

# Case For Support



# I. Program Overview

## Our Journey

The Oxford Teachers Academy is a new project proposed by Oxford Day Academy, a public charter high school that adapts **Oxford tutorials**—the University of Oxford's debate-based learning method—to the public high school setting. Our students spend up to half of their time 'in the field,' design-thinking their way through the issues that matter most to them; on campus, they connect these real-world experiences to academic content through socratic debates with other students and staff.

We've spent a decade piloting and refining our approach and successfully launched our own school. Now, we are embarking on a **partnership with University of Oxford faculty** to more effectively train school communities in the tutorial method, and to scale its successes without the time or expense of growing a brick-and-mortar footprint. We will achieve this through a **teacher credentialing program** that trains the next generation of K-12 teachers in tutorial-based pedagogy and sends them back out into their own communities.

## The OTA Difference.

In response to a **national teacher shortage crisis**, other charter schools have used teacher training programs to scale their model's reach. The Oxford Teachers Academy (OTA) leapfrogs these training scale strategies in three key ways.

1. **Who we train.** Existing credentialing programs require candidates to earn a college degree before they enroll, which cuts out millions of potential educators already living in the communities that need them most. By contrast, our program targets local adults who are passionate about developing youth but lack a college degree; we train them through a paid apprenticeship combined with a low-fee BA

and teaching credential pathway. This better targets and develops **educators who reflect their students' identity**; research suggests that children of color—especially boys—greatly benefit from teachers who share their demographics and lived experiences.

2. **Where we go.** The overwhelming majority of teacher training programs depend upon the economies of scale and population density typical of urban communities. Rural schools serve nearly as many students as urban schools, and face equally acute teachers shortages, but few-to-no good options exist for developing rural teachers locally. Our tech-enabled apprenticeship approach allows us to **reach rural communities** that have been untouched by existing teacher training pathways.

3. **How we're funded.** Most programs charge high fees to cover the overhead costs of their affiliated university; these are paid either by private tuition (which drives out diverse candidates) or by massive philanthropy (which is unsustainable). Our non-profit apprenticeship program allows prospective teachers to begin working under the supervision of a master teacher right away, generating revenue from schools paying for a staffed classroom. Our low overhead and strict focus on education degrees allow us to keep program costs low, such that we are **financially sustainable on earned income** from partner schools once we exit the startup phase.

A reading deck accompanies this case for support to provide further details on logistics and execution. With this context in mind, we welcome you to learn more about the Oxford Teachers Academy—a revolutionary new educator pipeline program that unlocks student potential by addressing the **quantity** and **quality** components of our nation's teacher shortage crisis.



# II. The Crisis

Most successful people can point to a teacher who changed their lives—a mentor who inspired them to grow, to think, to pursue their passion well after class was over. Far from anecdotal, these stories personify the vast body of research on teacher quality. Those findings are clear: few things should matter as much as teachers within the education reform movement, as high-quality educators are two to three times more effective in shifting our students' trajectories than any other school intervention.<sup>1</sup> Yet it has never been harder for schools to find and keep talented educators, and teacher shortages have reached crisis levels in communities across the nation.

**Teacher shortages are large and growing quickly.**<sup>2</sup> Every day, millions of American students walk into classrooms ready to learn, only to find that no one is there to teach them. Right now public schools in every single state<sup>3</sup> face a total of 100,000

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classroom vacancies.<sup>4</sup> Looking forward, these projections worsen: replacement rates must increase to an estimated 1.5 million teachers over the next five years,<sup>5</sup> but enrollment in teacher certification programs fell by 35% over a previous five year period.<sup>6</sup> The net result: those millions of students already waiting for a teacher will only balloon without a significant change in how we supply teachers to our schools.

These statistics, staggering as they may be, present the rosier version of our reality, as they assume that all current teachers are of sufficiently high quality. To the contrary, two of the biggest teacher quality indicators—teachers' own academic performance and their identity match with students—have moved in the wrong direction over the last 30 years.<sup>7,8,9</sup> This suggests that quantity is only only the tip of the iceberg, and that millions of additional students in staffed classrooms still do not have the quality teacher they need to reach their full potential.

**Persistent shortages bear astronomical costs.** On average, schools spend \$20,000 in headhunting and recruitment fees to fill a single vacant teacher position,<sup>10</sup> costing an estimated \$2.2 billion in taxpayer funds each year.<sup>11</sup> These immediate costs are dwarfed by the long-term costs of the shrinking high-quality teacher pool. A leading education economist projects that the bottom 5-8%

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of US educators—most of whom are unqualified, and have been given emergency credentials to fill a teacher vacancy—cost the US \$100 trillion in students' lost future economic productivity.<sup>12</sup>

# III. The Opportunity

Addressing the teacher shortage crisis will require millions of new educators—and through their training, the opportunity to pull a new type of teacher and pedagogy into our schools. In this way, vacancies become the mechanism that drives meaningful, sustained adoption of the tutorial method beyond the walls of Oxford Day Academy.

**Addressing root causes could close teacher shortages.** Current efforts have not ended the teacher shortage crisis because they do not address the underlying drivers. Programs could substantially shrink vacancies if they focused on two such factors:

- **Teacher distribution.** Teacher shortages are not uniform. Certain grade levels (high school);<sup>13</sup> subject areas (math, science, and special education);<sup>14</sup> and geographies (rural and urban)<sup>15</sup> face massive shortages while other cohorts—for example, suburban elementary school teachers—report a surplus. Training programs must coordinate with K-12 schools to produce teachers that fill particular needs.
- **Teacher attrition.** Presently, 40% of teachers leave the classroom in their first 5 years of teaching, such that 80% of all vacancies result because a teacher exited the classroom prematurely (ie, not from retirement, school promotion or moving to a new school).<sup>16, 17</sup> Programs that focus on teacher recruitment and retention can seal the leaky teacher pipeline and replenish our supply.

**Teacher placement as a distribution channel for tutorial pedagogy.** Countless promising educational practices—curriculums, instructional methods, and so on—fall by the wayside even when they are superior to existing alternatives because they do not compel schools to pull and keep them in. Teacher shortages create the burning platform for adoption: school leaders are not opposed to the tutorial method, and would be thrilled to find a cost-neutral solution to their exact shortage needs, both now and in the long term.

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*The Oxford Teachers Academy acts as a benevolent 'trojan horse' for pulling the tutorial methodology into classrooms across the US without the obligations or liabilities of expanding our physical footprint.*

By partnering with schools to identify their specific teacher vacancies—and then filling them with credentialed, tutorial-trained instructors—the Oxford Teachers Academy acts as a benevolent 'trojan horse' for pulling the tutorial methodology into classrooms across the US without the obligations or liabilities of expanding our physical footprint.

# IV. Our Approach

The Oxford Teachers' Academy fills vacancies through a tech-enabled apprenticeship program that mirrors the US medical residency system. The

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## *A tech-enabled apprenticeship program that mirrors the US medical residency system*

details provided in sections III, IV, and V of the accompanying reading deck.

**Tapping an invisible market.** OTA grows the teacher supply by revealing two hidden teacher labor segments: credentialed teachers who have left the classroom in search of greater flexibility, and local community members who want to teach but need a convenient, affordable college degree and teaching credential pathway. With millions of people in each segment, this market is large enough to saturate teacher shortages across the US, but has been overlooked by other credentialing pathways.

**Delivering quality teachers with precision.** Under our method, veteran teachers who have left the classroom are trained as expert mentors. These experts support three to five apprentices through virtual and in-person collaboration across multiple schools within a geographic hub. Partner schools work with OTA to identify the exact subject areas

narrative below provides a high-level description of how this program works, with specific operational

and grade levels they need, and to select local apprentices who they believe could be a long-term fit for their school culture. Such an approach seems especially promising for rural communities, where there is an acute need for quasi-virtual solutions that can reach geographically remote schools.

**Apprentice-style training for next-generation teachers.** The expert mentor serves as teacher of record in the short term, with apprentices taking on more and more responsibility over a six-year apprenticeship that mirrors the US medical residency system. During this time, apprentices take online and in-person classes through OTA to earn their BA degree and teaching credential. Schools pay OTA the standard teacher salary for staffing that classroom (roughly \$50,000 / year), and we use the money to cover apprentice stipends, expert salaries, as well as degree costs and administrative fees.

The net result is a scalable system that better identifies, trains, and supports new teachers; more effectively and affordably fills vacancies for schools; and more efficiently scales the tutorial method to make it accessible to our nation's most underserved communities—all in pursuit of unleashing the full potential of each and every student.

# V. Conclusion

The Oxford Teachers Academy (OTA) is the first of its kind: a 21st century teacher training pipeline designed to build exactly the teachers we need for exactly the communities who need them. Valuable in its own right, this capacity also creates the means to scale the Oxford tutorial method into a widely-adopted gold standard for instruction.

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*A 21st century teacher training pipeline designed to build exactly the teachers we need for exactly the communities who need them*

Imagine a world where this mission is realized—what would it look like?

**For local residents** who want to become teachers, apprenticeship marks the opportunity to give back to their neighborhood while getting paid to earn a college degree and teaching credential. It's the ticket to a more stable salary, a meaningful career, and a better life without leaving the people or place that raised them.

**For veteran teachers** who have left the classroom, expert mentorship provides the fulfillment of what first attracted them to the teaching profession, but without the inflexibility or bureaucracy that drove them away. It's the opportunity to continue growing and learning, now as a teacher of teachers, but without losing their connection to students.

**For partner schools** facing chronic vacancies, an OTA partnership saves money and time, as well as a pathway for developing a professional, lifelong teacher workforce that is committed to their community. It frees them from the burden of never-ending teacher recruitment, so that they can focus on their schools' academic mission.

**For students** from all walks of life, rigorous tutorial-based learning under the guidance of an exceptional teacher is the gateway to a lifelong passion for exploration and discovery. No longer a faceless afterthought, their individual interests and abilities become the center of instruction as they are developed into the critically conscious, creative, compassionate leaders our world needs.

This vision is achievable—and not just for the students, staff, and community of Oxford Day Academy. Our teacher training program could bring these possibilities into reality for every community, in every corner of our nation. In this way, we see the potential of the Oxford Teachers Academy to change the world one student and one teacher at a time.

## Notes

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