

Overview and Background of Our Work in Louisiana

The Relay Graduate School of Education is a national, accredited, nonprofit institution of higher education whose mission is to teach teachers and school leaders to develop in all students the academic skills and strength of character needed to succeed in college and life.

Relay currently serves more than 2,000 teachers in 12 sites and 400 leaders nationwide. Relay is committed to using practice and feedback to become the place where a new generation of continuously improving, results-focused individuals can fulfill their destiny in the world's greatest profession.

Teacher Preparation in New Orleans

For the past three years, Relay has operated a teacher preparation program in New Orleans, supporting and developing a total of 200 graduate students who teach full-time in the city's public schools. This year alone we are serving nearly 90 teachers in the city. In New Orleans, Relay offers teacher certification and master's degree programs, as well as an advanced program in Special Education and a Teaching Residency program. Through these programs, candidates acquire the foundational skills needed to be successful early in their teaching careers, including skills like how to build relationships with students, families, and colleagues, and the fundamentals of classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment design. In addition, Relay builds candidates' ability to leverage data to inform their instruction, and to measure and track their PK-12 students' academic progress.

Teacher Preparation in Baton Rouge

In the 2016-17 school year, Relay also launched teacher preparation programs in Baton Rouge. We currently enroll 12 teachers who, like their peers in New Orleans, are teaching full-time in Baton Rouge schools while being trained as part-time graduate students at Relay. We expect to grow the Baton Rouge campus over time, similar to our trajectory in New Orleans.

Relay Teaching Residency—Louisiana

One of our newest and fastest growing programs in Louisiana is the Relay Teaching Residency. During the two-year program, aspiring teachers experience a structured and gradual on-ramp into the profession, complete a master's degree, and become qualified for a full-time teaching position at a public school in Louisiana. In their first year, residents immerse themselves in their schools, working directly with PK-12 students under the close supervision of a master Resident Advisor. Residents simultaneously enroll in Relay, where they take classes on core teaching techniques and content-specific instruction, then rehearse those techniques and receive expert feedback during weekly practice sessions.

Successful first-year residents transition into lead teaching roles in the second year of the program, when they complete a Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) degree. Through the program, residents also earn a Louisiana teaching certificate.

School Leader Training in Louisiana

Over the past three years, Relay has also supported nearly 70 principals in Louisiana through our National Principals & Principal Supervisors Academy. Through this intensive, high-quality program, Relay prepares current principals to become even stronger instructional and cultural leaders of their schools. School leaders enrolled in the program focus on a number of foundational elements of instructional leadership that drive student achievement, including data-driven instruction, positive student culture of high expectations, observation and feedback, adult professional development, instructional planning, the creation of an aligned staff culture, and strategic leadership.

Evidence of Impact in Louisiana

Over the past three years, Relay, through the teachers and principals we have served, has impacted nearly 40,000 public school students around the State of Louisiana, most of whom are students of color in high-needs districts. Relay has prepared teachers, residents, and principals of New Orleans and Baton Rouge to raise the academic bar for their PK-12 students, to use data to better drive instructional decisions to drive PK-12 student learning. Relay has helped create classrooms around the state that are engaging and joyful environments for PK-12 students.

In Louisiana, Relay has a specific focus on cultivating the next generation of teachers and leaders of color. More than 50% of Relay's graduate student body in Louisiana self-identify as people of color (compared to 18% and 20% respectively for teachers and leaders of color nationwide), and the Relay Teaching Residency is proving to be an especially critical source of diverse, local teaching talent. Nearly 60% of Relay Residents in Louisiana identify as people of color in the 2016-17 school year. And, among school leaders, nearly 30% of the Louisiana principals who have participated in Relay's National Principals Academy over the past three years identified as people of color. Looking ahead, we aim to continue to diversify our graduate student body, in part by conducting new recruitment efforts for the Residency.

Relay graduates are realizing results in Louisiana classrooms. Relay is the first graduate school of education to hold degree candidates accountable for PK-12 student performance, and, on average, the PK-12 students taught by Relay's Louisiana Class of 2016 grew 1.2 years in reading performance in one year's time. To earn their degree, in the second year of the M.A.T. program, graduate students must demonstrate that their students have achieved at least one year's worth of growth in a year's time. The overwhelming majority of graduate students are meeting this expectation; 95% of 2016 graduates from Relay Louisiana met or exceeded their rigorous goals for PK-12 student achievement.

Relay is eager to continue the very early success we have seen in Louisiana, and aims to serve an even greater number of teachers, teacher residents, and principals in the state in the years to come, alongside many strong schools and partners.

Proposed Organizational Model for Louisiana

Relay has a number of high-impact programs that could be attractive to Louisiana districts or schools. While those Relay programs could be offered up on a menu from which districts or schools could select under this RFI, Relay believes its biggest impact could be to go deep with one school in partnership around the following initiatives:

1. Training and supporting a school's instructional leader through Relay's principals program.
2. Preparing and supporting the teachers of record in each of the school's classrooms.
3. Recruiting, training, and supporting a cohort of residents for the school.
4. Organizing the literacy block of the school around Common Core-aligned ELA curricula and literacy support systems, leveraging what we have seen implemented well for low-income students elsewhere.
5. Organizing the math block of the school around Zearn, Eureka Math, and math support systems, based on what Relay has learned to be successful in other schools serving similar PK-12 student populations.

Contingent upon the success of the initial school partnership, Relay would look to grow the number of partner schools in the state over time. Relay is currently preparing to pilot this partnership model in another state with an urban school that serves low income students of color. Not all of the initiatives listed above would be new; Relay has been conducting the first three listed above with promising results in Louisiana and other states for a number of years.

An ideal partner school under this proposal would have some autonomy from a district to select its own curriculum, be creative with the school day and its schedule, and support residents through competitive salary and benefits, among other criteria. The success of the school would be enhanced by a willingness from the state and district to support such an intense school partnership model and an eagerness to replicate any successes in other local or state schools.

Relay stands ready and open to discussing this proposal and all of Relay's initiatives with the state through this RFI process.