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Beyond Compliance: Response to Michigan's Teacher Induction Mandate

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Unfunded mandate. Say these two words in a roomful of school and district leaders, and the likely response will be groans, eye rolling, and heartfelt sighs (with possibly some inappropriate language from the back of the room). Frustration with unfunded mandates is unlikely to end any time soon. As long as policymakers' ambitions exceed their budgets, unfunded mandates are here to stay.

Faced with an unfunded mandate, school and district leaders can respond in several ways. The first, ignoring the mandate, may actually work quite well in some cases. Some mandates turn out to be downright silly and, as long as the consequences are mild, ignoring them is an effective strategy. Most, however, cannot be ignored. Ignoring them results in severe sanctions, including loss of funds and public embarrassment. In these cases, district leaders can choose to comply with the letter, if not the spirit, of the mandate. Finally, some mandates actually embody such good ideas that ignoring them is not in the best interests of students. These mandates deserve to be embraced – even if unaccompanied by additional resources.

Michigan's teacher induction mandate is an example of an unfunded mandate that falls into this last category. Complying with Michigan's induction mandate makes sense. We know that helping novice teachers both improves their effectiveness and increases the likelihood they will remain in teaching. Ignoring the needs of novices is costly, in terms of both student achievement and teacher turnover.

The Michigan legislature recognized this when passing Section 1526 of the Revised School Code. This section requires districts to assign mentors to novice teachers and to provide them with at least fifteen days of professional development during their first three years of teaching. These days are in addition to the five days of annual professional development required for all teachers under Section 1527 of the Revised School Code.

We have all heard anecdotes about districts that are doing an excellent job of inducting their new teachers into the profession, as well as horror stories of unsupported novices. Our research team set out to learn more about how Michigan's education leaders are responding to Section 1526, the teacher induction mandate.[1] We first spoke with several superintendents facing a variety of demographic and economic circumstances and asked them about their induction programs. We also asked them to nominate colleagues whose districts were doing an exemplary job. We then interviewed key

[1] This project was carried out by a team of researchers from the College of Education at Michigan State University with support provided by the Education Policy Center at MSU.

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administrators in the nominated districts, hoping that their success stories would be useful to other districts struggling with the induction mandate.

Undoubtedly and unfortunately, there are probably some local school leaders who ignore this mandate, or who comply with it by seeking out low cost professional development regardless of its quality and assigning novice teachers to "paper mentors" with whom they rarely, if ever, interact. In our interviews with district personnel, however, we found many more examples of intermediate school districts (ISDs) and local school districts that have gone beyond mere compliance with the legislation, finding creative ways to embrace the sound ideas behind it.

This brief will discuss the strategies used by districts as they strive to offer high quality induction programs in an environment of scarce resources. While these strategies provide guidance for districts still struggling with the induction mandate, their usefulness extends beyond this particular mandate as well. As we shall see, the strategies used in this particular case are applicable to the more general problems associated with substantive compliance with unfunded mandates. While not easy, it is possible for financially challenged districts to offer high quality responses to unfunded mandates.

In our study, we identified three effective strategies for developing and implementing high quality programs in a fiscally strained environment. We found instances of districts collaborating with each other and with their ISDs to pool resources. We saw examples of districts reaching out to outside experts for materials and strategies. And we identified districts reaching in to draw upon local expertise in creative ways. Both ISDs and school districts took advantage of these strategies, often combining strategies to respond to the induction mandate. Table 1 describes and presents examples of each strategy.

Collaboration

Several of the districts we studied were able to increase the quality of their induction programs by collaborating with outside groups. They collaborated with each other and with university faculty, sharing funds and technical expertise to stretch their dollars.

In one instance, several districts joined together to form a consortium that successfully applied for grant money to develop an induction program. By pooling their local induction funds and the grant money, they were able to hire faculty from a local university to assist them in developing materials and then train local personnel to use those materials. The resulting induction program reflected input from all the collaborating parties. District personnel were familiar with the local context and their particular needs, while the university personnel knew a great deal about the research surrounding induction. The resulting collaboration allowed the districts in the consortium to combine what researchers know about effective induction with educators' insights about how a particular strategy might play out in their own local context.

In this example, the power of collaboration was augmented by the additional funds available as a result of the grant. Even without a grant, collaboration can allow districts to use existing resources more efficiently. Several districts reported collaboratively planning programs for new teachers. They were able to share their expertise and, since programs were still implemented locally, individual districts could modify the plans as needed.

Other districts, particularly those with a small number of new hires each year, collaborated on both planning and implementation. Joint planning took advantage of the technical expertise found across districts, while joint implementation was more cost effective than having each district present individual programs to small groups of teachers.

Collaboration between school districts and ISDs also increased the quality of local induction offerings. Some school districts borrowed materials from their ISD and called on ISD personnel for assistance in designing programs, allowing them to take advantage of resources and technical expertise housed at the ISD level. Some smaller school districts relied more heavily on ISDs, even contributing part of their professional development funds to the ISD, allowing it to offer induction programs. This can be a particularly effective strategy when school districts do not have the manpower to offer high quality induction programs and professional development funds are insuffi-

cient to allow for increased personnel at the local level.

Several districts reported entering into reciprocal agreements with other districts, allowing teachers to attend offerings outside of their home districts at no cost to the teachers. One rural district reported that it ran its own induction program but participated in reciprocal agreements with nearby districts, supplementing local offerings. This is particularly useful when new hires within a district do not teach the same subjects. Rather than having a high school math teacher, a middle school choral director, and a third grade teacher participate in one-size-fits-all induction, collaboration across districts allows for more subject specific offerings at a reasonable cost.

A final collaborative strategy is for districts to work closely with local institutions of higher education, encouraging those institutions to provide continuing education that is aligned with local induction needs. For example, one district collaborated with two local universities to provide coursework that would culminate in novice teachers receiving Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP) certification. The district felt that MLLP certification was valuable but was unable to offer it within the district. Local universities were willing and able to fill this gap, particularly since the districts would encourage novice teachers to enroll.

Reaching Out – Seeking Outside Expertise

Another effective strategy involves using materials and strategies developed by outside experts – induction specialists – as the basis for an induction program. For example, Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching is a nationally known system of teacher evaluation. In fact, the Praxis III teacher evaluation program offered by Educa-

Table 1. Doing More With Less: Effective Strategies for Succeeding in a Fiscally Strained Environment

	Collaboration	Reaching Out	Reaching In
Description:	Districts work together and with other local groups.	Districts rely on outside specialists for program design or delivery.	Districts draw upon expertise at all levels of the system.
Examples:	Districts pool their funds and technical expertise to offer a unified induction program.	Districts use materials developed by induction specialists rather than developing all their materials themselves.	Districts seek out specialized expertise in their teaching force. An elementary school teacher with a particular interest in science education might work with new elementary school teachers on this aspect of their development.
	Districts work with local universities so that professional development needs can be met through the local higher education system, rather than through district offerings.	Districts send employees who work with new teachers to outside providers, such as the MEA Pathwise trainers, for induction training.	Local experts offer high quality induction to teachers who are geographically scattered through the use of technology such as video conferencing.
	Districts enter into reciprocal agreements where teachers can attend offerings provided by any district that has signed the agreement at no additional cost to the teachers or the teacher's home district.	Some districts outsource their training, relying on outside specialists to assist with induction, rather than overburdening their existing staff.	Building principals help the district identify teachers who are likely to work well with new teachers.

tional Testing Service is built around the four domains and 19 criteria promoted by Danielson as characterizing effective, professional practice. Several districts in our study took advantage of Danielson's work, basing their induction offerings on Danielson's framework and then introducing additional strands where needed to meet local needs.

Quite a few districts – 13 at the time of our study – were combining outside expertise and collaboration by sending local personnel who worked with new teachers to the Michigan Education Association's (MEA) Pathwise training program. The MEA took advantage of Danielson's expertise when designing the Pathwise mentor training program, which is based on her evaluation framework. By collaborating with the MEA, districts were able to learn how to apply Danielson's work to induction quickly and efficiently. One district reported sending two district administrators and two teachers to the Pathwise training and then having those four people take on responsibility for training other local personnel.

Several districts also reported using books and videos by outside specialists such as Harry Wong as a component in their induction programs. The Wong series stresses classroom organization and new teacher survival skills. By relying on outside expertise to guide this facet of induction, districts were able to free up local resources and expertise to work on other issues, such as developing subject- and grade-specific programs for novice teachers.

The examples above illustrate the use of outside expertise and materials to design district induction programs. Other districts were more concerned about their local capacity to deliver appropriate services. One district developed its induction program locally and then used outside consultants to deliver monthly two hour inservices based on its local program. This allowed the district to offer expert instruction to novices despite being a small district where the limited number of people made it difficult to rely exclusively on local expertise for program delivery. While this strategy may not be as cost effective as others, it allows districts with few internal resources to offer high quality induction programs that are consistent with both the letter and the spirit of the mandate.

Reaching In – Using Local Expertise Creatively

Another strategy used by many districts involved using existing local expertise in creative ways. Using local people is often more cost effective than hiring outside consultants. However, it can be difficult for district personnel, particularly in small districts, to develop expertise in every aspect of education.

The mentoring aspect of induction provides examples both of this dilemma and of possible solutions to it. Several local districts were having difficulty identifying suitable mentors for their new teachers – district administrators simply didn't know which teachers would be likely to make good mentors. They solved this problem by drawing on local expertise at the school level, asking building principals to help identify potential mentors, based on expertise, personality, and subject/grade levels. In other cases, local mentors were unavailable for new teachers in particular specializations, such as art. Districts overcame this problem by asking their ISD or neighboring local districts for assistance in finding an experienced, exemplary teacher in the novice's specialization area. By drawing on expertise at several system levels, local districts provided new teachers with mentors who were well suited to provide them with assistance specifically targeted to their needs and goals.

Mentor training provides another example. One district took advantage of the fact that a local teacher was beginning work on an advanced degree. The district encouraged her to build her thesis work around mentor training. The teacher surveyed local mentors and mentees to determine their needs and then developed a training handbook as part of her academic work.

Drawing upon local expertise is also a valuable tool for developing new teacher induction workshops. One ISD and its associated local districts worked with administrators and teachers at all system levels to develop training strands for new teachers. Once strands were identified, the group worked together to identify sources of local expertise. For example, a teacher with extensive knowledge of early literacy development might be chosen to put on a workshop that would be attended by novices from both her local district and surrounding areas.

ISDs and local districts often reported that the ISD had in-house expertise on topics such as special education law and available resources, while local districts had greater expertise on procedural topics such as attendance policy. They divided training responsibilities to reflect this balance, allowing experts at each level of the system to provide training in their domain and avoiding expensive duplication of effort.

Other districts were beginning to take advantage of technology to extend the reach of local expertise. One ISD developed a CD for local districts to use; ISD personnel could not be everywhere at the same time, but their electronic proxies could. Another ISD reported using distance learning. In rural areas, travel time can be an enormous obstacle to training. Video conferencing and use of the internet allow the ISD to provide high quality training to a scattered audience without spending inordinate amounts of time on travel.

School districts are filled with talented people. Drawing on local expertise in creative ways allows districts to take advantage of existing local talent. Rather than spending time and money duplicating existing expertise – whether by hiring new personnel or training district personnel in areas where local talent already exists – districts are able to focus their resources on enhancing the skills of existing local experts and increasing the depth and breadth of their induction programs.

Conclusion

Responding to unfunded mandates is neither pleasant nor easy, but some Michigan districts are rising to the challenge. By leveraging their resources in creative ways, these districts are moving beyond compliance, developing high quality induction programs for their novice teachers. Three strategies were commonly used to leverage resources: collaborating with each other and with outside groups, taking advantage of the materials and strategies developed by national induction specialists, and using local expertise in creative ways.

Districts often worked with partners to implement the induction mandate. They would offer programs together, or collaborate with ISDs or local universities. This strategy allowed them to offer higher quality programs than they could have developed and implemented on their own. Not only did the quality of offerings increase, but costs often decreased as well since program costs were spread across a larger number of teachers.

Districts also took advantage of work done by nationally prominent induction specialists. They based their programs on the recommendations made by these outside experts rather than beginning with a blank slate. This saved time and money during program development, allowing local personnel to devote their time and expertise to customizing general recommendations to suit local needs. In some cases, districts took advantage of the frameworks developed by these induction specialists, while in others districts used their training materials as well.

Finally, all of the districts studied relied on local expertise for at least some portion of their induction program, sometimes using local experts in unconventional ways. School administrators were asked to think about the personalities and expertise of their staffs to help districts match novice teachers with congenial mentors – even when those novice teachers were not at the administrator's school. Classroom teachers with specialized knowledge were asked to offer workshops to novices. These tasks are not written into the job descriptions of school personnel, but districts were able to offer higher quality induction programs at a lower cost by thinking creatively about multiple sources of local expertise rather than limiting themselves to district personnel.

Very few districts restricted themselves to one strategy. For example, a district might work with several others to develop an induction program, use teacher expertise found throughout all the districts to design and deliver some workshops around the induction program, and take advantage of a national induction specialist's work when designing and delivering others. It was clear in the interviews that many districts struggled to deliver high quality induction in a fiscally strained environment. At the same time, districts were willing to work hard to do so because they believed in the ideas underlying the mandate. They took advantage of every strategy they could think of and were often remarkably successful in meeting the spirit, as well as the letter, of this law.

Unfunded mandates are unlikely to disappear. While the examples from our study have been

limited to induction, it is easy to generalize the strategies discussed here to other unfunded mandates. When reporting requirements increase, districts can work together to learn about the new requirements and develop strategies for training personnel about them. When special education laws change, districts can rely on interested teachers and school administrators to receive training in the new laws and then teach other personnel – including district administrators – about the changes. Two constants in education are changing policy and an expectation that districts must manage to do more with less. The strategies used by these Michigan districts as they sought to develop and implement high quality induction programs can help districts deal with both change and rising expectations in constructive ways.

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