



Mitigating Teacher Shortages: Induction and Mentorship

JULIE ROWLAND WOODS

The first brief in this series, *Teacher Shortages: What We Know*, explores research on teacher shortages and highlights recent state task force findings. This report is one of five policy briefs examining strategies states are using to address shortages:

1 ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

2 FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

3 INDUCTION AND MENTORSHIP

4 EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

5 TEACHER LEADERSHIP



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Providing new teachers with induction and mentoring can be an effective strategy to **retain** teachers. A definition of induction and mentorship programs is provided, followed by a summary of the research on this strategy, state policy examples and considerations for policymakers.



What are induction and mentorship programs?

Teacher induction and mentoring programs are one strategy to address early teacher attrition, which can have a negative effect on student achievement.¹ New teachers who are poorly supported or underprepared are more likely to leave the profession within the first five years, and today's students are more likely than ever before to be placed in classrooms with new teachers.²

Comprehensive induction programs can not only improve teacher retention but also “accelerate the professional growth of new teachers, provide a positive return on investment, and improve student learning.”⁵ Currently, about one in five teachers in U.S. classrooms are in their first three years in the profession,³ and many teachers are now entering through an alternative certification program.⁴

According to the New Teacher Center, 29 states require some form of induction or mentoring for new teachers. However, few state policies meet all of the criteria commonly recommended for high-quality comprehensive programs.⁶ The terms induction and mentoring are sometimes used interchangeably, but typically induction programs incorporate mentorship by an experienced teacher. What is termed “comprehensive induction” is generally a multi-year, structured program of mentorship and professional development in which trained mentors provide constructive feedback to new teachers.⁷ These programs often ensure release time for participants and evaluate progress based on statewide or program standards for teacher success.

DIG DEEPER



A policy snapshot from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) highlights research, strategies and state examples of mentoring and induction programs.

MORE ANALYSIS



The New Teacher Center (NTC) recently released an updated 50-State Review of Policies on New Educator Induction and Mentoring. NTC's analysis shows that only three states—Connecticut, Delaware and Iowa—meet most of the organization's criteria for high-quality mentoring and induction programs.



What does the research say?

RETENTION

Induction and mentoring programs have been shown to improve teacher retention. For example, in a recent study, teachers who were assigned a mentor and participated in induction during their first year of teaching were more likely than teachers without these supports to teach for at least five years.⁸ Early induction and mentoring programs were extremely successful in certain urban districts, reducing attrition by more than two-thirds in districts in Ohio and New York.⁹

While a number of studies indicate that these programs can reduce attrition and improve teacher job satisfaction, research suggests that the strength of these positive effects may depend on the kind and quality of program provided. Factors such as “having a mentor from the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject and having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers” may be more influential than other factors contributing to retention.¹⁰ Additionally, school culture is an important factor, as induction and mentoring programs may have their best impact on teachers working in schools with “strong school leadership, collegial professional relationships, adequate supplies and equipment, and a positive and supportive climate among all adults.”¹¹

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

New teachers are typically less effective than veteran teachers at improving student achievement, but induction and mentoring programs can help new teachers become more effective teachers more quickly than without the support.¹² Induction and mentoring programs have been shown to improve classroom instructional practices as well as student achievement as measured by test scores.¹³

QUALITIES OF A COMPREHENSIVE INDUCTION AND MENTORING PROGRAM

Appropriate Program Timing and Length

Comprehensive induction and mentoring programs often require a certain amount of contact time between the mentor and mentee, guaranteed time released from other work duties, and a reduced workload for both the mentor and mentee teacher.¹⁴ By requiring that these programs provide teachers with the appropriate time and support, state policy can help ensure that induction and mentoring programs do not become an additional burden for teachers and that funding is not wasted on a “check the box” program.

Teachers typically participate in comprehensive induction and mentoring for at least a full year. To maximize their effect on student achievement, programs may need to provide multiple years of new teacher support. One oft-cited study found that two years of comprehensive induction did not have a positive impact on student achievement until the teachers' third year of teaching.¹⁵



Setting High Standards

Leading teacher advocacy organizations recommend that induction and mentoring programs are grounded in strong program standards, which can establish a consistent set of expectations for program design and operations.¹⁶ By providing a unifying vision across the state, standards can help ensure high-quality programs while allowing flexibility to account for unique local needs.¹⁷ The state department of education, board of education or an educator licensure board could be charged with developing these standards.¹⁸

Additionally, program standards can incorporate teaching standards, which describe what a high-quality teacher knows and can do. When used for induction and mentoring programs, teaching standards can provide “a basis for assessing novice progress and identifying areas for professional growth.”¹⁹ These standards give mentors and mentees a common language and benchmarks that can be used with mentoring tools such as formative assessments that assess a new teacher’s progress throughout the year.

Mentor Criteria, Training and Tools

To help ensure high-quality mentorship, program standards may include mentor selection and training criteria. Commonly cited criteria for selecting high-quality mentors include minimum years of experience, proven effectiveness in the classroom, demonstrated leadership qualities and a strong understanding of adult learning.²⁰ Program standards may also require mentors to teach in a common content area or grade as their mentee.

Initial and ongoing mentor training can teach mentors to be effective at classroom observations, provide useful feedback and use formative assessment tools.²¹ Formative assessments of new teachers’ practice may be used to help identify areas for new teacher improvement and guide mentor-mentee discussions.²² These tools can also document the effectiveness of induction and mentoring programs by showing their effect on teacher development over time or helping program leaders to identify areas for program improvement.



State examples

Appropriate Program Timing and Length



Kentucky law specifies that new teachers and their mentors spend at least 70 hours working together, allocated as at least 20 in-class hours and 50 out-of-class hours.²³



North Carolina’s Beginning Teacher Support Program must include three years of induction and mentoring, and the program standards stipulate that “mentors are given protected time” to work with new teachers.²⁴



Set High Standards



The **Illinois** Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs are described as the state's "vision of a comprehensive and dynamic program for beginning teachers and those who support them." The standards cover nine key areas: 1) induction program leadership, 2) program goals and design, 3) resources, 4) site administrator roles and responsibilities, 5) mentor selection and assignment, 6) mentor professional development, 7) development of beginning teacher practice, 8) formative assessment and 9) program evaluation.²⁵

Working in conjunction with Illinois' program standards is the Illinois Induction Program Continuum, which "describes four levels of program implementation for each criterion of the standards."²⁶

Mentor Criteria, Training and Tools



The **South Carolina** Department of Education's guidelines for its induction and mentoring program describe a four step formative assessment process. The new teacher and mentor together will: 1) collect objective teacher performance data, 2) analyze the data and compare the teacher's performance to performance standards, 3) develop a professional growth and development plan and 4) implement the plan, after which the formative assessment process begins again.²⁷

South Carolina's guidelines also include mentor selection and training criteria. Mentors must have the recommendations of a school administrator and another teacher, among other requirements, and mentors must be evaluated on their knowledge of key mentoring and induction concepts.²⁸



Policy considerations

To ensure appropriate program timing and length, consider:

- A reduced workload, guaranteed release time and minimum contact time requirements for mentors and mentees.
- Multiple years of support.

To set high standards for programs and their participants, consider:

- Program standards that outline the roles and duties of participants, including how and when mentoring should occur.
- Teaching standards that can be incorporated into mentor training and the feedback mentees receive.



To support mentors in their role, consider:

- Formative assessments for new teachers.
- Initial and ongoing mentor training.
- Mentor criteria, such as years of experience, effectiveness and knowledge of key mentoring concepts.
- Compensation for mentors.
- Ongoing professional development for new teachers; if possible, tie professional development to areas of improvement identified by mentors.

In general, induction and mentoring programs can benefit from:

- Consistent funding streams.
- Program accountability systems that assess and monitor program quality.
- Supportive school leaders and school cultures.
- Reducing teacher isolation through peer networks and learning communities, and providing induction and mentoring to cohorts that can provide ongoing support.



Endnotes

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AUTHOR

Julie Rowland Woods is a policy analyst with Education Commission of the States. She has her law degree and master's degree in education policy. When she's not thinking about policy with the K-12 team, Julie loves camping with her husband in Colorado's state parks. Contact Julie at jwoods@ecs.org or 303.299.3672.

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