

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Research Brief: Supporting New Teachers

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In 2008, more than 104,000 educators (87 percent) across North Carolina participated in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, providing critical information for every traditional public school about whether or not the faculty perceives that the trusting, supportive environments necessary to enhance student learning and retain teachers are present.

These conditions are especially important for new teachers entering the profession. High quality mentoring is dependent on the presence of many of these working conditions to be effective, including: a supportive environment, teacher engagement in decisions about instruction, school leaders who facilitate the creation of clear and predictable decision making processes, opportunities for mentor and new teacher professional development, and time for educators to work collaboratively.

In addition to general trends evident from the main sections of the survey, specific questions were designed to assess perceptions of the quality of mentoring across the state. Approximately 19,000 teachers in their first three years in the profession (about 7,000 in their initial year) were asked a series of questions about the support they received. About 26,000 North Carolina teachers reported serving as a mentor to new colleagues over the past three years and were asked about their perceptions

of the frequency of mentoring and any additional support they received.

New Teachers Have Different Perceptions and Professional Development Needs

Beginning teachers report differing perceptions of the working conditions in their school and areas where they need additional support to improve. Consider the following:

- New teachers are more likely to agree that they have positive working conditions than mid-career and veteran teachers. On virtually all questions, teachers in their first year are the most likely to note the presence of positive working conditions, followed closely by those in their second and third years.
- In most professional development areas, new teachers are more likely to report needing additional opportunities to be more effective with their students. While there is little disparity based on years of experience in feelings of preparedness in their content area, closing the achievement gap and with English Language Learners, there are significant differences in the areas of classroom management, methods of teaching and student assessment. For example, while half (52 percent) of first year and one-third of teachers with two to three years experience (36 percent) indicate a need for more professional development in classroom

management, less than one-fifth of those with eleven or more years report a need.

Ideally, induction can build upon and foster new teachers' positive perceptions of supportive working conditions while also providing the additional support new teachers identify as necessary. However, it appears that not all beginning educators are receiving the support they need.

Induction Support Does Not Reach all New Educators

Nine out of ten teachers report being assigned mentors for both their first year and/or their first and second year of teaching. And of the new teachers assigned a mentor, many do not receive the support that research demonstrates is necessary to improve performance and keep them in the profession (Table 1). One-third of new teachers assigned a mentor report never planning during the school day (32 percent) or planning instruction with their mentor (33 percent). One-fifth of new teachers indicate that they were not observed by their mentor.

New principals, like teachers, do not receive systematic support within the state. Less than one-third (31 percent) of new principals—those with three years in the principalship or less—were assigned a mentor. When a

mentor was assigned, new principals were positive about the impact in many areas such as instructional leadership, budgeting, school improvement planning, etc.

- Of those receiving a mentor, one-third (36 percent) of the principals were never observed in their school or did school improvement planning with their mentor (35 percent)
- Forty-six percent of principals who were assigned a mentor agreed it was important in their decision to remain a leader in their school, and 60 percent said it enhanced their effectiveness as a school leader

While many novice teachers are not being reached, those who were assigned a mentor and met with them more frequently indicate that the support they received was effective in many areas. Three-quarters of new teachers receiving mentoring agree that their mentor was effective in supporting instructional strategies (76 percent), classroom management/discipline (76 percent), school and/or district procedures (76 percent), Eighty percent report that their mentor supported their completion of required documentation and 85 percent of new teachers agree that their mentor provided effective general support and encouragement. Two-thirds report effective support from their mentor in their subject area.

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY OF MENTORING ACTIVITIES REPORTED BY NEW TEACHERS AND MENTORS

Mentoring activity	Supported New Teachers		
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>At Least Once Per Week</i>
Planning During the School Day	32%	38%	30%
Being Observed by My Mentor	20%	72%	8%
Planning Instruction with My Mentor	33%	43%	24%
Having Discussions with My Mentor About Teaching	4%	45%	51%

Note: The "sometimes" category includes responses ranging from "less than once per month" to "several times per month."

Mentors, like new teachers, are not receiving systematic support across schools and districts. While three-quarters (77 percent) of North Carolina educators serving as mentors to new teachers received some mentor training (i.e. seminars or classes), other supports are rare. About one-third of mentors report receiving release time to observe their mentee (38 percent), receiving common planning time with their mentee (31 percent), and regular communication with school administration (34 percent). Less than one out of ten receive release time to observe other mentors (7 percent) and virtually none receive a reduced number of preparations (2 percent) or teaching schedule (2 percent).

Four out of ten mentors report working with only one beginning teacher and seven out of ten (67 percent) work with two or less.

Impact of Mentoring

Three-quarters of new teachers mentored report that it made at least some contribution to their success as a

beginning teacher (four out of ten report that their mentoring experience mattered quite a bit or a great deal). About half (45 percent) agree that their mentoring experience was important in their decision to continue teaching at their school.

On the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, all teachers were asked about their future employment plans: whether they wanted to “stay” teaching in their current school, remain teaching but “move” to a new school, or “leave” teaching altogether. New teachers who plan to stay in their school receive more frequent mentoring support than those who want to move to a new school or leave the profession (Table 2). In an examination of the self-reported future employment plans of new teachers who were mentored, those who want to stay in their school more frequently planned during the school day, planned instruction, had discussions about teaching and were observed than those who wanted to move to another school or leave teaching altogether.

TABLE 2. FUTURE EMPLOYMENT PLANS OF NEW TEACHERS AND FREQUENCY OF MENTORING ACTIVITIES

Mentoring activity	Frequency of Mentoring as Reported by New Teachers								
	Never			Sometimes			At Least Once Per Week		
	<i>Stayers</i>	<i>Movers</i>	<i>Leavers</i>	<i>Stayers</i>	<i>Movers</i>	<i>Leavers</i>	<i>Stayers</i>	<i>Movers</i>	<i>Leavers</i>
Planning During the School Day	28.5%	37.2%	37.8%	38.8%	37.7%	39.3%	32.7%	25.1%	22.9%
Being Observed by My Mentor	18.1%	22.7%	23.1%	72.8%	69.1%	69.2%	9.1%	8.2%	7.7%
Planning Instruction with My Mentor	29.6%	38.6%	41.1%	44.1%	40.9%	41.1%	26.3%	20.5%	17.8%
Having Discussions with My Mentor About Teaching	3.1%	5.1%	6.5%	43.4%	49.8%	49.9%	54.5%	45.1%	43.6%

Note: The “sometimes” category includes responses ranging from less than one per month to several times per month.

Conclusion

A Mentor Task Force was established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to develop recommendations to the North Carolina State Board of Education to inform school districts on the use of state funding for the design and approval of their induction program. The Task Force, meeting in fall 2008 and spring 2009, is considering new standards for mentor programs and mentors that align with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, a network of mentor programs, and the development and delivery of mentor training.

These state reforms may be necessary as educators in some schools indicate that induction issues are not being addressed. Two-thirds of teachers responding to the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey agree that school leadership makes sustained efforts to address concerns about new teacher support. Approximately one out of six teachers (17 percent) disagree that efforts are made. By comparison, 64 percent agreed efforts are made

to address concerns about leadership, 66 percent agreed efforts are made to address concerns about teacher empowerment, and 72 percent agreed efforts are made to address concerns about professional development and facilities and resources respectively.

Additionally, only half of principals (53 percent) agree that they have sufficient time to focus on instructional leadership issues. Six out of ten principals (57 percent) spend three hours or less in an average week on instructional leadership issues (nine out of ten spend 5 hours per week or less) and one-quarter spend three hours or less (26 percent) observing and coaching teachers.

Given the return on investment of supporting high-quality induction—\$1.66 for every \$1 invested according to a recent New Teacher Center study—and the gains in teacher retention and teacher effectiveness, policymakers and practitioners should do more to ensure that all new teachers are systematically supported across North Carolina.

About The New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center (NTC) was established in 1998 as a national resource focused on teacher and administrator induction. NTC implements and promotes induction best practices through a variety of innovative professional development opportunities and materials that assist educators and policy makers in supporting the next generation of education professionals. Using an integrated, collaborative approach, NTC strives to support essential research, well-informed policy, and thoughtful practice that encourage teacher development from pre-service throughout the career of a teacher.

New Teacher Center

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