



Laura Haley
Boettcher Teacher Residency RALS Recipient
Ignacio Middle School, Ignacio CO
English/Language Arts

To the Esteemed Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Laura Haley. I'm a resident in the Boettcher Teacher Residency program, a first year Special Education English Language Arts teacher at Ignacio Middle School, and I was lucky enough to be selected as a recipient for the Rural Alternative Licensure Stipend. I'd like to tell you a little bit about my journey toward becoming a teacher, and how receiving the RALS has impacted my life.

Education has always been a passion of mine. Growing up in Durango, Colorado, I was surrounded by great teachers who supported me and cared about my success. They pushed me to be better. To do better. I wouldn't be where I am today without all of those educators who stood behind me. Last year, when I came across information about the Boettcher Residency Program, it seemed like a perfect fit for me. I'd been researching different avenues that would allow me to turn my BA in Writing into a teaching license. I immediately applied and was accepted into the program for the 2018-2019 school year.

Going into the program, I knew there would be some costs associated with it. There always are when it comes to education. But it's astounding how quickly it all adds up. Fees for the Praxis and associated study materials, fingerprinting, licensing applications, textbooks for the program... The list goes on. And that's before you even set foot in a classroom. For many of us in the program, these fees were all adding up before we even knew for sure if we'd have a paying job.

I was lucky enough to find a job working in Ignacio School District. Ignacio is a small, rural district that serves around 820 students. Our district is very racially diverse, with our student body being made up of approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ Native American students, $\frac{1}{3}$ Hispanic students, and $\frac{1}{3}$ white/caucasian students. More than half of our students qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Meal program. Our students face high poverty rates, and all too many of them have been exposed to childhood trauma in their lives. Many of them are desperately in need of the type of stability and order that can only be found in a classroom. They need to build relationships with adults who will be there to support them emotionally and academically. As a teacher, that's a much easier task when you don't have to worry about how your rent is going to be paid.

I teach reading interventions and ELA to approximately thirty students in sixth, seventh and eighth grade. All of them have either an IEP or a Tier 3 designation for reading. They come from a variety of backgrounds with an even greater variety of needs and challenges, and every day I spend with them makes me a better person. Even though I might be able to make more money in a different district, I feel like I can do more good in Ignacio. Some days, it feels like I have the chance to really make a difference. Receiving the RALS makes the financial burden less of a concern.

While finding a job in Ignacio was fortunate for me, it was a symptom of a bigger problem that Ignacio faces right now. Ignacio is only a thirty minute drive from Durango. Because Durango is a bigger community with a much larger tax base, the school district has the ability to pay teachers significantly more than many of the outlying communities. The result is that many teachers start their careers in the outlying communities to get some experience, and then they take jobs in Durango. This frequently means that Ignacio - and other small, rural communities like it - are constantly scrambling to fill the holes. It's a tough battle to fight, and, unfortunately, the students are the main casualties. The RALS stipend definitely helps to close the gap between what Ignacio School District is able to pay me, and what I might make in a larger school district. While money certainly isn't my main motivation for teaching, when it comes to paying bills, every little bit helps.

Receiving the RALS stipend made a huge difference for me and my family. In addition to offsetting the costs of the licensing application process, it helped me to set up my very first classroom, including the 300 books that I currently have in my classroom library. It also helped cover the cost of the \$1,200 Orton-Gillingham course that I took so that I could offer effective reading interventions for my most challenged students. (My district did not have the available funds to send me, so I paid for it on my own.) Above all, the stipend helped me to be better prepared for my students, and I am incredibly grateful to the State of Colorado for providing me with that opportunity.

With much gratitude,

Laura Haley



Heather McIntyre
Boettcher Teacher Residency RALS Recipient
Dolores High School, Dolores CO
Science

Dear Senate Education Committee Members:

I am currently working as a Boettcher resident in a physical science classroom at the Dolores High School in lovely Dolores, CO. As an unpaid resident, receiving the Rural Alternative License Stipend (RALS) was an important source of income for me and critical to my ability to continue with the Boettcher Program. Despite the financial challenges, the residency pathway has allowed me to have the best learning experience for becoming a classroom teacher. My mentor has over forty years of teaching experience and the two other science teachers that I often collaborate with each have twenty and thirty years of teaching experience respectively. I feel fortunate to benefit from their many years of experience teaching and with the local community. The mentorship program ensures that all those years of experience and local knowledge are not lost but passed on to those who can use it during their careers and to the benefit of the local community.

I consider southwest Colorado my home and I look forward to teaching in here in the near future. Even now, as a resident, I feel I have been able to make a positive difference in the lives of the students I work with. I look forward to being in the classroom everyday and feel like I have developed a positive bond with my students. During the times when I have been the lead instructor, the students have been responsive and generally engaged in whatever lesson I am teaching that day. I am about to embark on what the program calls our "full lead". I will be teaching all of the classes that my mentor normally teaches, Integrated Science, Geology/Astronomy, and Physics, for a full six weeks on my own. While the planning has been time consuming, it has also been educational and enjoyable- I can't

wait to teach some of the lessons that I have created because I know the students will be as interested as I have been. I don't believe that I would have the confidence or skill to take this on without my background as a resident in the Boettcher Program.

I am very grateful to have received the RALS stipend but I know that there are many other deserving residents within my cohort that could have benefitted from it as well. Increasing the number of stipends distributed would support those residents that might not otherwise be able to pursue the Boettcher residency program. Increasing the number of RALS stipends is money well spent, it is an investment in rural Colorado's educational system.

Most Sincerely,
Heather McIntyre



Kalee Buhr
Boettcher Teacher Residency RALS Recipient
Centauri HS, La Jara, CO
HS Business

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

The RALS has been a true blessing in helping me become an educator. I am currently teaching high school business at Centauri High School in La Jara, Colorado. My school has about 300 students that mostly come from low income families. I am among one of the low income families, but I knew I wanted to teach so I found a way to get my teaching degree. I quit my job as an accountant because I wanted to interact with the kids of my community. I want to help the students understand that they are special and can break the pattern of just getting by which is why I plan to stay in Centauri. When I started teaching I was not getting paid. I was going through my savings faster than I had planned. The RALS stipend has been a blessing because the money has allowed me to give teaching all my energy, because I am not working as hard on making ends meet. I believe that this stipend will help fill classrooms with great educators. The alternative teaching program had allowed me to take my business background and experiences into the classroom. I feel that this a benefit to the school because you wouldn't want someone who is educated to teach history teaching students about accounting or marketing. The stipend gives others, like myself, a chance to enter the classroom and bring in experiences while helping with some of the financial struggle.



Jessica Bloise
Boettcher Teacher Residency RALS Recipient
Cortez Middle School, Cortez CO
English/Language Arts

Dear Colorado House and Senate Education Committees,

My name is Jessica Bloise, and I'm writing to you about the positive effect the Rural Alternative License Stipend (RALS) has had on my journey to become an educator and to encourage you to increase the number of grants next year.

I am pursuing my alternative license in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) at Montezuma-Cortez Middle School (M-CMS) in Cortez, Colorado. My ultimate goal is to pursue my Master's degree in culturally and linguistically diverse education and work with English Language Learners (ELLs). As a participant in the Boettcher Teacher Residency, I am what is known as a "traditional resident," a rarity in the cohort down here.

In contrast to being a "traditional resident", many teachers in my cohort are a "teacher of record." These are the ones who assume full responsibilities of a teacher even if they have little to no teaching experience. The director of our program jokes that teachers of record are learning to build the plane as they're flying it.

The Montezuma-Cortez School District hires teachers of record because of the severe teacher shortage here. While I'm immensely impressed with how they handle their countless responsibilities, and many of them are doing an astounding job, I'm convinced that the best way to learn to teach is by going the route I chose--traditional residency. Being a traditional resident is like learning how to drive while taking a rigorous driver's ed course, doing many supported practicums, and receiving coaching from an unshakeable and encouraging teacher. Being a teacher of record is like someone tossing you the keys and giving you a few pointers.

Traditional residents have a higher retention rate than teachers of record, but what's stopping many potentially great teachers from taking the traditional route is money, or lack thereof. Traditional residents have to face a school year with no income, an impossibility for most. This is why the stipend that I received is such a godsend. More of these stipends will allow other potential teachers in this region to do what I'm doing and receive the kind of comprehensive, supportive, and rigorous training necessary to not just become a great teacher, but stick with teaching in schools that need great teachers. Growing up in Longmont, the image I had of rural Cortez before coming to work here was that it was a one street, dusty cowtown out in the wild west. I was right in some ways and wrong in others.

Cows do abound here--ranching is an important industry. One day, my commute to school was stalled because of a cattle drive across highway 145. For a number of our students, certain

times of year mean they work twelve hour days--helping to birth calves and care for them as soon as the bus drops them off after school.

The region's geography is breathtaking. Depending on where you're standing in Montezuma County, your view might be filled with the undulating, green and brown layers that comprise Mesa Verde's prominence. Or maybe if you look out east the striking La Plata mountains will fill your gaze--this time of year snuggled together and snow-capped. Or if you look west you'll see the dignified and

solitary Sleeping Ute mountain, sacred to the Ute Mountain Ute tribe. The region is beautiful, but the people living here don't have an easy life. Poverty, drug abuse, and violence are an unfortunate reality for many. The capital of the Ute Mountain Ute nation, Towaoc sits 14 miles southwest of the middle school, and many children who live there take a long bus ride everyday into Cortez to receive their education. The challenges of life in Towaoc are similar to many Native American reservations in the United States: alcoholism, methamphetamine use, violence, abuse, and homicide. Many children who live in Towaoc have experienced the kind of trauma you'd expect to see in violent inner city pockets, not in the sprawling mesas of the Four Corners region. Teaching in Cortez is tough, and not just because the profession of teaching is inherently difficult.

Last Friday after parent teacher conferences I was asking twenty year veteran teacher what he thinks of teaching in Cortez. It's a tough place to teach, he says. That's why so many teachers flee after one year, and their exodus is largely due to the difficult student behavior teachers must contend with on a daily basis and is exacerbated by the low salary.

Students' difficult behavior in the classroom often stems from their unstable home lives and is a plea for normalcy, consistency, kindness, acceptance, and necessitates a deep, deep well of patience. However, when a student tells you to go to hell (or worse) despite you giving them all the patience and love you have, it can be hard to maintain persistence and hope. The challenging working environment, coupled with a low salary (\$29,250 to start) is why teachers leave the Montezuma-Cortez School District. Good teachers are desperately needed here, but the job is easier and pays more elsewhere. More alternative license stipends could go a long way to mitigating the trend of teacher turnover here.

The grant has enabled me to do what I otherwise couldn't have done--stay out of debt while still receiving my alternative license in the best alternative licensure preparation program in the state of Colorado. Teachers succumb to the same crushing fist of poverty as our students, especially in this poor region of the state. This grant has enabled me to be a better teacher, and by enabling me, it has enabled the students at the middle school to have a stable, patient adult in their lives who is dedicated to the profession and to them.

~~We just crossed the academic year halfway mark, and my contributions have~~
included: co-teaching the English Language Learners program, interpreting and translating conferences and essential documents for Spanish-speaking parents, taking over as the Spanish teacher when the contracted teacher needed to switch roles, all the while fulfilling my Boettcher duties.

More grants would mean more desperately-needed financial incentives and support for people entering a demanding profession in a uniquely challenging environment. More grants could

allow potential educators to be traditional residents like me, instead of having to take on the full burden of a full time teacher before they are ready. More of these grants could mean the difference between teachers staying long enough to make a difference and teachers leaving the profession right away. Please increase the number of grants so that more teachers are encouraged to make a commitment to schools like Montezuma-Cortez Middle School, schools that urgently need teachers to stay.

Sincerely,
Jessica
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