



Presidential
Transition



Why Are New Teachers Leaving?

The Case for Beginning-Teacher Induction and Mentoring

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The Challenge

The first year of teaching is a “make or break” time. The transition into the teaching profession can be a challenging experience for the beginning teacher. Approximately 30 percent of all beginning teachers either move to a different school or leave teaching at the end of their first year.ⁱ The U.S. Department of Educationⁱⁱ reported that nine percent of new teachers may not even make it to the end of their first year, while current researchⁱⁱⁱ finds that up to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years of entering the classroom.

Teacher turnover is evident throughout the profession, not only among beginning teachers. Sixteen percent of public school teachers around the country are leaving their classrooms, either moving to a different school or leaving the teaching workforce altogether. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Teacher Follow-up Survey, of the more than three million public school teachers in the profession during the 2003–04 school year, 84 percent remained at the same school (“stayers”), eight percent moved to a different school (“movers”), and another eight percent left the profession at the beginning of the next school year.^{iv}

But why are new teachers leaving? Educators have long suspected a link between high beginning-teacher attrition rates and the teacher shortages affecting our nation’s schools.^v Teacher shortages vary by state and are often found in subject areas like math and science, but also in specialty areas like special education and English as a Second Language.^{vi} Research suggests these shortages are due in part because too few new teachers are joining the workforce, but also due to the fact that teachers are leaving the profession.^{vii}

Providing professional development and support to beginning teachers is cited as critical to their retention in the teaching workforce.^{viii} In a study of Texas teachers, researchers found that beginning teachers left the field because they did not receive the supports they desperately needed.^{ix} Furthermore, increasingly high numbers of well-qualified teachers are leaving teaching for other pursuits. Research suggests that these well-qualified teaching recruits are often the first to leave,^x and approximately one-third of them leave the profession within five years.^{xi}

Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring

The rates of beginning-teacher turnover reinforce the need to address the issues faced by the beginning teacher. Beginning-teacher induction programs have increased in an effort to provide support and to beginning teachers to remain in teaching. Induction programs, which often include a mentoring component, are designed to ease the beginning teacher’s transition, while also providing professional development opportunities to build knowledge and enhance skills. Further, a growing body of evidence suggests that beginning-teacher induction programs can positively affect teacher quality, students’ academic outcomes, and school costs.^{xii} However, diversity in the implementation of mentoring and induction programs, combined with a lack of rigorous research on program effectiveness, make it difficult for researchers to truly determine the impact of induction and mentoring.^{xiii}



What are some of the current mentoring and induction programs?

Mentoring induction programs, or programs that utilize mentoring as the primary method of induction, vary based on their goals, whether it be reduction in the costs of attrition or enhanced professional growth. Some programs are designed to acclimate beginning teachers to the school environment, while others are geared toward supplementing the novice teacher's education with strategies and insights gained from years of teaching experience. Still other programs emphasize social and emotional support for the beginning teacher, with the mentor teacher serving as confidant and guide to the local school system.^{xiv}

ICF International recently conducted an evaluation of the **Texas Education Agency's Beginning-Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) grant program**. The overall goals of the BTIM program are to: (a) increase beginning-teacher retention, (b) improve beginning-teacher performance, and (c) improve overall student achievement. The evaluation investigated the effectiveness of the BTIM program on teacher retention and student achievement, and also highlighted areas for program enhancement. Findings indicate that the BTIM program appears to have positive influence on teacher retention at the end of the first year of the program.

Action Plan

This paper proposes four action steps for beginning-teacher induction and mentoring programs with the potential to not only keep teachers in the classroom, but also increase student achievement and reduce school costs. These steps are based on ICF's work and interaction with the field. The steps are designed to create immediate improvement for existing programs, offer suggestions for new program development, and point to the needed direction for future research.

1. **Create a school culture and community that supports the new teacher mentoring and induction program.** A successful mentoring program is not a one-time or short-term effort; it must be a sustained, purposeful activity that requires buy-in from teachers, mentors, school leaders, and the entire school community. Strategies for creating a supportive school environment include:

Implementing and fully communicating program policies and procedures. The full development and implementation of policies and procedures are critical to establishing a shared understanding of the program's participant responsibilities, available opportunities, and benefits. ICF's work with BTIM grantees indicated a substantial portion either had not developed or had only partially developed program policies or materials such as handbooks. Open and consistent communication among all program participants (e.g.,

Voices from the Field

Case studies with Texas school districts participating in the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) program yielded the following recommendations for program improvement:

- Reduce paperwork.
- Start the program earlier in the year.
- Have a lead mentor or facilitator at each school.
- Hold trainings that mentors and beginning teachers attend together.
- Distribute a structured timeline for completing milestones and submitting paperwork.
- Increase the amount of support provided by district and school administrators.



administrators, mentors, and beginning teachers) is inherently related to successful implementation. A central feature of this communication (through mechanisms such as learning communities and listservs) should be program responsibilities, opportunities, and benefits. An open line of communication will provide an additional key benefit, as a means for administrators to identify program strengths and weaknesses.

- **Obtaining full participation in training by program administrators.** Generally, training is a key element to understanding a beginning teacher mentoring and induction program, obtaining commitment, and instituting effective implementation. ICF's evaluation of the BTIM program indicated that training was viewed favorably by administrators, mentors, and beginning teachers. However, a substantial portion of BTIM program administrators did not receive this training. School and program administrators should participate in training to help alleviate issues related to policy development, implementation, and communication to mentors and beginning teachers. The ICF team suggests encouraging program participation among all stakeholder groups through a combined training involving administrators, mentors, and beginning teachers. This option could serve to facilitate a shared understanding of the program and facilitate communication among all groups.
- **Monitoring the consistency and nature of mentor-beginning teacher interactions.** School administrators should monitor mentor-beginning teacher interactions to determine the level and type of contact between mentors and beginning teachers on their schools. For instance, as the school year progresses, face-to-face meetings may be supplemented by e-mail exchanges or other informal communication. Additionally, administrators should monitor whether the content of mentor-beginning teacher interaction evolves over time. Much of the interaction between mentors and beginning teachers likely focuses on classroom management and instructional techniques, particularly in the early portion of the school year. As the beginning teachers become experienced, comfortable, and confident, the content of the mentor-beginning teacher relationship may need to evolve to ensure consistent and productive interaction.

2. **Utilize suggested elements of successful beginning teacher induction and mentoring programs.**

The Alliance for Excellent Education^{xv} cites the components of a comprehensive mentoring program as including high-quality mentoring, common planning time and collaboration, ongoing professional development, participation in an external network of teachers, and standards-based evaluation. Beyond the program components, environmental and programmatic elements that enable a successful induction and mentoring program include: a perspective on induction that is multi-year and developmental; strong principals; high-quality providers of the induction program, including dedicated staff; additional support for new teachers with little preparation; incentives for novice and veteran teachers to participate; alignment among induction, classroom needs, and professional standards; cooperation with unions; and an adequate and stable source of funding and commitment to outcome evaluation.^{xvi}

ICF's work in the field highlights two additional elements that can contribute to the success of a beginning teacher induction and mentoring program:

- **Use grade and subject as key matching criteria between mentors and beginning teachers.** The ICF evaluation of the BTIM program found that both mentors and beginning teachers felt mismatches in grade and department were barriers to developing an effective relationship.



Research suggests that beginning teacher mentoring is most effective for new teachers when they are matched with a mentor who teaches the same grade and subject area.^{xvii} Further, matching beginning teachers with mentors teaching the same subject area has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of new teacher attrition by approximately 30 percent.^{xviii} Every effort should be made to match a beginning teacher with a mentor who teaches the same grade level and subject area.

- **Remove within school constraints and logistical barriers.** ICF's evaluation of the Texas Education Agency's Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program found that beginning teachers and mentors participating in the program felt physical distance between classrooms and limited time (planning and preparation) were barriers to establishing an effective relationship. Further, common planning time is one of the key components of a comprehensive mentoring program.^{xix} Program administrators should be made fully aware that, provided teaching assignments or other school issues do not impede, eliminating barriers of these types will potentially yield substantial benefits in implementation.

3. Increase opportunities for national-sponsored induction and mentoring programs by using federal funds to support state-level programs.

Federal funding for beginning teacher induction and mentoring programs sends a message that beginning teachers need and deserve support during their transition into the classroom. During these tough economic times, school districts may not know how to financially provide this necessary assistance, or handle the high costs of teacher attrition. The administration should consider developing a beginning teacher induction and mentoring grant program that helps state and local education agencies support these new teachers.

The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates the cost of recruiting and training a new teacher is about 30 percent of the leaver's salary. Research suggests that induction pays off at \$1.37 for every \$1 invested.²⁰

- 4. Engage in outcome research to understand the effects of induction and mentoring, such as increased teacher retention or improved student outcomes.** Among controllable factors, nothing is more critical to student achievement than the delivery of high quality instruction. Although research on the impact of beginning teacher induction is positive, this research consists primarily of case studies, literature reviews and syntheses, and studies using quasi-experimental designs. Researchers caution against making definitive statements about these findings and suggest two issues hinder efforts to determine induction's impact, including: (a) the variety in the implementation of beginning teacher induction programs, and (b) the lack of rigorous outcome research on the effects of induction.^{xxi} Since this is an issue that affects every classroom, school, and district, it is appropriate to invest in a longitudinal study, approximately three to five years, to truly understand the impact of induction and mentoring on beginning teachers and the students they serve.

This four-step Action Plan is only the beginning in a long discussion around beginning teacher induction and overall teacher quality. The financial crisis faced by many schools and districts underscores a need to invest in the future of new teachers. Teacher induction and mentoring programs offer one strategy for providing beginning teachers across the nation with the tools and support they need to succeed.



About the Authors

This paper was written by Ms. Elizabeth Eaton and Ms. Wendy Sisson of ICF International. Ms. Eaton, an associate at ICF, has worked with education stakeholders at the Federal, state, and local levels. She has expertise in both youth and beginning teacher mentoring, and experience in conducting education research. Ms. Eaton served as a key contributor to the Texas Education Agency's evaluation of the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) program. Ms. Sisson, a principal at ICF, is a skilled social scientist with 15 years of experience in research and program evaluation, program/systems implementation and collaboration, project management, and training and technical assistance at the Federal and state levels. She is experienced in multiple content areas within education, including mentoring and school emergency management. The authors benefited from the input of staff across ICF who conduct work on teacher professional development, teacher mentoring, and education policy. The views expressed in this paper and any errors are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ICF International.

About ICF International

ICF International (NASDAQ:ICFI) partners with government and commercial clients to deliver consulting services and technology solutions in the energy, climate change, environment, transportation, social programs, health, defense, and emergency management markets. The firm combines passion for its work with industry expertise and innovative analytics to produce compelling results throughout the entire program life cycle, from analysis and design through implementation and improvement. Since 1969, ICF has been serving government at all levels, major corporations, and multilateral institutions. More than 3,000 employees serve these clients worldwide. ICF's Web site is www.icfi.com.

Endnotes

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ⁱⁱ American Federation of Teachers. (1998). *Mentor teacher programs in the states*. Educational Issues Policy Brief, Number 5. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from <http://www.aft.org>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Note 1.

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^{xiv} See Note 1.

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^{xvii} Johnson, S. M., Berg, J. H., & Donaldson, M. L. (2005). *Who stays in teaching and why: A review of the literature on teacher retention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

^{xviii} See Note 1.

^{xix} See Note 15.

^{xx} See Note 15.

^{xxi} See Note 8.