recruitment and retention



¹For an overview of the research on the benefits of a diverse educator workforce, see some of the following:

- Gershenson, S., Hansen, M., & Lindsay, C.A. (2021). *Teacher diversity and student success: Why racial representation matters in the classroom*. Harvard Education Press.
- Gershenson, S., Lindsay, C.A., Hart, Cassandra M.D., & Papageorge, N.W. (2017, March). The long-run impacts of same race teachers. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. <https://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>
- Mahnken, K. (2018, August 15). Why diversity matters: Five things we know about how black students benefit from having black teachers. The 74. <https://www.the74million.org/why-diversity-matters-five-things-we-know-about-how-black-students-benefit-from-having-black-teachers/>

efforts combined with high quality targeted and responsive programming and support to educators. Although EED grantees serve educators at varying stages of their careers (i.e., preparation, early career support, ongoing development), they all are responsible for the recruitment and retention of educators within their programs and contribute to the recruitment of educators in education professions. This spotlight shares relevant examples of how strategic approaches to recruitment, support, and retention are essential to strengthening the educator workforce.



Making Connections

At Strengthening the Educator Workforce: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in EED Grants, the EED TA Center introduced a [frame](#) for understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion in EED grant work. The frame emphasizes how work focused on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion requires attending to both technical capacities, such as organization, structures, strategies, and tools, while also attending to the people conducting and impacting the work. As you read this spotlight, consider the following:

- How have the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) and Mastery Charter Schools created structures and used strategies to recruit a diverse group of students (in the case of CCE) and teachers (in the case of Mastery Charter Schools)?
- How are those structures, strategies, and tools informed by a focus on mindset, awareness, care, and belonging?
- What are some examples where CCE and Mastery Charter Schools collaborated, listened, related, reflected, or acted in ways that strengthened their own efforts to focus on and live out principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Meet the Grantees

The Center for Collaborative Education



Oscar Santos
Executive Director



Yvonne Ribas
Project Director,
Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP)

The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) is a 2020 Supporting Effective Educators (SEED) grantee. CCE is an educational nonprofit whose mission is to transform schools to ensure that all students succeed. Its project, Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP), seeks to address the demographic disparity in the public schools of Los Angeles by creating a robust pipeline of educators from community colleges. Through CPTP, CCE seeks to address two challenges: 1) A smaller proportion of Black and Latinx populations earn college degrees; and 2) Students of color do not have exposure to minority educators, and do not typically see teaching as a viable career pathway. CPTP partners with three community colleges in California ([Rio Hondo College](#), [El Camino College](#), and [Cerritos College](#)) to recruit and support future teachers by providing programming aligned with research-based practices, including stipends for participation, and enhanced advisory mentoring (sometimes known as intrusive mentoring) that adopts a multi-layer, holistic approach to mentoring. CPTP offers comprehensive programming that combines student services, financial supports, networking for relationship and community building, as well as cohort opportunities for employment and career planning with an objective to fortify the teacher pipeline.

CCE is also currently working with four local California State Universities and the University of California in a collaborative to help ensure CPTP students can transfer easily to four-year institutions and stay in the teaching pathway. These higher education representatives also serve on the CPTP Advisory Council composed of community college leaders, community leaders, university leaders, PK-12 leaders, and CPTP mentors and student leaders.

CCE has just completed the first year of its grant, but it has had early success recruiting future educators who are racially and ethnically diverse and who have varied life experiences. Among the current cohort, 94 percent of students identify as people of color. The average age of the cohort is 28. In addition, these students are mentored by current educators—74 percent of whom self-identify as people of color.

Links:

- [SEED Project Abstract](#)
- [Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline Website](#)
- [CPTP Student Panel: How Mentoring Has Impacted My Journey to Becoming a Teacher](#)
- [Newsletter](#)

Mastery Charter Schools



Glamildi Rondon-Martinez
Assistant Director of Teacher
Residencies and Partnerships

Mastery Charter Schools (Mastery) was a 2010 and 2016 Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantee. Mastery is a charter management organization (CMO), a network of 24 schools serving 14,000 students across Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Camden, New Jersey. Its 2010 TIF grant focused on developing and implementing its performance-based compensation system for teachers and leaders. Its 2016 grant application focused on refining and improving its human capital management system in four areas of work: talent pipeline development, talent management systems, educator development, and a performance-based compensation system.

One of the key components of Mastery’s talent management system is its teacher residency program. The CMO recruits future educators into its residency and hires them into Support Teacher roles as they complete their teacher preparation through a partnership with Relay Graduate School of Education. Between 2015 and 2021, the CMO has averaged 85 percent retention of its residents and has promoted 74 percent of their retained residents to Lead Teacher roles. More than 70 percent of their residents identify as people of color. The organization attributes its success strengthening the educator workforce to its mission-aligned recruitment and retention strategies as well as the high quality supports it provides to educators during their residency and beyond.

Links:

- [TSL Program Abstract](#)
- [Become a Teacher: Master-Relay Teaching Residency](#)
- [Preparation that Helps First Year Teachers Get Results: Three Lessons Learned](#)

Key Strategy – Mission-Focused Recruitment and Retention Efforts

CCE

In many ways, community colleges more accurately represent the United States demographics. According to a 2021 data analysis of federal data conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges, more than 50 percent of community college students identify as persons of color. Nearly a third of community college students (29%) are first generation college students. The average age of a community college student is 28.

“We are doing the work of strengthening the teacher force by increasing teachers of color. It’s that straightforward.”

Yvonne Ribas

CCE’s CPTP program is unique in its focus on community college students. Because most states require a bachelor’s degree to become a public-school teacher, recruitment efforts often focus on undergraduates at four-year institutions. Oscar Santos described community colleges as underutilized. “I think we [the education community] underutilize community colleges... I’ve heard for many years, there’s not enough good candidates out there. That’s not true; [it’s that the education community hasn’t] found where the assets are. It’s a reframe.”

CCE recognizes and celebrates the unique characteristics of community college students.

“If you are going to college at 28,” Santos explains, “you aren’t going there for fun. You are going there to work and make a difference.” CCE sees the assets that community college students can bring to the teaching profession and has intentionally designed their program around their needs. “The design is purposeful so that it is not cumbersome,” Oscar Santos explained. All participants are immediately treated as professionals and the program helps participants build their professional resume.

The CPTP program aligns to the CCE’s mission of transforming “schools to ensure that all students succeed” and its vision of “a just and equitable world where every student is college- and career-ready and prepared to become a compassionate, thoughtful, and contributing global citizen” by supporting community college students to be successful in their studies and help them explore teaching as a potential career.

In recruitment materials and information sessions, CCE also keeps the mission of the CPTP program “front and center; no one can miss it,” Yvonne Ribas explained. “We are doing the work of strengthening the teacher force by increasing teachers of color. It’s that straightforward.” Anecdotally, CPTP points to its equity and collective ownership framework, its community-based purposeful pipeline, and the adaptive nature of the program as reasons why students and mentors are drawn to the program.

Mastery Charter Schools

Mastery's mission is the following: "All students learn the academic and personal skills they need to be truly prepared for postsecondary success and able to pursue their dreams." The organization's values highlight a focus on student achievement, pursuit of equity, service to students and families, doing the right thing, positive culture, straight talk, open doors, continuous improvement, and teamwork. The organization works to recruit educators who are mission-aligned and seeks to live up to its values in how it treats and values educators.

Through many conversations, both with potential recruits and current practitioners, educators identified priorities of work-life balance, mission-alignment, and values as priorities to them when selecting a workplace. These data made it clear that mission and values needed to be at the forefront of messaging to candidates.

The organization's recruitment process, which includes interviews and demonstration lessons, seeks to identify individuals whose personal mission aligns with Mastery's. Mastery has strategic partnerships with organizations with similar missions, including Center for Black Educator Development, City Year, and Breakthrough Collaborative. About 15 percent of new-to-Mastery hires come from AmeriCorps-affiliated programs, most notably TFA, City Year, and PeaceCorps. Partnership organizations and AmeriCorps-affiliated organizations have served as useful pipelines of potential candidates, especially candidates of color. Mastery also finds staff referrals to be a useful recruitment source; about 45 percent of new-to-Mastery hires come from staff referrals.

Mastery's recruitment process is "high touch." Mastery actively follows leads when they hear about potential candidates who have similar mindsets, professional experiences, and affiliations to profiles of successful Mastery staff. Mastery staff work to convince potentially strong candidates to apply to Mastery and then craft bespoke cultivation plans to support them through the hiring and onboarding process.

Once hired, Mastery staff work to set educators up for success.

During the pandemic, communicating with candidates via text became ever more important. It provided multiple quick touchpoints with candidates to check in, help candidates stay invested, and show that Mastery Charter Schools is invested in the candidates. Mastery also uses nurture emails to show and tell how Mastery lives out its values and priorities to encourage future Mastery staff to engage in the hiring process. During COVID-19, these nurture emails also provided latest health and safety resources on their protocols and emphasized how Mastery was committed to cultivating the most high-quality educators to help students thrive as they transitioned back into in-person learning.

During COVID-19, Mastery Charter Schools needed to be flexible in new ways, offering work accommodations, shifting to virtual instruction if there was a COVID-19 case, and shifting how they recruit candidates. "We learned to be flexible, hold space and grace for folks—that all ties to recruitment and retention," Glamildi Rondon-Martinez explained. Staff made sure to check in with recruits and current staff about their concerns regarding COVID-19 to ensure that they were able to address those concerns. Rondon-Martinez notes that Mastery did not see a big dip in recruitment and retention, attributing it to Mastery's commitment to listening to educators and keeping educators and students safe during the pandemic.

At the same time, Mastery knows it has an obligation to walk the walk. For example, Rondon-Martinez notes, "We are anti-racist not only in name but also in programming." Mastery explicitly named anti-racism as a priority last year. Since then, the organization has had multiple discussions with staff about how specific actions in the long-term plan align to anti-racist values. In the past year, when social injustices have occurred that deeply impacted the communities Mastery serves, Mastery has demonstrated the values of straight talk and open doors by

promoting conversations. For example, Mastery leadership actively talks about how social injustices might trigger students and provides resources to teachers to take care of themselves and to talk about trauma with students. Mastery has also had frank conversations with educators at risk of exiting who felt Mastery Charter Schools was not living up to its values.

Straight talk goes both ways at Mastery. Educators have voiced concern when an action did not align with Mastery’s mission and values, prompting Mastery leadership to reflect and make a change. For example, after the killing of George Floyd and the reckoning that swept the nation, Mastery staff, particularly staff members identifying as Black, pushed Mastery to step forward and live out the organization’s values.

Based on this internal push from staff, Mastery created a six-person equity team led by a Chief Equity Officer. The team collaborated with staff to identify six key performance indicators and anti-racist ideals that were incorporated into the framework of Mastery.

Compensation also plays a role in ensuring that educators can live the Mastery mission. Mastery prioritizes educator pay “to get them to stay with us so they don’t have to make financially motivated decisions instead of mission-motivated decisions” to stay or leave. Mastery offers \$5,000 sign-on bonuses as part of their equity plan to support transition and relocation for new hires. Mastery also offers competitive salaries, and performance-based compensation for staff members.



Key Strategy – Targeted and Responsive Programming and Supports

CCE

CCE’s CPTP program focuses on providing teacher exploration and training coursework coupled with ongoing personalized support that includes enhanced advising, also known as intrusive advising (see callout box for definition). All participating community college students receive per semester at least 30 hours of one-on-one mentoring from a current teacher working in a nearby community. Students also receive on-campus support and guidance from Success Coaches, current California State University students pursuing an education or counseling degree. These Success Coaches help participants access available resources on campus and prepare to transfer to a four-year program. “The program makes it easier for our students to stay on the teaching track because the support system is there,” Oscar Santos explained.

CCE’s CPTP also provides targeted and responsive programming and supports to its mentors, who are currently practicing educators in local schools. Mentors receive initial training as well as Teacher Mentor Network (TMN) offerings for professional learning opportunities in areas of need. Recent offerings have included sessions on Universal Design for Learning as well as a STEM Learning & Teaching Inspiration Session and project-based learning workshops facilitated by a NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory professional development specialist. TMN serves as an additional layer of enhanced advisory mentoring in group settings with an objective that TMN will be the structure for sustainability beyond the grant-funded years. TMN currently has over 1,000 members.

“The program makes it easier for our students to stay on the teaching track because the support system is there.”

Oscar Santos



What is enhanced advising?

Enhanced advising, also referred to as intrusive or integrated advising, “replaces the quick, transactional structure of traditional advising (e.g., a focus on class schedules, degree requirements, and financial aid procedures) with a more holistic structure in which advisors ask deeper questions and engage more with students to help them succeed” (Bailey, Bashford, Boatman, Squires, Weiss, Doyle... Young, 2016).

Resources to learn more:

- [Effective Advising for Postsecondary Students: A Practice Guide for Educators](#)
- [Strategies for Postsecondary Students in Developmental Education - A Practice Guide for College and University Administrators, Advisors, and Faculty](#)

After hearing the needs of participating mentors and students, CCE and community college partners added drop-in sessions to their programming. These sessions are spaces where both mentors and students can talk about issues relevant to them and continue to build a community virtually. For example, during Equity Hours, students and mentors participated in dialogues about current and historical inequities in public education and developed a greater shared understanding of why CPTP focuses on strengthening the teaching profession by diversifying the workforce. Recent exit surveys from the sessions showed that more than 90% of participants agreed with the statement “I felt a sense of community within today’s TMN session.”

Mastery Charter Schools

Like CCE, Mastery recognizes the need for additional pathways into the teaching profession. Mastery residents “may not have thought teaching was a viable option for a variety of reasons, including cost or they didn’t have a college major in education,” Glamildi Rondon-Martinez explains. “But, when they see that Mastery offers mentorship, coaching, and a residency, it seems more attainable.” Its residency program in partnership with Relay Graduate School of Education, which includes content knowledge building, makes becoming a teacher more accessible for three groups of future educators:

- Internal Mastery staff who seek to become educators but do not yet have the credentials needed
- Job applicants who applied for a teacher role at Mastery but do not yet have the credentials to be a teacher
- Recent graduates or career changers with bachelors’ degrees who seek to teach in a content area they hadn’t considered before

Glamildi Rondon-Martinez knows that “you cannot retain people if you are not preparing and supporting them.” In partnership with Relay, Mastery has outlined a detailed intentional scope and sequence of skills and experiences that clearly articulates resident responsibilities, resident advisor responsibilities, and feedback focus areas for each month of their residency so that they have experiences preparing them to take over the full responsibilities of a classroom teacher. These clear expectations are coupled with multiple check-ins and supports. During the residency program, Rondon-Martinez makes sure she continues to have multiple check-ins with residents and staff. Each resident meets with Rondon-Martinez at least three times each school year to talk about the resident’s academic performance, work towards certification, and other aspects of their

“You cannot retain people if you are not preparing and supporting them.”

Glamildi Rondon-Martinez

residency and life at Mastery. Rondon-Martinez checks frequently with staff to see how residents are progressing and also sends monthly communications to school leaders so they are aware of what residents are doing in their residency. “We make it so gaps in communication won’t be the reason why someone isn’t set up to be successful,” Rondon-Martinez explains.

Rondon-Martinez explains that Mastery leadership understands that some turnover is healthy, “but we are not okay with needing to recruit [more educators] because we did not support our residents and teachers.” Residents who are hired by Mastery continue to receive support throughout their career. After residents are promoted into core teaching roles, they continue to have a New Teacher Mentor and receive targeted support based on the stages of need for early career teachers. All New Teacher Mentors also receive coaching and development to support their early career educators. Mastery also assigns educators into one of four instructor categories based on experience and their performance based on their teacher evaluations.

Supports also attend to educator overall well-being. For the 2021-22 school year, in acknowledgement of the additional stressors and burdens teachers and school leaders are experiencing, Mastery has implemented 10 “Wellness Wednesdays” where students are dismissed early. On those days, the organization expects that teachers and leaders also leave early in order to take care of themselves. In addition, Mastery recently announced its pilot program through Talkspace, which provides free mental health services to staff, spouses, and children.”

Closing

Both the Center for Collaborative Education and Mastery Charter Schools understand the interrelatedness between recruitment and retention. Mission-focused recruitment efforts help attract and recruit a diverse group of candidates to their respective programs, but both organizations know that is not enough. Pairing recruitment efforts with targeted and responsive supports that attend to both professional and personal needs can help students persist in their programs or keep teachers in the workforce. In addition, high quality supports in place can also serve as a recruitment technique because potential students or hires know they will be set up for success. A diverse educator workforce is a strong educator workforce, and the Center for Collaborative Education and Mastery Charter Schools are working to strengthen the workforce through their EED grant work.

