

Mentoring for Novice Elementary School Teachers: Its Influence on Retention  
and Attrition Rates

by  
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## Approval Page

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## Abstract

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This applied dissertation was designed to examine the influence of a mentoring program on novice elementary school teachers in several suburban elementary schools in the Tidewater area of southeastern Virginia. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between mentoring programs and the attrition and retention rates of novice teachers.

The writer organized the study around four research questions:

1. How effective are mentoring programs in decreasing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention rates?
2. How does being involved in a mentoring program influence the novice teacher's decision to remain in the profession?
3. Do novice teachers believe that they receive the needed support during their 1st year of teaching?
4. How important is the role of the mentor to the novice teacher?

Evaluation and nonexperimental research methods were used in this study. Cross-sectional surveys that used Likert scales and written responses were mailed to the participating schools. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes for return to the researcher accompanied the surveys. Descriptive statistics were also used in reporting the data that were obtained from the surveys.

The results of the surveys revealed that novices who participated in mentoring programs were influenced to remain in the teaching profession. These results may prove beneficial to school districts in improving the mentoring programs they have in place.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Nature of the Problem*

The education system faces the task of recruiting and retaining highly competent teachers. Teaching, once a very attractive career choice, has become one of decreased interest, largely because of the demands that accompany it. The U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Brown, 2003) suggested that two million new teachers will need to be hired over the next 10 years. According to Brown, the National Center for Education Studies found that approximately 6% of the nation's teachers leave the profession in a typical year, and 7% change schools.

According to the National Education Association (NEA; as cited in Brown, 2003), new teachers who participate in induction programs like mentoring are nearly twice as likely as those who do not to stay in their profession. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (as quoted in Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, & Peske, 2001) stated,

Our research suggests that the key to addressing shortages lies not in active recruitment policies but in supporting and training for new teachers at the school site. For it is in schools and classrooms where teachers must find success and satisfaction. It is there they will decide whether or not to continue to teach.  
(p. 8)

A very important part of an effective mentor program is the mentor. This individual is the one who works closely with the novice teacher.

Individuals who wish to be mentors must be carefully selected and trained. Brooks (1999) stated, "Among the topics mentors need to understand and characteristics they need to have are the role [*sic*] of the mentor: the needs, problems, and phases of beginning teachers; observation and feedback strategies; and effective teaching strategies" (p. 55).



Not having support during the novice teaching years can produce feelings of isolation. New teachers should not be left to learn wholly by experience when the knowledge and support they need resides in the room next to theirs (Heller, 2004).

First-year teachers are frequently left in a “sink or swim” position with little support from colleagues and few opportunities for professional development (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). In addition to the lack of support, teaching assignments for novice teachers tend to be unjust. A typical practice in teaching is to give the new person the least desirable assignment, usually a class that has exhibited poor academic performance and that has discipline problems (Heller, 2004). One teacher (as quoted in Harvey, Heller, McConnell, & Williams, 1998) put it this way:

Nothing will cause burn-out in a new teacher quicker than giving him or her freshman . . . remedial, or . . . discipline problems. If anything, these new teachers need time to test their new wings, to try out their knowledge in an elective area. They bring with them freshness and enthusiasm straight from the world of academe. Tap into their resources--don't let them go to waste. (p. 142)

### *Purpose of the Project*

The first year of teaching is often a disappointment for beginning teachers (de Jesus & Paixo, 1996). Examining ways to alleviate this disappointment is crucial to the education industry. A potential solution for reversing this problem is the implementation of mentoring programs. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between mentoring programs and the attrition and retention rates of novice teachers.

### *Setting*

The applied dissertation study was conducted at several suburban elementary schools in the Tidewater area of southeastern Virginia. The schools were selected on the basis of their system's having met all the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB was designed to change the culture of America's schools by

closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The author is a product of the school system.

### *Background and Significance of the Problem*

Beginning in the early 1980s, when mentoring programs began to surface in the educational scene as part of a broad movement aimed at improving education, policymakers and educational leaders pinned high hopes on mentoring as a vehicle for reforming teaching and teacher education (Feiman-Nemser, 1996). Concerned about the high rate of attrition during the first 3 years of teaching and aware of the problems faced by beginning teachers, policymakers saw the logic of providing onsite support and assistance during the 1st year of teaching (Little, 1990). Every teacher who leaves within 3 years of entering teaching costs taxpayers an estimated \$50,000.00 (Wong & Asquith, 2002). This estimate was based on an industry standard of calculating 2.5 times the employee's initial salary in recruitment, personnel expenditures, and lost productivity (Wong & Asquith).

School districts are beginning to recognize that schools will be unable to function effectively when its teachers leave the field in large numbers. Many jurisdictions have initiated professional development programs for novice teachers in an attempt to identify and deal with the factors that have such a negative influence on some new teachers that these teachers quickly leave the profession that was their first career choice (Thomas & Kiley, 1994).

### *Research Questions*

*Research Question 1.* How effective are mentoring programs in decreasing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention rates?

*Research Question 2.* How does being involved in a mentoring program influence the novice teacher's decision to remain in the profession?

*Research Question 3.* Do novice teachers believe that they receive the needed support during their first year of teaching?

*Research Question 4.* How important is the role of the mentor to the novice teacher?

#### *Definition of Terms*

For the purposes of this study, the author defined *novice teacher* as anyone in his or her first 3 years of teaching. *Beginning teacher* is synonymous with *novice teacher*. *Retention* is the process of keeping teachers from resigning their position in the schools in which they are working or in the overall school system. The *attrition rate* is the rate at which teachers leave the school district or profession. *Mentors* are experienced teachers who are selected to assist novice teachers during their first 3 years in the classroom. An *induction/mentoring program* is one in which assistance and support are given to novice teachers to acquaint them with their positions, policy and procedures, the community, and their colleagues in the school district.

## Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

### *Attrition Rates of Novice Teachers*

Teachers have the highest attrition rates of any profession; in particular, new teachers are apt to leave the public schools (Heller, 2004). Teachers choose to leave their jobs at far higher rates than those of professionals in many other professions (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Merrow (1999) believed the retention problem to be misdiagnosed as a recruitment problem.

According to Darling-Hammond (2003), the NCLB requirement that schools staff all classrooms with “highly qualified teachers” (p. 7) creates a major challenge, especially for schools in inner-city and poor rural areas. The problem does not lie in the numbers of teachers available; many more qualified teachers are produced than are hired (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

According to Ingersoll (2001), nearly 40% of teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years on the job. Nine percent of public school teachers nationwide leave before they complete their 1st year in the classroom, and over a fifth of public school teachers leave their positions within the first 3 years after entry; the attrition rates are even higher in the more disadvantaged schools (Delgado, 1999, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

High attrition rates in the first years of training compose a long-standing problem. Rates of attrition from individual schools and districts are determined by leavers and by movers, who go from one school or district to another. When viewed together, leavers and movers particularly affect schools that serve poor and minority students. Teacher turnover is 50% higher in high-poverty than in low-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2001). It is especially hard to retain teachers in inner-city and rural schools. This revolving door

creates a permanent core of inexperienced teachers who are learning their craft by practicing on the students before them (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

In spite of the location, novice teachers--particularly first-year teachers--are at risk of leaving the profession. Regardless of the quality of academic training and the success that is experienced in student teaching, first-year teachers may be disillusioned if adequate support and guidance are not present in the school setting (Delgado, 1999). In addition, many new teachers are demoralized by the lack of autonomy and professional status they find in the schools. As many as half of all new teachers respond by leaving the profession (Snider & Burness, 1997).

An uninviting work environment may provide the impetus for teachers leaving the profession. Large class enrollment and an inability to address the needs of students have also been associated with teacher attrition (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). Bush (1983) believed the early years of teaching to compose an intense and formative stage in learning to teach and teaching. Bush found that

the conditions under which a person carries out the first years of teaching have a strong influence on the level of effectiveness . . . that teacher is able to achieve and sustain over the years . . . on the attitudes [that] govern teachers' behavior over even a [40-year] career . . . and, indeed, [on] the decision [of] whether . . . to continue in the teaching profession. (p. 3)

According to Thomas and Kiley (1994), "statistics indicate that one out of seven (15%) of new teachers leave teaching after their 1st year and more than 50% have left within 6 years" (p. 1). School districts are beginning to recognize that schools will not be able to function effectively when practitioners leave the field in such large numbers. Some jurisdictions have started professional development programs for novice teachers in an attempt to identify and deal with the factors that negatively affect some new teachers, causing them to leave the profession quickly (Thomas & Kiley).

According to Weiss and Weiss (1999), many studies have shown that well-designed teacher induction programs reduce turnover rates and increase teacher effectiveness during the early career. Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) found that assistance for new teachers, particularly in mentoring programs, has a positive impact on teachers and their retention.

Induction programs can help schools and districts meet the challenge of supporting new teachers and take advantage of the opportunity this challenge presents. Such programs can improve teacher retention rates by enhancing new teacher satisfaction (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Policies that are established for both preservice and in-service teachers may prove effective in meeting the increasing need for teachers over the next decade.

The federal government offset shortages in medical fields by funding training opportunities and scholarships for candidates in shortage areas (Darling-Hammond, 2000a). In September 1999, President Clinton released \$33 million in federal grants to provide similar support to the teaching profession (Certo & Fox, 2002). The grants were awarded to 25 partnerships among schools of arts and sciences, teacher preparation programs at the same institutions, and high-need local school districts. The intents of these partnerships were to improve teacher recruitment, preparation, and licensing and certification and to provide support for in-service teachers (Certo & Fox).

Early attrition from teaching bears enormous costs. The Texas Center for Educational Research (2000) estimated the state's annual turnover rate to be 15%, including a 40% turnover rate for public school teachers in their first 3 years. This costs Texas a "conservative" \$329 million a year, or at least \$8,000 per recruit who leaves in the first few years of teaching (Texas Center for Educational Research).

Large numbers of underprepared teachers create a certain drain on schools' financial and human resources. In urban schools across the United States, a large share of teachers is either inexperienced, underqualified, or both (Shields et al., 2001). These schools must continually pour money into recruitment efforts and professional support for the novice teachers. Schools dissipate scarce resources trying to reteach the basics each year to teachers who come in with very few tools and leave before they become skilled (Carroll, Reichardt, & Guarino, 2000).

Moir (2003) believed that every teacher who leaves after only a few years takes with him or her vital classroom experience and represents a missed opportunity to establish lasting relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and parents, and among professionals. Moir suggested that the loss of new teachers also has a follow-on effect, as replacement teachers are recruited hastily. Many of these emergency hires have not had adequate training. In some large cities, as many as 50% of new hires are on qualification waivers of some kind (Moir). School systems expect these replacement teachers to complete acquisition of their credentials even as they struggle to acquire real-life teaching experience (Moir). Their first years prove to be more challenging than those of teachers who have had adequate training (Moir). The stage is set for a self-perpetuating cycle of attrition, as each new generation of teachers faces difficulties (Moir).

#### *Factors That Influence the Decision to Leave*

Teachers who less adequately prepared are more apt to leave the profession. The National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Hencke, Chen, & Geis, 2000) found that 29% of new teachers who did not receive such preparation as the student-teaching experience left within the first 5 years; only 15% of those who had such experience left

within the first 5 years.

Teachers work hard to ensure that children succeed. Their effectiveness is often undermined by inadequate, one-size-fits-all compensation, flawed teacher preparation, ineffective leadership, and poor working conditions (Teaching Commission, 2004).

One of the reasons teachers leave the teaching profession is burnout (Byrne, 1994). Balkin, White, and Bodey (2002) characterized teacher burnout as the loss of drive to continue in the teaching profession. According to Balkin et al., studies of teacher burnout explain that phenomenon in terms of stress due to work conditions, staff relations, pupil misbehavior, and poor personal health.

Teaching was identified by Jackson, Schwab, and Schuler (1986) as a stressful profession. *Stress*, as related to teachers, may be defined as a job-related condition of negative effects, such as tension, frustration, anger, or anxiety, that Kyriacou (2001) perceived as threatening to individual psychological or physical wellbeing. Stress can also affect teachers' job satisfaction, decrease the amount of time and energy spent on job-related tasks, and reduce effectiveness in working with students (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991). Kyriacou (1987) suggested that stress is widespread because of the required level of alertness to varying--and potentially threatening--demands that is found in teaching.

Connolly (2000) identified the following stressors: (a) lack of public and parental support, (b) time demands, (c) discipline and attendance problems, (d) lack of texts and equipment, (e) student apathy, (f) negative attitudes, (g) large class size, and (h) society's negative attitude toward education. Burnout predicts intention to leave and actual job turnover (Cooper & Sutherland, 1992). In terms of morale, a negative perception of the profession can lead to progressive absenteeism and, finally, to withdrawal from teaching



(Hall, Villeme, & Phillippy, 1988). Quaglia, Marion, and McIntire (1991) found stress, nonteaching duties, student behavior, and lack of administrative support to be contributing factors of attrition.

Job dissatisfaction, primarily due to poor salary, poor administrative support, and student discipline problems, is also among the reasons for leaving the profession that are most frequently given by teachers (MacDonald, 1999). Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts that offer lower wages and when their salaries are low relative to alternative wage opportunities, especially teachers in such high-demand fields as math and science (Brewer, 1996). Society expects teachers to be twice as altruistic, twice as flexible, and half as concerned with salary as other professionals (McClay, 1995). Elam (1989) analyzed the results of the Kappan/Gallop Poll and reported that poor teaching salaries and lack of prestige were factors that were expressed by teachers as reasons for dissatisfaction.

The lack of resources in a school also contributes to teachers' job dissatisfaction, which can lead to attrition. A large percentage of beginning New York City public school teachers who were interviewed expressed that they did not have access to adequate basic supplies (Tapper, 1995). Most used their own money to equip their classrooms. There were not enough textbooks, or the textbooks that were available were in poor condition. Photocopying materials is a task that all teachers face, but copy machines were frequently broken, and teachers had to rely on family, friends, or other private sources to reproduce materials (Tapper).

Access to classroom materials and classroom behavior, rather than teacher salary, are aspects of education that can be controlled and changed and that may ultimately affect teacher retention (Balkin et al., 2002). Poor working conditions and lack of significant

on-the-job training and support are major reasons teachers leave the profession within 5 years of entering (Ingersoll, 2001).

Feelings about administrative support, collegial support, parental support, and teacher input into decisions are strongly related to the decision to stay in teaching or to leave (Billingsley, 1993). Certo and Fox (2002) argued that work environment and conditions lead to levels of job satisfaction. Characteristics of the school environment, such as student discipline issues, interaction among colleagues, time to plan, parent and community support, and concern for overall safety, are factors that have led teachers to leave their schools (Jorissen, 2002).

P. Harris (2002), who surveyed California teachers, found that teachers who worked in high-minority and low-income schools reported significantly worse conditions than did teachers who worked in low-minority and high-income schools. These conditions included poorer facilities, less access to textbooks and supplies, fewer administrative supports, and larger class sizes (P. Harris). Additionally, teachers who were surveyed were more likely to express the intent to leave the school if the working conditions were poor than if they were excellent (P. Harris).

Teachers are more likely to remain in the profession when they feel supported by administrators than when they do not, and they are more likely to remain in the profession when they have strong connections to their work environment (including colleagues) than when they do not (Sparks, 2002). Teachers are also more likely to remain in the profession when they are pursuing a collective vision for student learning than when they are not (Sparks). Shen (1998) found that school-related factors, including teachers' involvement in decisions, administrative support, student characteristics, and school location, influenced teachers' levels of job satisfaction and decisions to stay or to

leave.

Connolly (2000) conducted research on seven volunteer elementary school teachers who taught kindergarten through Grade 6. Her initial findings suggested that the strong motivation to remain in teaching was multifaceted. Included were teachers' job satisfaction, feelings toward children, and altruism and teachers' perception of effectiveness of their efforts. Satisfaction began to diminish sometime during the 3rd year, when teachers realized that they had little autonomy and were not really involved in decision (Connolly). The teachers identified the lack of public and parental support, time demands, discipline and attendance problems, lack of texts and equipment, student apathy and negative attitudes, large class size, and society's negative attitude toward education as major sources of stress (Connolly).

In November 2001, the Department for Education and Skills commissioned the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Liverpool to investigate the factors that affected teachers' decisions to leave the profession during the 2002 calendar year (Robinson & Smithers, 2003). The participants in the study were teachers leaving the primary, secondary, middle, and special schools in England. The 1,051 participants were asked to rate 16 possible reasons for leaving on a 3-point scale ranging from *of great importance* to *of no importance*. The 16 reasons that were provided to participants were as follows: (a) too-heavy work load, (b) government initiatives, (c) stress, (d) wanted change, (e) personal circumstances, (f) wanted new challenge, (g) feelings of being undervalued, (h) poor pupil behavior, (i) attraction by another job, (j) the way the school was run, (k) travel, (l) better career prospects, (m) too-low school salary, (n) poor resources or facilities, (o) offer of higher salary, and (p) difficult parents.

In the responses of the participants, a too-heavy work load emerged as the major

reason for leaving (Robinson & Smithers, 2003). Nearly half of the participants indicated that this was of great importance in reaching their decision to leave (Robinson & Smithers). About a third indicated that government initiatives and stress were of great importance (Robinson & Smithers). A third of the participants indicated a wanted change and personal circumstances as reasons of great importance in the decision to leave (Robinson & Smithers). Leavers from the primary schools were emphatic about the work load. Poor pupil behavior was of great importance in decisions to leave secondary schools but of much less importance in decisions to leave primary and special schools. Almost half of the leavers from the special schools were leaving for a desired change (Robinson & Smithers). Approximately half of those who were leaving the middle schools had been attracted by another job, and 40% were looking for a new challenge (Robinson & Smithers). Of the 16 reasons from which participants could choose, the following were ranked as the top 10 reasons for deciding to leave: (a) too-heavy work load, (b) stress, (c) government initiatives, (d) personal circumstances, (e) wanted change, (f) wanted new challenge, (g) feelings of being undervalued, (h) poor pupil behavior, (i) the way the school was run, and (j) attraction by another job (Robinson & Smithers).

The factors for leaving were also examined according to age and by the number of years in the profession. The older teachers (30 years of age and up) were more likely to leave because of the work load, and the younger teachers (under 30 years of age) were more likely to leave because of salary (Robinson & Smithers). The school situation itself was not linked to age. The longest serving teachers (with 16 or more years of experience) were likely to leave because of work load, and the new teachers (with 1-5 years of experience) left because of salary, new challenges, and personal circumstances (Robinson & Smithers). Teachers with 6-15 years of service were likely to become discontented

with their school situation (Robinson & Smithers).

Regardless of school wealth, student demographics, or staffing patterns, the most important resources for continuing improvement are the knowledge and skill of the school's best prepared and most committed teachers. Four major factors that strongly influence whether and when teachers leave specific schools or the education profession are salaries, working conditions, preparation, and mentoring support in early years (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

### *The Role of the Mentor*

Having a mentor can greatly reduce anxieties, feelings of isolation, and desire to leave the profession. Biehl (1997) defined a *mentor* as (a) a person who has achieved superior rank; (b) an authority in one's field as a result of disciplined work, study, and experience; (c) someone who has a certain measure of influence in one's chosen field; and (d) someone who is genuinely interested in novice growth and development.

Moir (2003) believed that the cycle of teacher attrition should be broken. Approaching the problem of teacher attrition, Moir asked, "If I were starting my career today, what would most help me develop into an outstanding, caring and accomplished teacher?" (p. 3). She stated, "One answer stands out among all the rest: I can only imagine how much better a teacher I would have been that first year if I'd had a mentor" (p. 3). Moir described the mentor as follows:

Mentors have an impact on new teachers in ways that no amount of training can. The real-life classroom presents questions that only real-life experience can answer. Mentors help provide those answers. They give practical, concrete advice; pose important questions to prompt reflection; model teaching techniques in the classroom; observe and offer feedback; and offer another point of view at a time when it's easy to lose all perspective. Their experiences help the novice [teachers] balance professional development with day to day [*sic*] details. Mentors also decrease the isolation of the new teacher. Their emotional support is essential when the obstacles seem too great and allows the novice to take risks and grow

while still keeping the classroom functioning. By developing a specific plan for each new teacher and setting specific performance goals to improve teachings [*sic*] practice, mentors create an environment based on collaboration. (p. 3)

Holloway (2001) suggested that the presence of a mentor is not enough; the mentor's knowledge of how to support new teachers and skills with which to provide guidance are crucial to the success of the new teacher. The promise of mentoring goes beyond helping novices survive their first year of teaching. If mentoring is to function as a reform, it must be linked to a vision of good teaching, guided by an understanding of teacher learning, and supported by a professional culture that favors collaboration and inquiry (Feiman-Nemser, 1996). Effective induction programs conceive the role of the mentor as "teacher of teachers" (Moir, 2003). Mentors use their expertise to support beginning teacher development in ways that are responsive to the needs of the new teacher (Moir).

Recognizing the lack of consensus about the roles and functions of mentors and the uneven quality of mentoring, the National Association of State Boards of Education (1998) emphasized mentor accountability and recommended that the "selection criteria, roles, and functions of mentors, defined in terms of standards, should be clearly articulated, both to mentors and to beginning teachers, and mechanisms should be in place to ensure that mentors meet these standards" (p. 32). Appropriate training for the mentor's expanded teaching role improves the quality of a mentoring program (Holloway, 2001). The mentor's knowledge of how to support new teachers and skill in providing guidance are crucial (Holloway).

Moir (2003) asserted that, too often, mentoring programs are conceived as "buddy systems" in which experienced educator are paired with new teachers informally. The buddy system model does not require mentors to be trained for their role, nor are mentors

given time to carry out its demands. These mentors are treated like new teachers, allowed to sink or swim, armed with only intuition and good intentions to keep themselves afloat (Moir). Moir suggested that not all good teachers make good mentors. Every mentor must have exemplary professional ability and a full knowledge of standards, curriculum, and student assessment.

Before a mentoring program begins, it is essential that mentoring teachers receive quality training. Quality mentoring can be of great assistance to new teachers; however, to assure quality mentoring occurs time, and effort must be invested in developing the mentors. Strong induction programs provide ongoing opportunities for study and problem solution as mentors carry out their work with new teachers. To learn to mentor in educative ways, mentor teachers need opportunities to clarify the vision of good teaching; to see and analyze effective models of mentoring; to develop skills, particularly in observing and talking about teaching in analytic, nonjudgmental ways; and to learn to assess new teachers' progress and their own effectiveness as mentors (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Good mentors are committed to the task of helping novice teachers find success and gratification in their new professions (Rowley, 1999). Mentors who are committed show up for and stay on the job (Rowley). They understand that persistence is as important in mentoring as it is in classroom teaching (Rowley). Good mentor teachers recognize the power of accepting the beginning teacher as a developing person and professional (Rowley). Mentors do not judge or reject mentees as being poorly prepared, overconfident, naïve, or defensive (Rowley). Because novice teachers enter their careers with varying degrees of skills in instructional design and delivery, good mentors should be willing to coach beginning teachers to improve their performance, whatever their skill

level (Rowley).

According to Schwille and Wolfe (as cited in Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999), researchers coined the term *educative* mentoring to distinguish the practice of educative mentors from more conventional approaches that emphasize emotional support, occupational socialization, and short-term assistance. Mentors who engaged in educative mentoring attend to the immediate needs of their novice and keep their focus on long-term goals (Schwille & Wolfe, as cited in Feiman-Nemser et al.). Understanding that learning to teach is a long-term process, they help their novice develop tools for learning in and from teaching (Schwille & Wolfe, as cited in Feiman-Nemser et al.). Assigning experienced teachers to guide and support novice teachers provides valuable professional development for both the new teacher and the veteran teacher (Holloway, 2001).

A study of mentoring that was sponsored by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning at Michigan State University (as cited in Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999) found that the most thoughtful mentors had a vision of good teaching and clear ideas about how to help novices learn to teach. Through observation and interaction, these mentors continually assessed what new teachers needed to learn (Feiman-Nemser et al.). Through modeling, joint planning, coteaching, and coaching, they guided learning (Feiman-Nemser et al.). Doing the work of teaching together with the novice (e.g., planning lessons and assessing student work) provided opportunities to share practical knowledge and to model a stance of inquiry toward teaching (Feiman-Nemser et al.). Danielson (1999) found that mentoring helps novice teachers face new challenges and improve their teaching practices as they assume full responsibility for a class.

Feiman-Nemser (1996) also addressed the issue of time--time to mentor and time



to learn to mentor. She found that, in some programs, retired teachers are hired as mentors; some programs release mentor teachers from some or all of their classroom responsibilities. Still other programs expect mentors to combine mentoring with full-time teaching. These arrangements send different messages about the purposes of mentoring and create different situations in which mentors can learn and apply their skills.

The National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in NEA Foundation, 1999) demonstrated that the benefit of mentoring is linked to the amount of time that a mentor and beginning teacher work together. According to the NEA Foundation, only 36% of beginning teachers who work with their mentor “a few times a year” report substantial improvements in their professional skills; in contrast, 88% of those who meet with mentors at least once a week believe the relationship has a benefit (p. 5).

An NEA associate from Alaska (as cited in NEA Foundation, 1999) identified time as an issue of primary importance for mentoring programs. It was recommended that teacher associations conclude written agreements to provide mentors and novices with adequate opportunities to observe one another, model good teaching, and discuss instructional strategies and resources (NEA Foundation).

### *Induction/Mentoring Programs*

Research and educators have suggested over the past several years that beginning teacher induction and mentoring programs play a significant role in the development and retention of quality teaching professionals (Andrews & Martin, 2003). Induction programs provide the critical support the beginning teachers need as they experience the “reality” of the classroom and the constraints of working in an established school climate (Andrews & Martin)

Over the past 2 decades, researchers, policymakers, and educators have become

increasingly interested in the experiences of novice teachers and the use of induction as a way of introducing them to the teaching profession (Serpell & Bozeman, 1999).

Induction is a formal program of systematic and sustained assistance provided to novice teachers by professionals specifically assigned that responsibility (Serpell & Bozeman).

Teacher induction has recently emerged (or reemerged) as a priority for states and districts (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Standards-based reforms calling for more challenging teaching and learning, projections of teacher shortages, and data about teacher attrition have contributed to a growing consensus that support and assistance are essential to the retention and effectiveness of beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999).

Debates about the effects of teacher preparation on recruitment and retention are ongoing. Teachers graduating from traditional university-based programs have lower attrition rates than teachers with other nontraditional forms of preparation (S. Harris, Camp, & Adkinson, 2003). A great percentage of new teachers in New York also reported to Tapper (1995) that the teacher preparation programs they encountered did not provide enough assistance for them to cope with their first-year experience, which intensifies the need for proper mentoring, professional development, and administrative support in the work environment.

During the transitional period between initial preparation and continuing professional development, teacher induction is a critical element that focuses on the recruitment, hiring, induction, licensure, assistance, development, and certification of teachers (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Quality teaching and learning are diminished when induction is perceived as short-term support to help teachers survive their first year on the job.

In recent years, support, guidance, and orientation programs--collectively known as "induction"--for beginning elementary and secondary teachers during the transition into their first teaching jobs (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). The particulars of the programs vary widely. They are generally intended to increase the confidence and effectiveness of new teachers and thus to stem the high levels of attrition among beginning teachers, which Ingersoll and Kralik estimated to be as high as 50% within the first 5 years.

Feiman-Nemser et al. (1999) analyzed discourse on beginning teacher induction and uncovered three meanings or uses for the term *induction*. First, the term *induction* is used to label a unique phase (or stage) in teacher development. It is a time of intense learning and anxiety, different from what has gone on before and what comes after. Second, induction is construed as a time of transition, when teachers are moving from preparation to practice. Third, conceptualizing induction as a process of socialization focuses attention on the occupational setting and professional community, which new teachers are entering; the messages they receive about what it means to be a teacher; and the ways in which these messages influence their emerging identity and practice.

Well-planned induction programs address the needs of the whole person. New teachers come with many concerns, questions, and anxieties in addition to personal and professional dreams and aspirations. A well-planned induction program considers all of these needs as the teacher is trained, guided, supported, and encouraged during the delicate days of the 1st year. Beginning teachers' needs span the first 3 years in the profession; induction programs must address 1st-year needs but should also consider this longer period as the real timeline for induction support (Dyal & Sewell, 2002).

The author believed that beginning teacher induction programs should be designed to begin before the teacher steps into his or her classroom and to continue

throughout the first years of teaching. Good induction programs start before the teacher's first day and runs for several years, guiding the teacher as he or she learns the ropes (Wong & Asquith, 2002). Serpell and Bozeman (1999) identified components of an induction program as follows:

1. Preparation, or general orientation to the school, including disbursement of materials regarding technicalities of school functioning.
2. Orientation, or curriculum training and effective teaching practices, including the opportunity to observe and to be observed and assignment of mentor.
3. Practice, or continuing interaction and exchange with an assigned mentor, including released time or reduced work load and in-service programming.

Feiman-Nemser (1996) suggested that teacher mentoring programs be developed and enacted so guidelines can be established to support curriculum issues, classroom management strategies, lesson plans, day-to-day school procedures and policies, and other teaching responsibilities. Ganser (2002) wrote,

Successful mentoring programs carefully avoid duplicating services already available within the school community and unintentionally shifting pre-existing [*sic*] responsibilities for induction support to the mentor program. Support can come from individuals, groups of teachers, programs, and staff development activities. Knowing that it takes an entire community to induct new teachers, successful programs solicit the input of several stakeholders in effective monitoring, including current and former mentors, retired teachers, school administrators. . . . Good mentor programs put more effort into supporting high-quality mentoring activities than into finding the perfect match between mentor and new teacher. Although some degree of teaching compatibility is important, what is more important is making sure that mentors and mentees are supported with resources and the time to work together meaningfully. With this support, their relationship develops based on mentoring activities rather than similar perspectives about their work. (p. 29)

Teacher induction is distinct from both preservice and in-service teacher training programs. *Preservice* training refers to training and preparation candidates receive prior

to employment (student teaching). In-service training refers to periodic upgrading and additional training received on the job, during employment. Theoretically, induction programs are not additional training per se, but are designed for those who already completed basic training. These programs are often conceived as a “bridge” from student of teaching to teacher of students (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004).

Mentoring programs help novice teachers face their new challenges through reflective activities and professional conversations, helping new teachers improve their teaching practices (Danielson, 1999). Feiman-Nemser et al. (1999) wrote,

Providing induction programs to support beginning teachers is a humane response to the trials and tribulations associated with the first year of teaching. Unless we also take into account the fact that beginning teachers are learners, we may design programs that stress and address problems and concerns without necessarily promoting teacher development. Nor can we focus on induction support without asking a more fundamental question. To what extent do the conditions and responsibilities of beginning teaching create the problems of beginning teachers? Would the emotional intensity and the learning challenges be more manageable if we reconceptualized the work of beginning teachers in ways that took more seriously their status as novices and their needs as learning teachers? (p. 9)

According to Ingersoll and Kralik (2004), the overall objective of teacher mentoring programs is to provide newcomers with a logical guide, but the particulars in regard to character and content of these programs vary. Duration and intensity compose one set of variables: mentoring programs vary from a single meeting between mentor and novice at the beginning of the school year to a more structured program that involves members over a couple of years.

Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) suggested that programs vary according to the number of novice teachers they serve. Some programs include all newcomers to a particular school, even those with prior teaching experience; others focus solely on the inexperienced candidates new to teaching. Programs also vary according to their purpose.

Some are designed to foster growth of novices; others are designed to assess, and perhaps weed out, those not suited to the job.

The precedent for novice teacher induction has been firmly established, but the need for more evaluative research remains evident. Although novice teachers benefit psychologically from the induction experience, how their psychological wellbeing in their first year translates into their retention in later years or into effective teaching practices remains unclear and relatively unexamined (Serpell & Bozeman, 1999).

#### *Why Novice Teachers Need Support*

Many first-year teachers experience isolation as they leave the support of student-teaching cohorts, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors to work with children in their own classrooms. Leaving the support that they were accustomed to while in training may shatter goals, dampen spirits, and destroy the self-confidence of first-year teachers (Delgado, 1999). Wasley (1999) believed that new teachers need assistance with both long- and short-range planning, guiding children from one activity to another, including children with special needs or language differences, and working with parents. This assistance can best be provided by more experienced teachers who are working or have recently worked toward similar goals in similar settings (Wasley).

Teachers need support beyond their first years in the classroom. Feiman-Nemser (2003) stated,

By most accounts, new teachers need 3 or 4 years to achieve competence and several more to reach proficiency. If we leave them to sink or swim on their own, they may become overwhelmed and leave the field. Alternatively, they may stay, clinging to practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students. (p. 27)

Though first-year teachers enter into the classroom with little or no experience, they inherit the same responsibilities as veteran teachers. Seasoned educators and the

public generally have high expectations for beginning teachers, often expecting them to perform at the level of veterans. As a result, first-year teachers feel overwhelmed and isolated on an island adrift in a sea of discouragement (Brock & Grady, 1998). The teaching profession is one of the few professions, if not the only profession, in which beginners are expected to assume full responsibility the first day on the job (Huling-Austin, 1998). Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) wrote,

In teaching, new entrants fresh out of professional training assume the exact same responsibilities as 20-year veterans. In doing so, they are also undertaking a remarkably complex endeavor, involving as it does the simultaneous management of multiple variables, including student behavior, intellectual engagement, student interaction preparation, materials, physical space, and time. While many novice teachers have had terrific intellectual preparation and an outstanding student teaching experience, their limited experience generally yields an equally limited repertoire of classroom strategies--far more limited than the variety of teaching challenges a new teacher invariably encounters. It's a situation ripe for frustration. (p. 3)

Charged with the same responsibilities as their more experienced colleagues, beginning teachers are expected to perform and to be effective. Most aspects of the situation--including the students, the curriculum, the community, the local policies, and the procedures--are unfamiliar. Along with the newness of the situation, the complexities of teaching confront the novice teacher with dilemmas and uncertainties daily (Bullough, 1989).

Feiman-Nemser (2003) added,

To take new teachers seriously as learners, we must not give them the same responsibilities as veteran teachers or assign them the most difficult classes. With new teacher learning as our goal, induction becomes an educational intervention that addresses new teachers' learning needs while helping them develop a principled teaching practice. (p. 27)

Support that is received from administrators for both novice teachers and their mentors is a key component in the success of the beginning teachers. Novices agreed that

the key role of the principal involves much more than assigning a mentor and providing beginning-of-school orientation (Andrews & Martin, 2003). The need for personal involvement with the principal is rooted in the principal's role in a teacher's hiring and potential nonrenewal. The principal determines what is expected of a teacher, and teachers who wish a good evaluation need to understand the expectations of their evaluator. Without clear expectations from the chief administrator, the teacher may feel abandoned and frustrated. When an administrator assigns a mentor to a new teacher, the administrator should not believe that his or her responsibility has ended (Andrews & Martin). The administrator's support of mentor is required, as well (Andrews & Martin).

Beginning teachers' limited experience and practical knowledge engender a sense of frustration and inadequacy. This is the paradoxical situation of all beginning professionals--they must demonstrate skills and abilities that they do not possess and that are gained only by their beginning to do what they have not yet comprehended (Schon, 1987). If educators want to realize the potential to improve the quality of teaching, they must recognize that new teachers are still learning to teach and must provide the conditions, support, and guidance to help them construct a professional, standards-based practice in the context of their teaching (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999).

Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) described two types of support for novice teachers as (a) personal and emotional support and (b) task- or problem-related support. Personal and emotional support does little to improve teaching performance, but it does much to promote beginning teachers' personal and professional wellbeing and to transmit the culture of teaching. This type of support also improves the likelihood that new teachers will stay the course long enough to have the opportunity to become more effective teachers. Task- or problem-related support helps newcomers develop a capacity



for critical self-reflection on teaching practice. It provides support for improving teaching performance in specific instances and, as a byproduct, reduces new teachers' stress levels.

What happens to beginning teachers during their early years on the job determines not only whether they stay in teaching but also what kind of teachers they become (Adelman, 1991). New teachers join a school faculty, start teaching, and begin learning lessons about themselves, their colleagues, the students, the curriculum, the school, and the community that can only be learned in the context of teaching. Most beginning teachers have to learn on their own or with occasional help from a sympathetic colleague (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). Novice teachers face many challenges as they enter into the real world: the classroom.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

Evaluation research was the method that was used for this study. Babbie (2004) defined *evaluation research* as research undertaken for the purpose of determining the impact of some social intervention, such as a program aimed at solving a social problem. The author believed that this research method was appropriate for determining the relationship between mentoring programs and teacher attrition and retention rates. This study was qualitative and nonexperimental. Mason (1996) defined *qualitative research* as research

grounded in philosophical position which is broadly “interpretivist” in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced; based on methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced (rather than rigidly standardized or structured, or removed from “real life” or “natural” social context, as in some forms of experimental method); based on methods of analysis and explanation building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context; [and aimed at producing] rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data. (p. 4)

In this nonexperimental study, the author did not manipulate variables, which were studied as they existed in the situation. Cross-sectional surveys were administered and collected at a specific date and time. The author also used descriptive statistics, which are mathematical techniques for organizing, summarizing, and displaying a set of numerical data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

#### *Participants*

The participants were novice first-year elementary school teachers.

#### *Procedure*

The author requested and obtained permission from the school system’s supervisor of student services to administer the survey at the chosen schools. After permission was obtained, the author requested permission from the building principals to

conduct the survey and to identify the novice teachers who were housed in the schools (see Appendix A). Letters of explanation went forth to the novice teachers, seeking their participation and explaining the purpose of the study, upon the response of the building principals. Ethical considerations of this applied dissertation study related to communicating the purpose of the research to the participants in writing and informing the participants of the data-collection procedures and tools. The accuracy of the findings was validated by the use of surveys, examination of evidence from the sources, the use of peer debriefing, and the use of an external auditor to examine and review the study.

### *Instrument*

The author used a two-section cross-sectional survey that required Likert-scale and written responses. Permission for use of this survey was obtained by the survey designer (see Appendix B).

### *Assumptions and Limitations*

In this applied dissertation study, the following assumptions were made:

1. All novice teachers would be willing to participate in the study.
2. All participants would answer the survey honestly.
3. All participants would return the survey in a timely manner.

The limitations of this applied dissertation study were as follows:

1. Total acceptance of the mentor program by the novice teacher was not expected.
2. A novice teacher might not return for the next school year.
3. The construction of the survey limited the study.

### *Anticipated Outcomes*

According to Weiss and Weiss (1999), numerous studies have documented the

value of teacher-induction programs and described multiple prototypes for implementation. The benefits of teacher induction programs include not only reduced attrition rates among new teachers but also improved teaching capabilities (Weiss & Weiss).

## Chapter 4: Results

The school system in which this applied dissertation study was conducted is located in the Tidewater area of southeastern Virginia. This system had an established mentoring program--the Teaching Mentoring Program (Chesapeake Public Schools, 2005)--in place. In compliance with the State Board of Education program, this mentoring program was established to meet the needs of the novice teacher (Chesapeake Public Schools).

The goals of the district's mentoring program are (a) introducing the novice to others and promoting a social environment; (b) helping the novice learn the policies and procedures of the school and school system; (c) sharing materials, ideas, concerns, and unwritten rules; (d) keeping the novice informed of timelines and events; (e) meeting regularly with the novice to resolve problems; (f) observing the novice and providing wanted feedback or having the novice observe the mentor; (g) arranging for the novice to observe other teachers; and (h) providing day-to-day needs of the novice teacher (Chesapeake Public Schools, 2005). Mentors are carefully selected by the building principal.

Mentors should exhibit certain characteristics (Chesapeake Public Schools, 2005). The suggested criteria for selection were as follows: (a) expertise in teaching, (b) experience in teaching, (c) ability as a mentor, (d) ability to be a team player, (e) good human-relation skills, (f) positive professional image, (g) close proximity to the novice teacher in his or her building, (h) common or similar subject area, (i) ability to maintain confidentiality, (j) desire to work with the beginning teacher, and (k) time to work with the beginning teacher (Chesapeake Public Schools). Proximity, commonality, desire, and time were cited by Chesapeake Public Schools as the criteria that should be given the

strongest consideration during the mentor-selection process.

After the mentors have been selected, each is assigned to a full-time, first-year novice teacher for the entire contracted school year. If the novice, having entered into the system at the beginning of the contracted school year, requires additional assistance at the end of the term in specific areas, assistance is provided internally. The principal assigns a teacher to assist the novice in addressing the specific areas. This procedure is not a continuation of the mentoring program. The principal has the right to request additional time for those novices who begin their contracts after the opening of the school year; however, the total mentorship should not exceed one calendar year (Chesapeake Public Schools, 2005).

Throughout the year, the novices attend in-service meetings that are sponsored by the district. These meetings address the specific needs and concerns of the first-year teacher. The needs are addressed on an ongoing basis through surveys and personal interviews. Individual needs are also addressed through classroom visits and conferences.

Some of the workshops require the presence of both the novice and the mentor together; others require either the novice only or the mentor only. Workshop topics include grade-level meetings (for mentor and novice teacher), classroom management strategies and problem solution (for novice teacher) and mentoring principles and practices (for mentor). Appendix C presents a schedule of the in-service meetings.

Eighteen copies of a survey were mailed to the novices at the participating schools. All were completed and returned. The survey that was used in this study was a slightly modified version of Kershaw's survey (as presented in Kershaw et al., 2004). This survey was used to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring program in addressing the needs of the novice teacher.

The survey consisted of two sections. Section 1 presented statements and sentence stems that rated the effectiveness of the mentoring program using Likert Scale responses of 4 (*strongly agree*), 3 (*agree*), 2 (*disagree*), 1 (*strongly disagree*), and NA (*did not experience*). Categories in this section included mentors' assisting the novice in understanding the professional expectations for teachers and assisting the novice in learning how to establish and maintain effective professional relationships. Section 2 required the novice to provide written responses to sentence stems or questions. This section provided the novice the opportunity to express his or her personal feelings in regard to the mentoring program and the influence or the lack of influence the program had on the decision to remain in or to leave the profession.

#### *Results Related to Research Questions 1 and 2*

Research Question 1 was "How effective are mentoring programs in decreasing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention rates?" Research Question 2 was "How does being involved in a mentoring program influence the novice teacher's decision to remain in the profession?" The novice teachers were asked whether their participation in the mentoring program influenced the decision to remain in or to leave the teaching profession. The novices were also asked to provide an explanation for their responses.

Nine of the novices stated that the mentoring program positively effected their decision to stay. Six of the novices stated that the mentoring program had no effect on their decision to stay. Of these six, two novices gave no explanation. Two of the novices failed to respond to the question. One novice stated that he or she was unsure.

The mentoring program had a positive influence on many of the novices. Some novices expressed that participating in the mentoring program reaffirmed the desire to remain in the profession. Another novice was made to feel like a part of the community

from the start of the school year. Feeling very happy and receiving support from the program influenced another novice. One novice obtained from the mentoring program knowledge that his or her teacher training program did not cover. Receiving assistance during difficult times affected another novice. The school assignment persuaded another novice to stay. A mentor had a positive effect on the life of a novice, encouraging the novice to remain in the profession. Another novice's participation in the program provided preparation for the new role of becoming a mentor for the next school year.

In contrast, several novices concluded that the mentoring program had no influence on the decision to remain in the profession. One novice stated that he or she had never given any thought to leaving the profession. Another expressed that he or she loved the job regardless of the mentoring program. It was the relationship with the team members and the administrators that influenced the decision, not the mentoring program itself, wrote another novice. Another novice remained in the profession because of the desire to teach, not the program.

The Likert-scale rating system was used by the novices to respond to a statement regarding the effectiveness of the mentoring program's assistance in their development as educators. This question was accompanied by sentence stems, which the novices had to rate. Table 1 presents the results that related to Statement 3, "The following mentoring activities helped me develop as an educator." The majority of the novices agreed with Statement 3. Related means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

Overall, the novices were satisfied with the assistance they received through the mentoring activities that were provided by the district; however, some novices did not experience the activities for reasons that were not provided to the author. This district, according to the novices, was very involved in the process of assuring that the transition



Table 1

*Numbers of Novices (N = 18) Who Gave Each Response on Scales Regarding the Value of Program Activities*

Scale	Response				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Did not experience
Regularly scheduled conferences during the school day with mentor	8	5	0	0	5
Informal conferences with mentor	12	6	0	0	0
Coaching by mentor	10	5	1	1	1
Observing mentor	7	5	1	0	5
Informal meetings with other faculty	6	10	0	0	2
Informal “get togethers”	5	7	1	0	5
Learning opportunities at school	5	10	1	0	2
Encouragement to attend system-wide learning opportunities	5	11	1	0	1

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations of Responses to Statement 3*

Response	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strongly agree	7.25	2.60
Agree	7.38	2.56
Disagree	1.00	0.00
Strongly disagree	1.00	0.00
Did not experience	3.00	1.91

from theoretical experience to actual teaching experience was made with high-quality assistance.

### *Results Related to Research Question 3*

Research Question 3 was “Do novice teachers believe that they receive the needed support during their first year of teaching?” The novices were asked how the mentoring program addressed their specific needs as new teachers. Of the 18 novices, 1 failed to respond. The author could not interpret the response of another novice because the handwriting was not legible. The responses were put into two categories: personal interaction and instructional assistance.

The personal interaction novice responses included the following:

1. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by giving the novices someone with whom they felt comfortable.

2. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by giving the novices someone who was readily available to answer questions.

3. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by giving the novices someone to talk to at their own grade level.

4. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by assigning the novices to their grade-level chairs.

5. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by providing the support of others.

6. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by giving assistance when questions required answers.

7. The mentoring program addressed novices’ specific needs by providing an ample amount of time to work with the mentor.

8. The mentoring program addressed novices' specific needs by helping the novices feel at ease in the classroom.

9. The mentoring program addressed novices' specific needs by providing help when it was needed.

10. The mentoring program addressed novices' specific needs by pairing the novices with a knowledgeable and effective teacher.

11. The mentoring program addressed novices' specific needs by providing regular observation and constructive feedback.

One novice stated that he or she could take or leave the professional advice that was offered.

The novices, according to the responses, appeared to have had the needs of first-year teachers met. It appeared that the majority of the novices focused on the personal-interaction aspect of the program as opposed to the instructional aspect of the program.

The novices were presented with two statements and stems for which the Likert scale was used to record responses. Statement 1 and its stems inquired about the mentors who informed the novices' understanding of the professional expectations for teachers. Statement 2 and its stems addressed the mentors' provision to the novices of assistance in the area of learning how to establish and maintain effective professional relationships. Table 3 relates to Statement 1, "Mentors at my school helped me understand the professional expectations for teachers related to [the following]."

The majority of the novices strongly agreed with Statement 1 and its stems. Related means and standard deviations are presented in Table 4.

Table 5 shows the results that related to Statement 2, "Mentors helped me learn

Table 3

*Numbers of Novices (N = 18) Who Gave Each Response on Scales Regarding the Value of Mentors' Assistance in Conveying the Essence of Professional Expectations*

Scale	Response				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Did not experience
Fulfilling classroom responsibilities	9	8	0	1	0
Assuming grade level or department responsibilities	9	6	0	0	3
Assuming appropriate school-level responsibilities	4	10	0	1	3
Knowing and following school system policies and procedures	10	8	0	0	0
Addressing standards	9	6	1	1	1
Completing the teacher evaluation process	6	8	2	0	1

*Note.* One novice did not respond to all prompts.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations of Responses to Statement 1*

Response	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strongly agree	7.83	2.31
Agree	7.66	1.51
Disagree	1.33	0.58
Strongly disagree	1.00	0.00
Did not experience	2.00	1.15

Table 5

*Numbers of Novices (N = 18) Who Gave Each Response on Scales Regarding Value of Mentors' Assistance in the Establishment of Professional Relationships*

Scale	Response				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Did not experience
With students	6	8	3	1	0
With parents and caregivers	9	5	3	0	1
With colleagues	4	10	2	1	1
With administrators and other school and school system leaders	4	11	2	1	0
With community members	2	5	1	3	7

how to establish and maintain effective professional relationship.” The majority of the novices was satisfied with the assistance the novices received from the mentors in understanding the professional concepts of teaching. Knowing and following school and school system policies and procedures received the highest agreement responses. No novices disagreed with this sentence stem. This indicated that they were pleased in this area; however, some novices did not experience the activities for reasons that were not provided to the author.

The majority of the novices agreed with Statement 2 and its stems; however, one novice noted in the margin of the survey that he or she did not need advice in this area. Related means and standard deviations are presented in Table 6.

The majority of the novices was content with the assistance mentors received in establishing professional relationships. There seemed to be a low level of assistance given to the novices in dealing with the community. Some novices did not experience the

activities for reasons not provided to the author.

Table 6

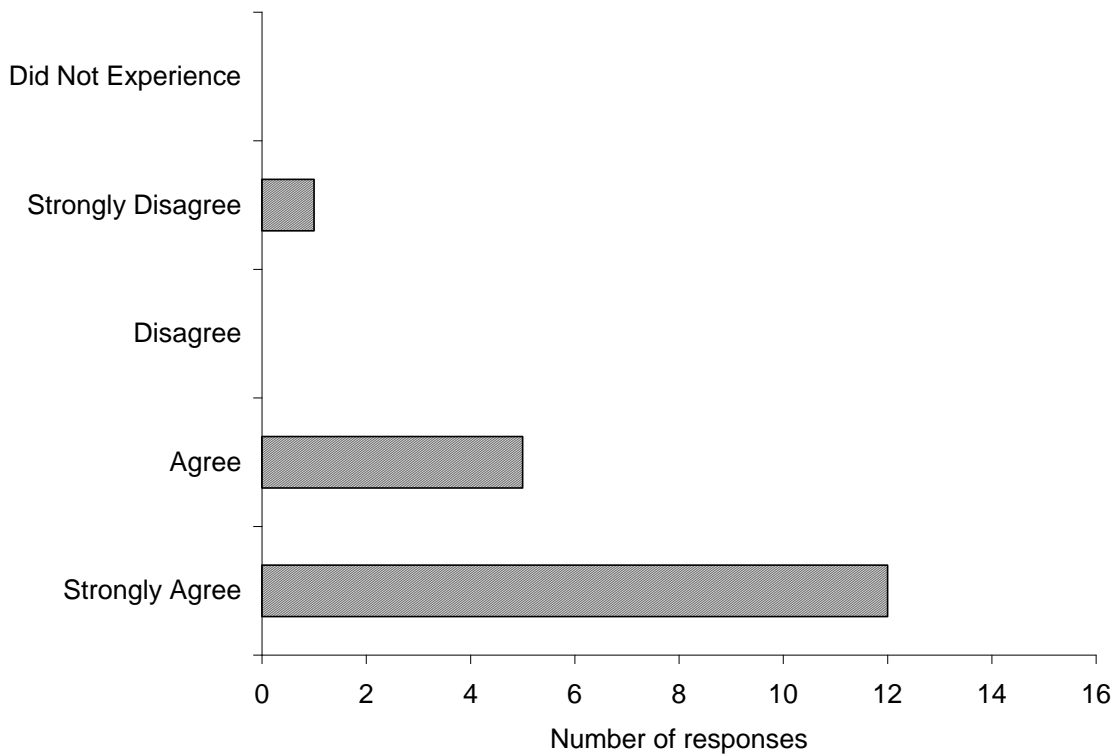
*Means and Standard Deviations of Responses to Statement 2*

Response	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strongly agree	5.00	2.65
Agree	7.80	2.77
Disagree	2.20	0.84
Strongly disagree	1.50	1.00
Did not experience	3.00	3.46

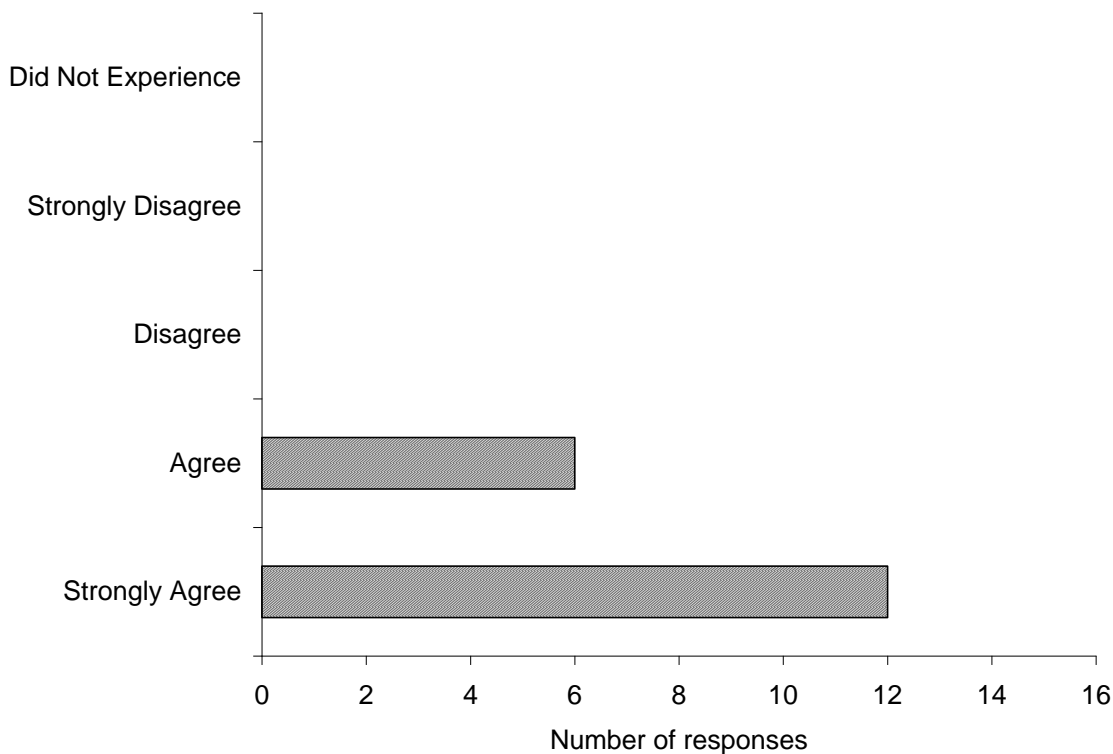
*Results Related to Research Question 4*

Research Question 4 was “How important is the role of the mentor to the novice teacher?” The novices were asked how the mentor impacted their professional development. Here, the novices used the Likert scale to express their feelings about the mentor who was assigned to them for the contracted school year.

Figure 1 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem A of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by serving as professional role models.” Figure 2 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem B of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by accepting me as a professional colleague.” Figure 3 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem C of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by making time for me when I needed assistance.” Figure 4 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem D of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by providing the specific support and



*Figure 1.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem A of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by serving as professional role models."



*Figure 2.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem B of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by accepting me as a professional colleague."

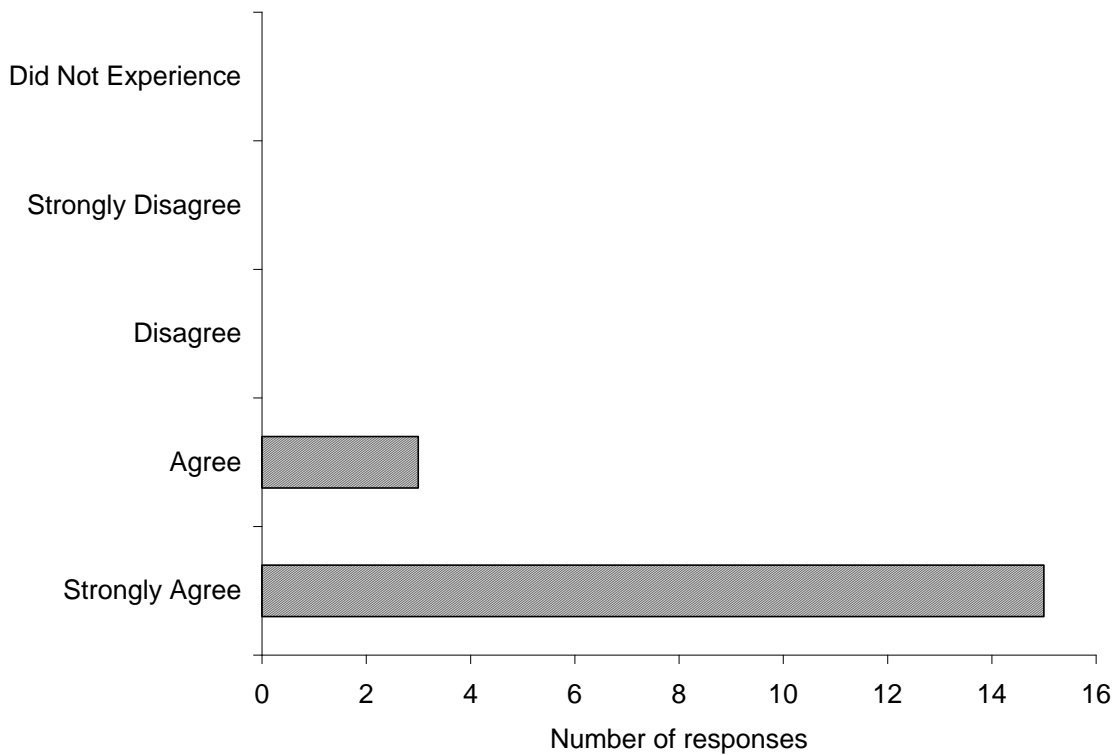


Figure 3. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem C of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by making time for me when I needed assistance."

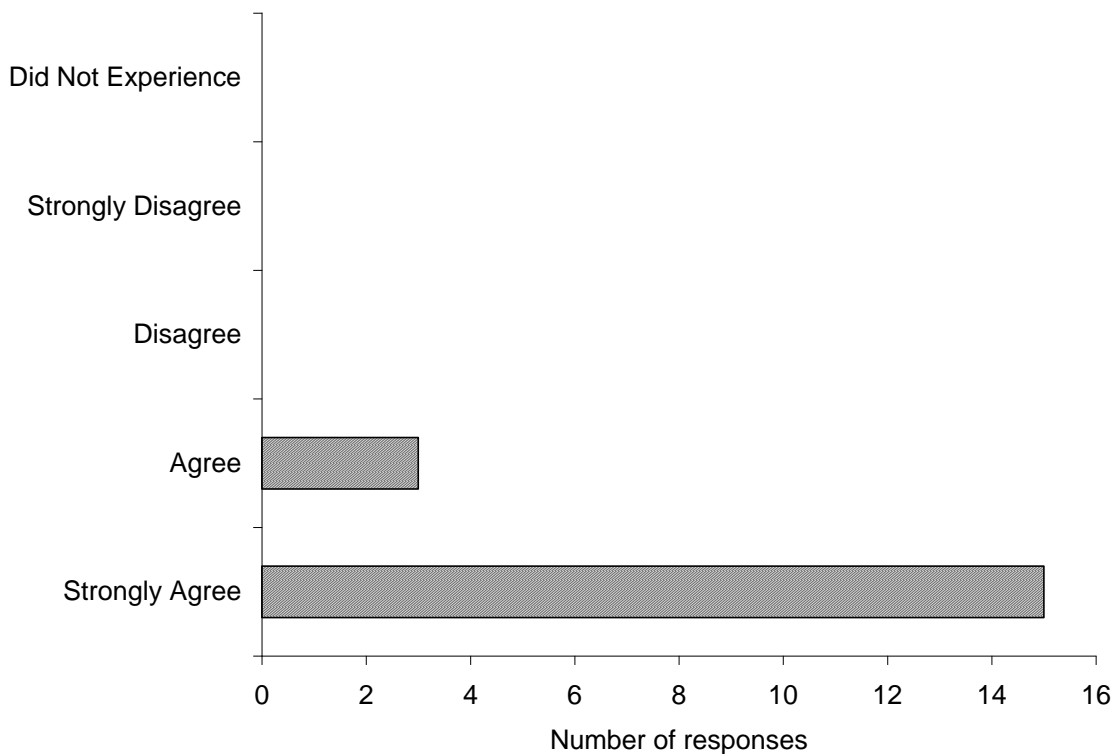
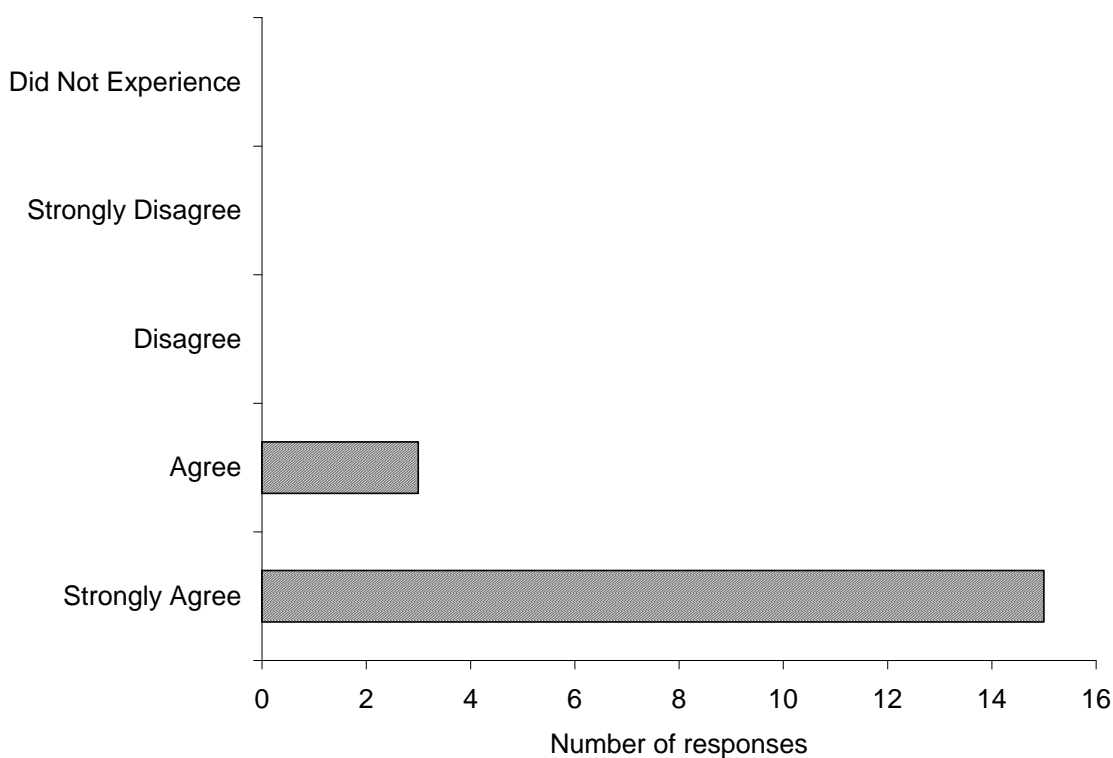


Figure 4. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem D of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by providing the specific support and assistance I needed."



assistance I needed.”

Figure 5 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem E of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by listening to my concerns and helping me to identify solutions.”



*Figure 5.* Distribution of novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem E of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by listening to my concerns and helping me to identify solutions.”

Figure 6 presents the novices’ ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem F of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by being flexible and open-minded in assisting me.” One novice did not provide a response to Stem F of Statement 4. Figure 7 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem G of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me get to know other faculty and staff.” Figure 8 presents the novices’ ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem H of Statement 4, “Mentors impacted my professional development by linking me with faculty who could assist me in addressing my concerns.”

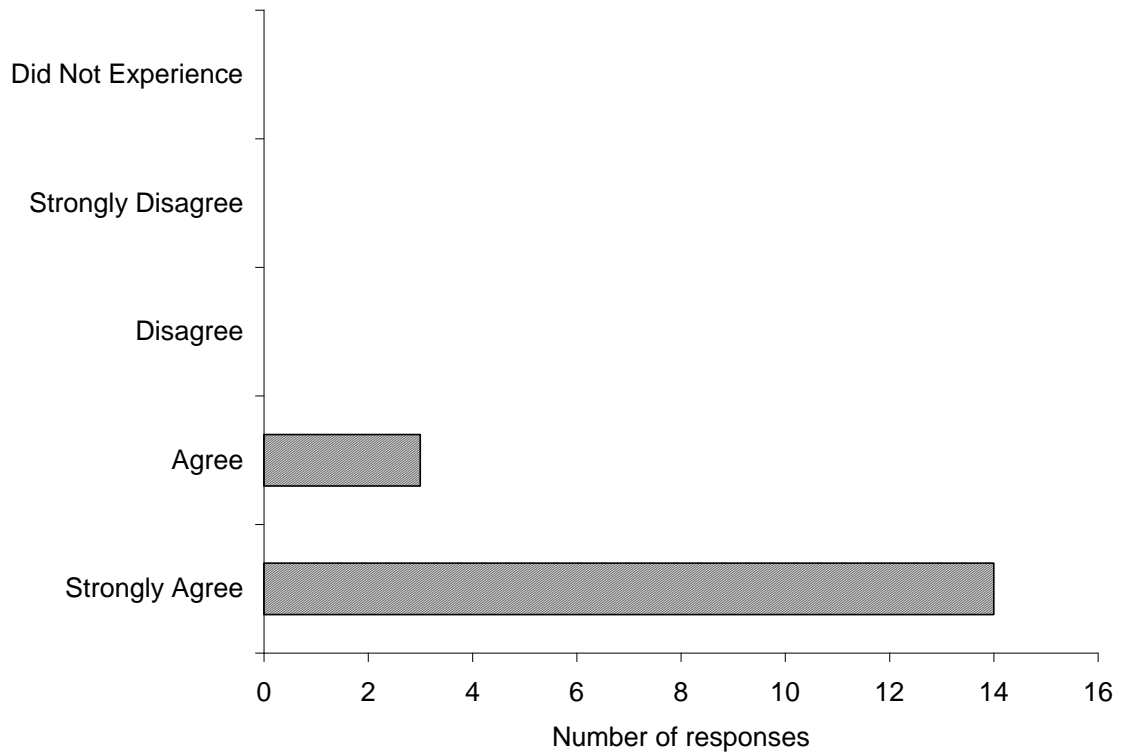


Figure 6. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem F of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by being flexible and open-minded in assisting me."

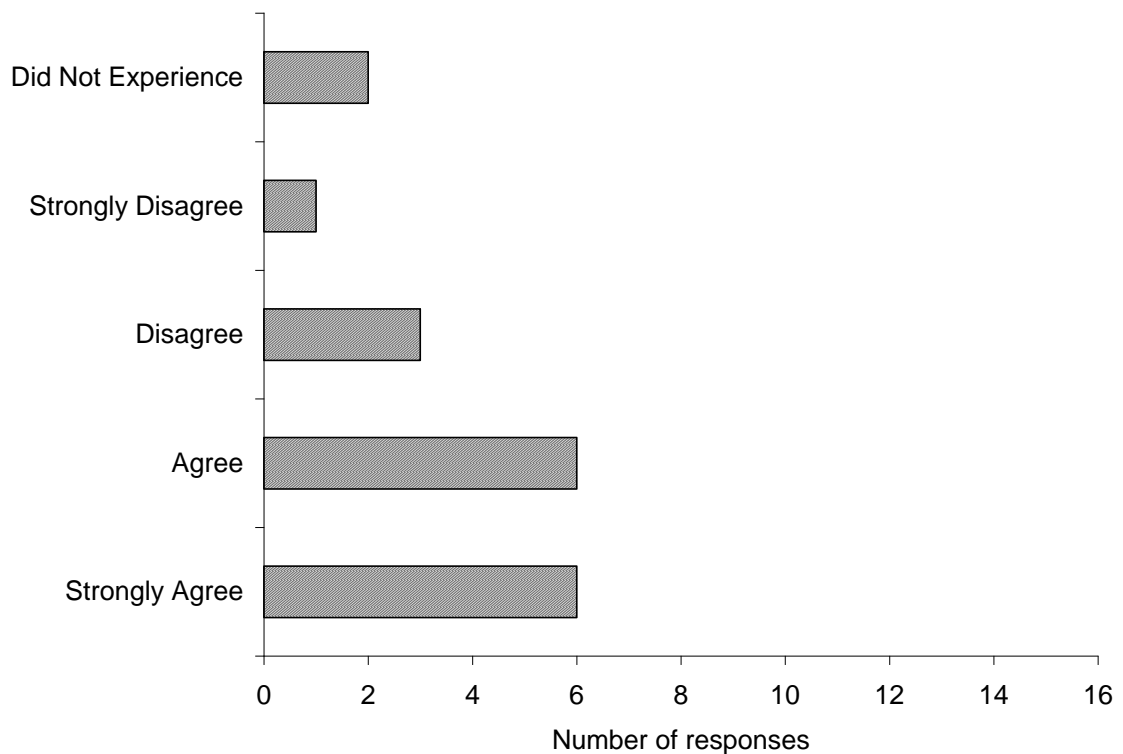
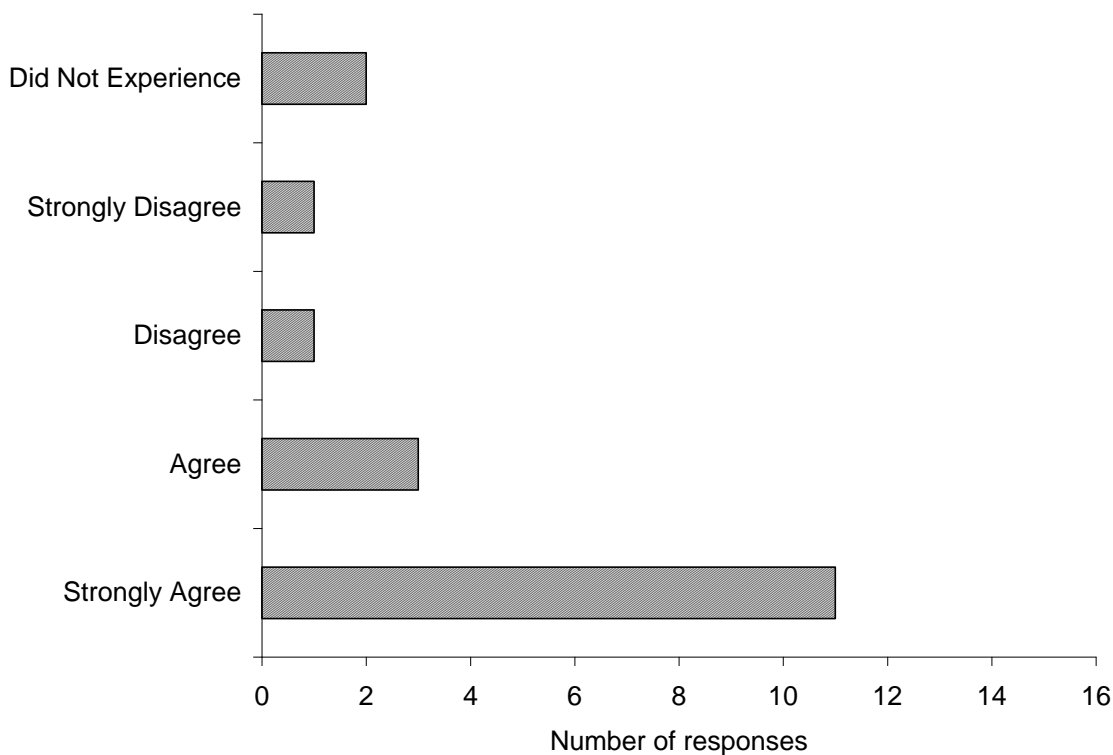


Figure 7. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem G of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me get to know other faculty and staff."



*Figure 8.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem H of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by linking me with faculty who could assist me in addressing my concerns."

Figure 9 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem I of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to acquire the resources I needed." Figure 10 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem J of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me develop a repertoire of effective instructional strategies." Figure 11 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem K of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me design a supportive learning environment and effective classroom management skills." Figure 12 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem L of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to learn strategies to address the diverse needs of my students." Figure 13 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem M of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to develop interpersonal and relationships building skills."

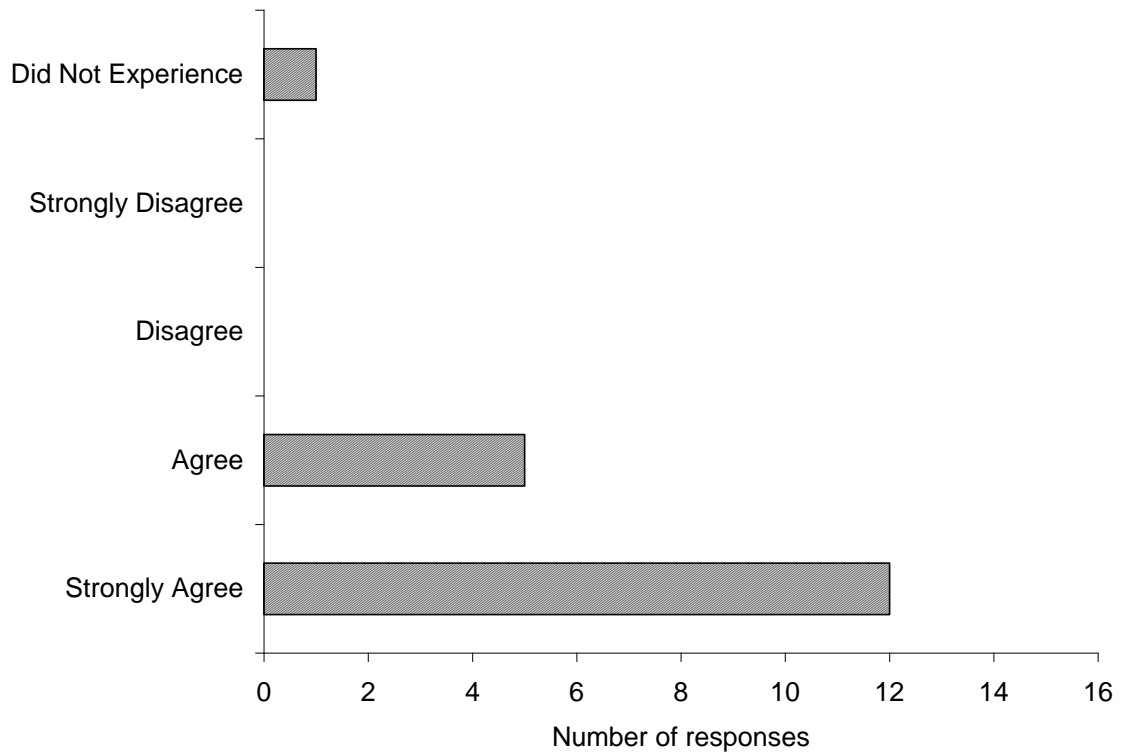


Figure 9. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem I of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to acquire the resources I needed."

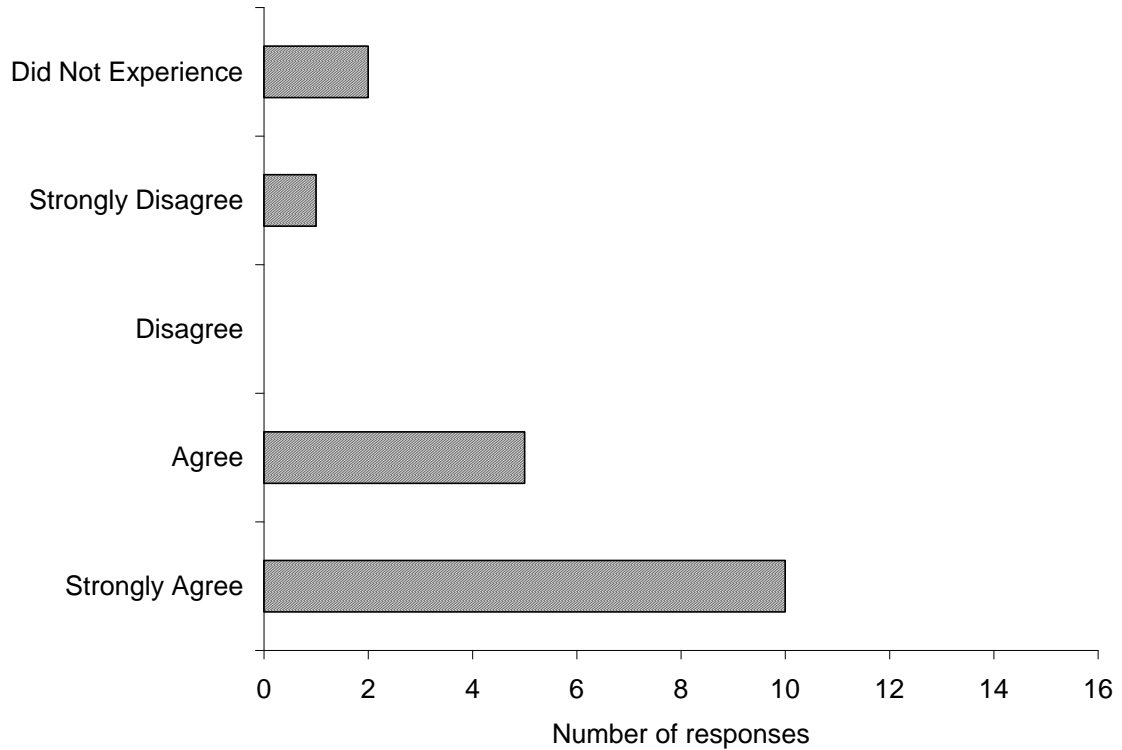
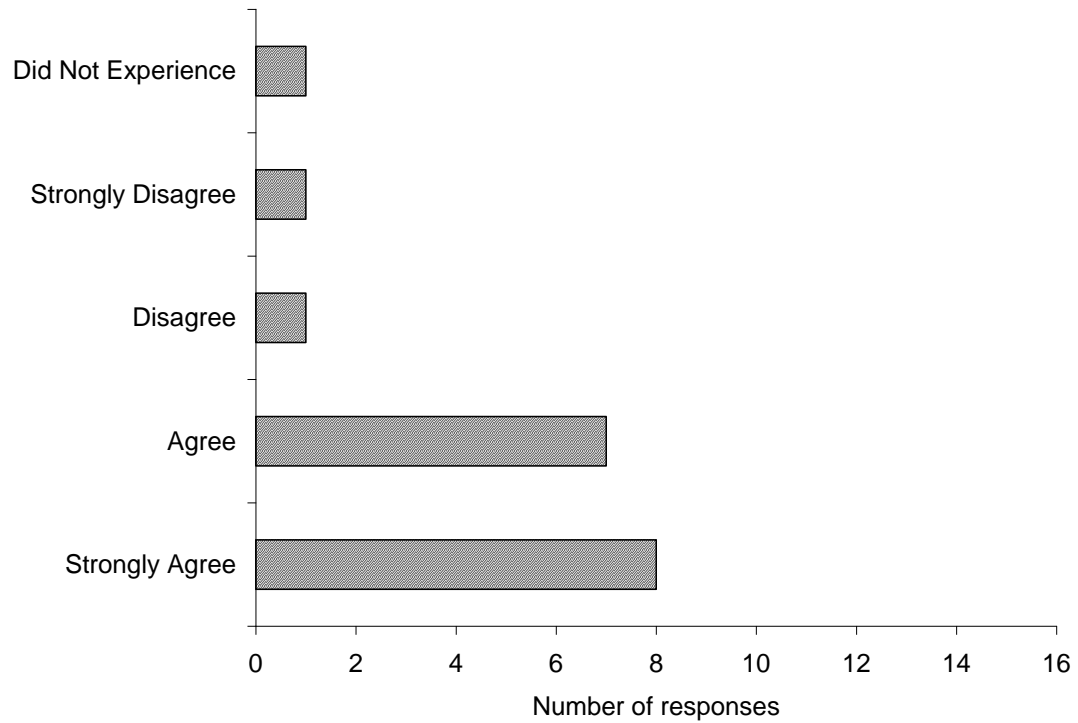
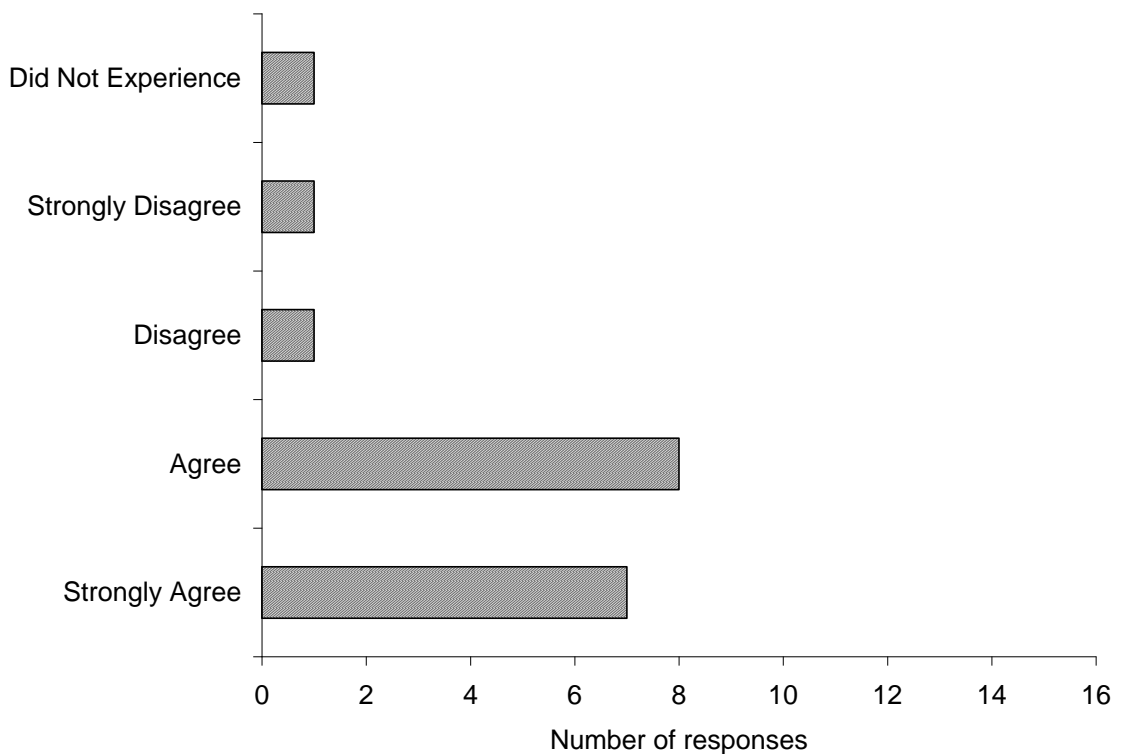


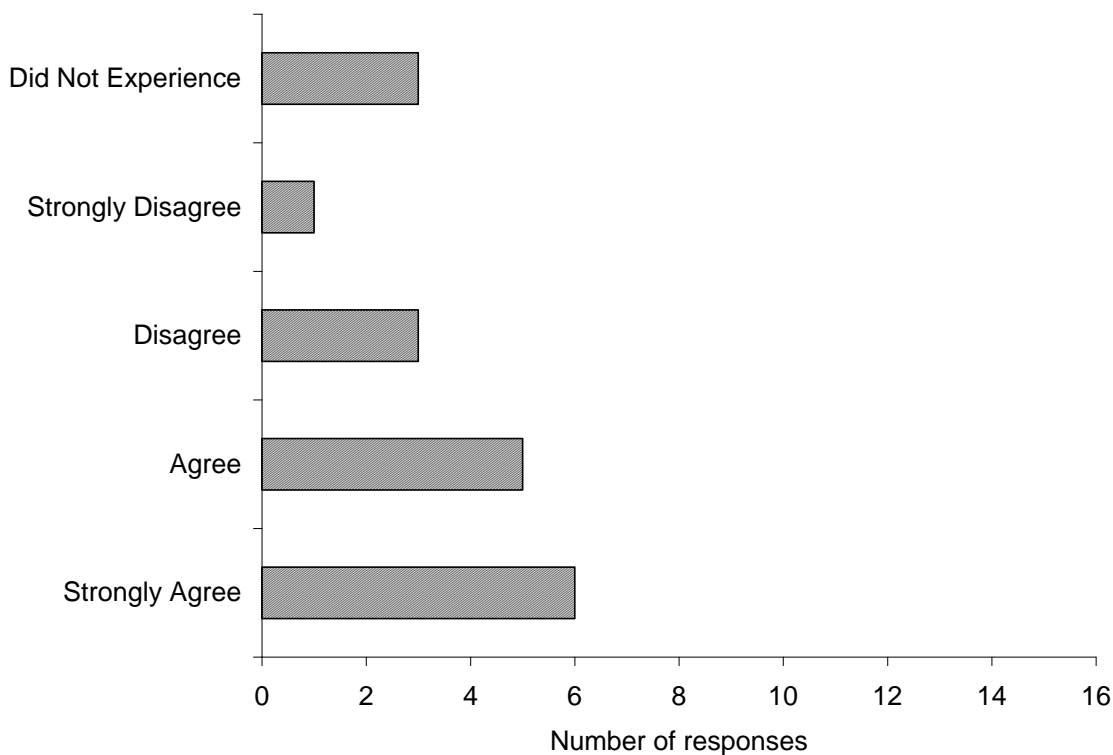
Figure 10. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem J of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me develop a repertoire of effective instructional strategies."



*Figure 11.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem K of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me design a supportive learning environment and effective classroom management skills."



*Figure 12.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem L of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to learn strategies to address the diverse needs of my students."



*Figure 13.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem M of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to develop interpersonal and relationships building skills."

Figure 14 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem N of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to understand the organization and culture of the school." Figure 15 presents the novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem O of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me understand the school community and its issues, strengths, and resources that impact our students." Figure 16 presents the novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem P of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by linking me with community resources that are available to address the diverse needs." One novice did not provide a response to Stem P of Statement 4. Figure 17 presents the novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem Q of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me learn to balance my own life responsibilities with the demands of teaching." One novice did not provide a response to Stem Q of Statement 4.

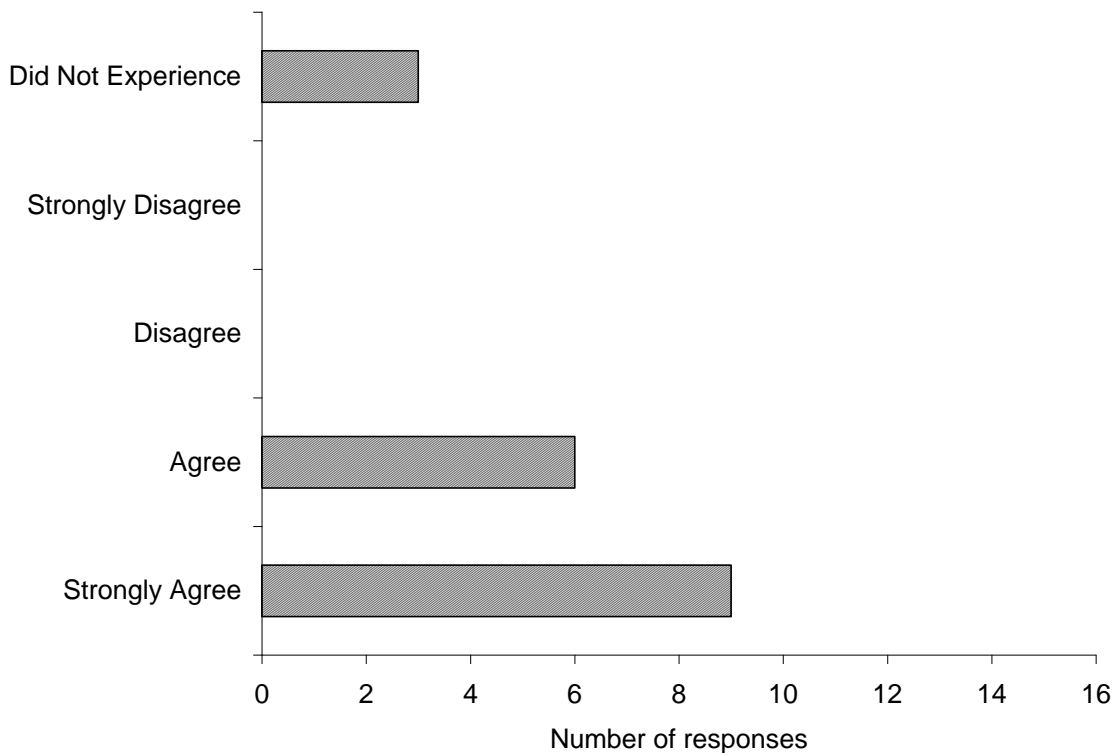


Figure 14. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem N of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me to understand the organization and culture of the school."

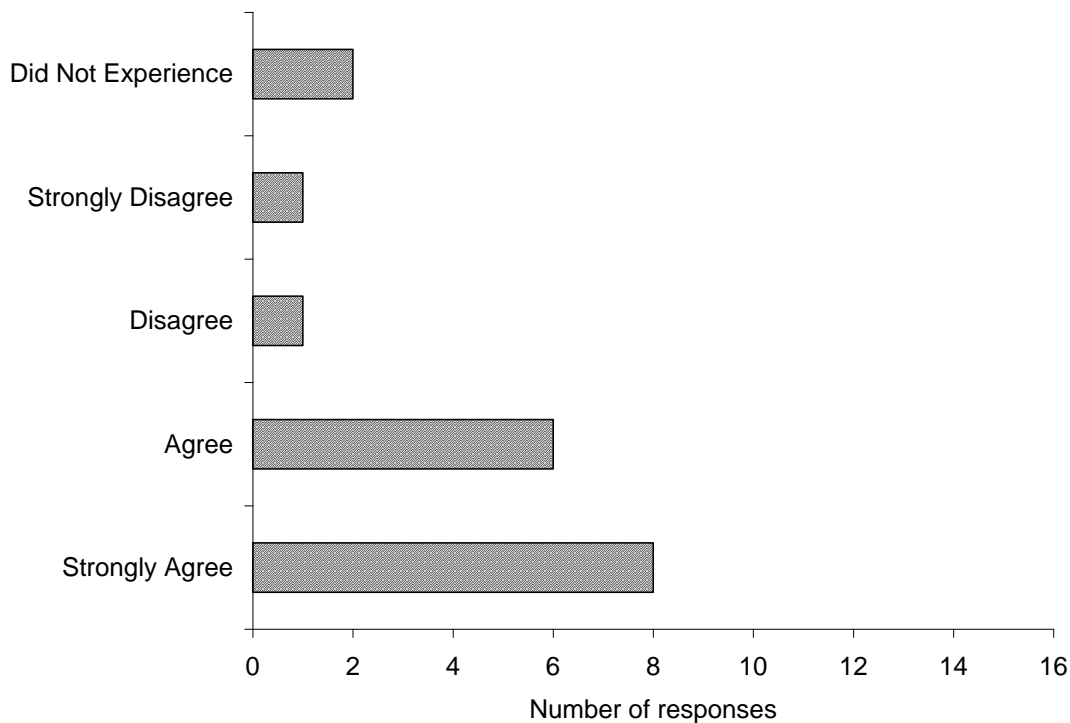


Figure 15. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 18$ ) responses to Stem O of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me understand the school community and its issues, strengths, and resources that impact our students."

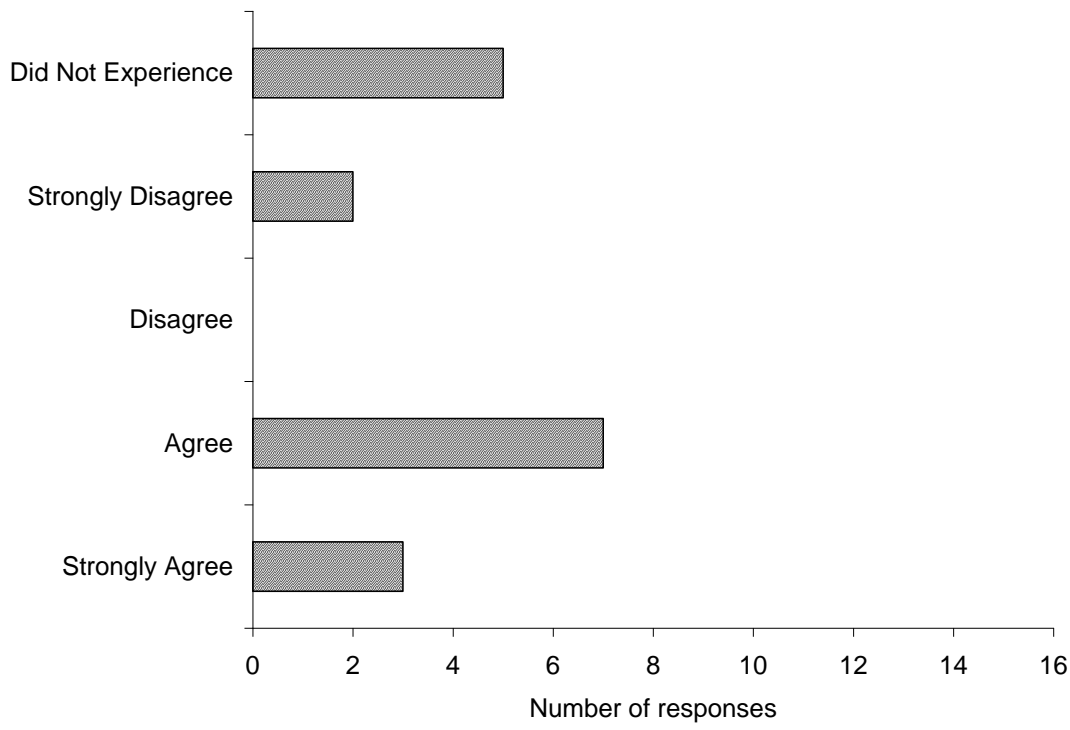


Figure 16. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem P of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by linking me with community resources that are available to address the diverse needs."

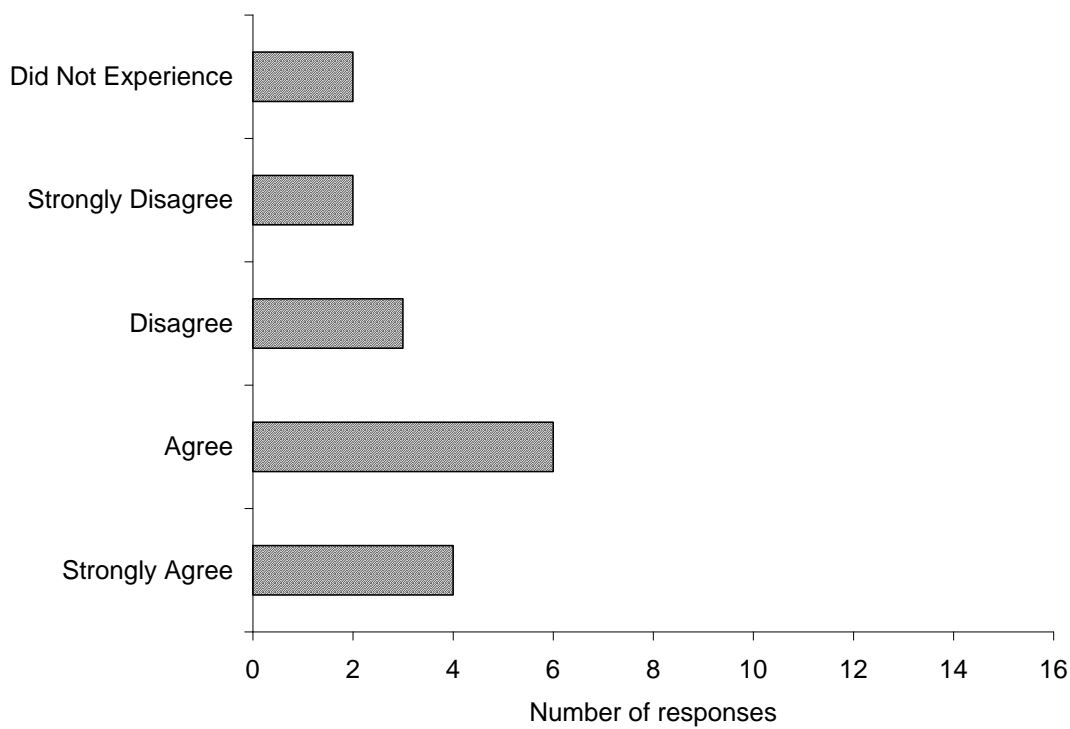
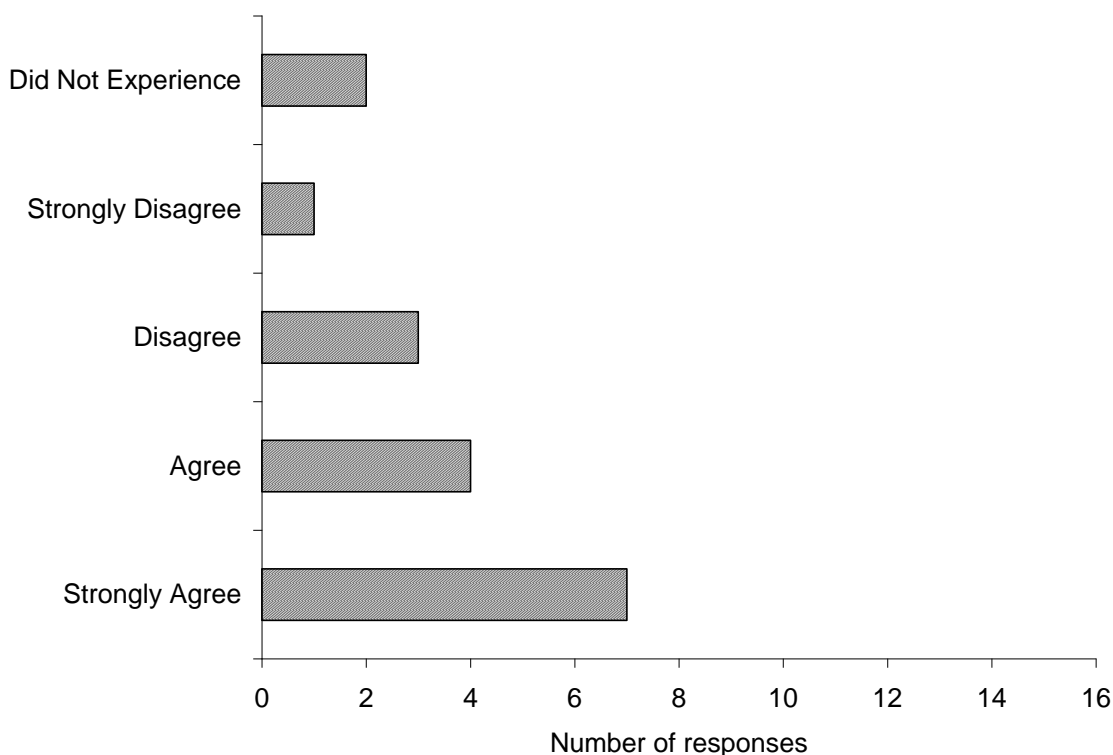


Figure 17. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem Q of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me learn to balance my own life responsibilities with the demands of teaching."



Figure 18 presents the novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem R of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me become a more reflective teacher." One novice did not provide a response to Stem R of Statement 4.



*Figure 18.* Distribution of novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem R of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by helping me become a more reflective teacher."

Figure 19 presents the novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem S of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by making me aware of my development as an educator and assisting me in setting goals for my continued professional growth." One novice did not provide a response to Stem S of Statement 4.

The majority of the novices agreed with Statement 4 and its stems. Five sentence stems did not receive responses. Means and standard deviations related to Statement 4 are presented in Table 7.

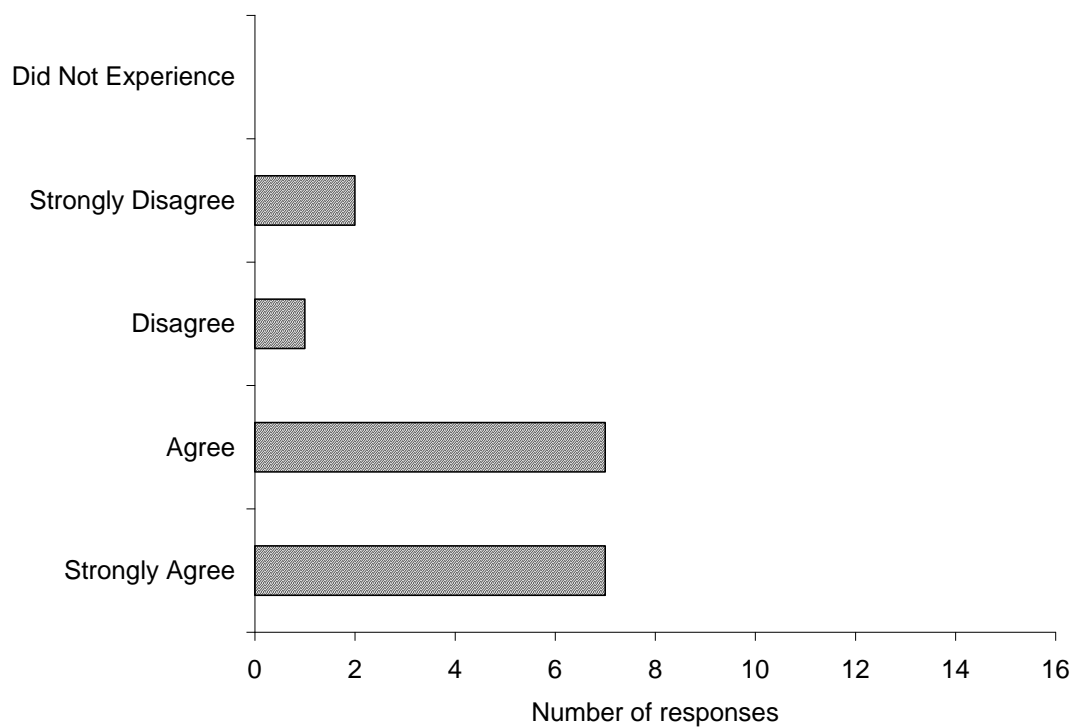


Figure 19. Distribution of novices' ( $N = 17$ ) responses to Stem S of Statement 4, "Mentors impacted my professional development by making me aware of my development as an educator and assisting me in setting goals for my continued professional growth."

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations of Responses to Statement 4*

Response	$M$	$SD$
Strongly agree	9.56	3.75
Agree	5.15	1.61
Disagree	1.88	1.05
Strongly disagree	1.25	0.45
Did not experience	2.16	1.11

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this applied dissertation study was to explore the relationship between mentoring programs and the attrition and the retention rates of novice teachers. Evaluation research was used in this study, which was qualitative and nonexperimental in nature, to determine the relationship between the mentoring program and teacher retention and attrition rates. Cross-sectional surveys and descriptive statistics were also utilized. Eighteen novice teachers who were identified by the building principal participated in this study.

### *Interpretation of Results Related to Research Questions*

Data that were obtained proved to be useful in answering Research Question 1, “How effective are mentoring programs in decreasing teacher attrition and increasing teacher retention rates?” and Research Question 2, “How does being involved in a mentoring program influence the novice teacher’s decision to remain in the profession?” The majority of the novices believed that the mentoring program the district had in place positively affected decisions to remain in the profession. The tone of the novice responses was one of satisfaction in regard to support that was received from the mentoring program. Mentor attitudes, feelings of being a part of the school community, and receipt of assistance during difficult times were some of the areas in which responses were positive.

Some novices, however, indicated that the mentoring program had no effect on their decision to remain in the profession. These novices intended to remain in the profession regardless of their participation in the mentoring program. The desire to teach and relationships were the influential factors in the building. One novice was unsure about the program and did not indicate whether he or she intended to remain in the

profession.

According to the vast majority of the novices, the activities that were prescribed by the district assisted in the development of educators. These activities included conferences (formal and informal), observations (mentor and novice), and system-wide learning opportunities. Some novices did not experience these activities; however, no data were available to the author to indicate reasons for this lack of experience.

Research Question 3 was “Do novice teachers believe that they receive the needed support during their first year of teaching?” The novices were asked to respond to a question regarding the mentoring program’s address of their specific needs as new teachers. The novices were provided the opportunity to express feelings and perceptions in their own words. Reviewing the data, the author determined that personal interaction was of great importance. The responses of 10 of the 18 novices reflected some type of personal interaction. Another novice provided responses that indicated that instructional assistance affected him or her. Because the handwriting of one novice was not legible, the author could not interpret the response, which, therefore, could not be analyzed. This response was not included in the results.

Research Question 4 was “How important is the role of the mentor to the novice teacher?” The novices addressed the mentor’s impact on their professional development using Likert-scale responses. Nineteen sentence stems related to this topic. These stems were labeled A through S. Sentence stems A through F primarily pertained to the mentor’s availability. The novices strongly agreed and agreed with the content of the sentence stems. Only one novice disagreed with a stem in this group. Sentence stems G through S alluded to the novices’ exposure to instructional strategies, classroom management skills, relationship-building skills (as related to students and community

members), and personal development. The novices indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with, or did not experience, a great majority of the content of the stems in this group.

### *Conclusion*

Keeping good teachers should be one of the most important agenda items for any school leader. Substantial evidence suggests that well-prepared, capable teachers have the largest impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000b).

Teachers have the highest attrition rates of any profession; in particular, new teachers are apt to leave schools (Heller, 2004). First-year teachers may be disillusioned if adequate support and guidance are not present in the school setting (Delgado, 1999). Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) found that new-teacher assistance, particularly in the form of mentoring, has a positive effect on teachers and their retention.

According to the vast majority of the novices in this study, the mentoring program influenced the decision to remain in the teaching profession. Novices in this study were inclined to remain in schools where personal interaction with the mentor was present. They were inclined to remain in schools where assistance and support were provided when needed. Novices in this study also indicated that being provided with assistance in understanding the procedures, rules, and regulations of the system was instrumental in making their teaching experience bearable.

Some novices did not agree with or experience some of the activities of the mentoring program. No explanation was given to the author for this lack of experience; however, there was no indication from the novices who provided nonpositive responses of an intention to leave the profession. Additionally, some novices expressed that the mentoring program in no way influenced the decision to remain in the profession. The

desire to teach was the motivating factor.

The district's mentoring program positively influences the novice's decision to remain in the teaching profession. The district designed and implemented a mentoring program that was conducive to the needs of the novice teacher. Mentors were selected according to a set of criteria created by the district. District-wide in-service meetings were scheduled throughout the year to provide information that related to the specific needs and concerns of the first-year teacher.

### *Implications of Findings*

Effective mentoring programs compose the key to reducing attrition rates and increasing retention rates. School districts must continue to study and become knowledgeable of the needs of the novice teacher. School districts desiring to attract and retain teachers should seek assistance from those districts that have exhibited high retention rates. The data that were obtained in this study will be beneficial to school districts, program planners, and state policymakers.

### *Limitations*

The author presented the following limitations preimplementation: (a) the novices' nonacceptance of the mentoring program, (b) the novices' not returning to the school the following year, and (c) the construction of the survey. All novices accepted and participated in the mentoring program and indicated their intent to return the following school year. There was no evidence of novice dissatisfaction with the construction of the survey.

### *Recommendations*

The author recommends that the district extend the mentoring program, start the mentor recruitment process in midsummer, and begin training sessions immediately

following the selection process to ensure that the mentors will be adequately prepared for the task. She also recommends that each school principal have an alternate list of mentors to replace those who do not fulfill expectations. The author recommends that the mentors make contact with the novices prior to the beginning of the school year to determine whether there is a need for reassignment. She also recommends that the novices complete monthly activity logs, signed by the mentors, to verify participation in scheduled meetings, contact with the mentors, and so forth. These logs would ensure that all novices experience the required activities and would be submitted to the building principal. The author recommends that the novices be provided with opportunities to meet with other novices outside of their school, once a month, to share experiences and uplift and encourage one another. She also recommends that the building principal provide opportunities for documented observation by both the mentors and the novices twice a week.

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Appendix A  
Principal Response Form

## Survey Participation Response Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the box indicating your willingness to assist in this survey.

- I agree to allow the novice teachers in my building participate in the Mentor Experience Research Survey.
- I do not agree to allow the novice teachers in my building participate in the Mentor Experience Research Survey.

Please provide the following information.

Number of novice teachers in the building \_\_\_\_\_

Number of novice teachers willing to participate in the study \_\_\_\_\_

The teachers will receive a letter explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw.

Please return the response sheet to Karla Potts by \_\_\_\_\_ in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

If there are any further questions, please feel free to contact me.



Appendix B

Survey

## Novice Teacher Perceptions of the Mentoring Experience

School \_\_\_\_\_

This survey will determine the effectiveness of the Mentoring Program in addressing your needs as a beginning teacher. Please rate the following components of the program in terms of their impact on your growth as a professional this year.

**Section I Directions:** Circle the number that most accurately reflects your perception for each statement. If you did not experience an item, circle "N/A."

**Scale:**

4 = strongly agree; 3 = agree; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree; and "N/A" = did not experience

<i>Perceptions of the Mentoring Experience</i>					
	Scale				
<b>1. Mentors at my school helped me understand the professional expectations for teachers related to:</b>					
a. Fulfilling classroom responsibilities	1	2	3	4	N/A
b. Assuming grade level or department responsibilities	1	2	3	4	N/A
c. Assuming appropriate school level responsibilities (e.g., extra-curricular, committees)	1	2	3	4	N/A
d. Knowing and following school and school system policies and procedures (e.g., paperwork, Special Education requirements, emergency procedures)	1	2	3	4	N/A
e. Addressing standards (national, state, system)	1	2	3	4	N/A
f. Completing the teacher evaluation process (e.g., professional expectations, evaluation criteria, paperwork, timelines)	1	2	3	4	N/A
<b>2. Mentors helped me learn how to establish and maintain effective professional relationships:</b>					
a. With students	1	2	3	4	N/A
b. With parents and caregivers	1	2	3	4	N/A
c. With colleagues	1	2	3	4	N/A
d. With administrators and other school/school system leaders	1	2	3	4	N/A
e. With community members	1	2	3	4	N/A
<b>3. The following mentoring activities helped me develop as an educator:</b>					
a. Regularly scheduled conferences during the school day with mentor(s) to plan, discuss issues, or to celebrate accomplishments	1	2	3	4	N/A
b. Informal conferences with mentor(s)	1	2	3	4	N/A
c. Coaching by mentor (e.g., observations, promoting reflection, providing feedback, encouraging new strategies)	1	2	3	4	N/A
d. Observing mentor(s) and other faculty members	1	2	3	4	N/A
e. Informal meetings with other faculty	1	2	3	4	N/A
f. Informal "get togethers"	1	2	3	4	N/A
g. Learning opportunities at the school (e.g., sharing effective strategies, workshops, special sessions on topics of interest to novice teachers, study groups)	1	2	3	4	N/A
h. Encouragement to attend system-wide learning opportunities (e.g., in-service sessions, new teacher orientations, new teacher workshops)	1	2	3	4	N/A
<b>4. Mentors impacted my professional development by:</b>					
a. Serving as professional role models	1	2	3	4	N/A

b. Accepting me as a professional colleague	1	2	3	4	N/A
c. Making time for me when I needed assistance	1	2	3	4	N/A
d. Providing the specific support and assistance I needed	1	2	3	4	N/A
e. Listening to my concerns and helping me to identify solutions	1	2	3	4	N/A
f. Being flexible and open-minded in assisting me	1	2	3	4	N/A
g. Helping me get to know other faculty and staff	1	2	3	4	N/A
h. Linking me with faculty who could assist me in addressing my concerns	1	2	3	4	N/A
i. Helping me to acquire the resources I needed	1	2	3	4	N/A
j. Helping me develop a repertoire of effective instructional strategies	1	2	3	4	N/A
k. Helping me design a supportive learning environment and effective classroom management skills	1	2	3	4	N/A
l. Helping me learn strategies to address the diverse needs of my students	1	2	3	4	N/A
m. Helping me develop interpersonal and relationships building skills	1	2	3	4	N/A
n. Helping me understand the organization and culture of the school	1	2	3	4	N/A
o. Helping me understand the school community and its issues, strengths, and resources that impact our students	1	2	3	4	N/A
p. Linking me with community resources that are available to address the diverse needs of my students	1	2	3	4	N/A
q. Helping me learn to balance my own life responsibilities with the demands of teaching	1	2	3	4	N/A
r. Helping me become a more reflective teacher	1	2	3	4	N/A
s. Making me aware of my development as an educator and assisting me in setting goals for my continued professional growth	1	2	3	4	N/A

**Section II Directions: Describe or give examples of your perceptions for each sentence stem or question. Be as specific as possible. Feel free to write on the back of this survey if you need additional space.**

1. I most appreciated the Mentoring Program for:
2. The Mentoring Program addressed my specific needs as a new teacher by:
3. How has your participation in the Mentoring Program affected your attitudes and behaviors as a teacher?
4. My suggestions for improving the Mentoring Program would be:.
5. How has your participation in the Mentoring Program (i.e., knowledge and skills you derived) affected the teachers, parents, community, and students in your school?
6. Has your participation in the Mentoring Program influenced your decision to remain in or to leave the teaching profession? If so, please explain. (Added by Karla Potts)

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### Supplement Sheet for Responses in Section II (Added by Karla Potts)

Please include the number from the sentence stem or question.

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Appendix C

Schedule of Novice-Mentor In-Service Meetings

### Schedule of Novice-Mentor in-Service Meetings

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<i>Month</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Topic(s)</i>
December	Novice Teacher  Mentors	Characteristics of an Effective Classroom Classroom Observations Classroom Management Strategies and Problem Solving Mentoring Principles and Practices
January	Novice Teacher	Establishing a Positive Rapport with: Parents Colleagues
February	Novice Teacher	Special Education Issues: The "Process" STAT Child Study Committee Formal Assessments Eligibility IEP Instructional Strategies
March	Novice Teacher	Characteristics of an Effective Classroom: Classroom Observations Lesson Mastery
May	Novice/Mentor	Post Assessment, Professionalism, Sharing Ideas

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