

# New teacher support

A COMPREHENSIVE INDUCTION PROGRAM CAN INCREASE TEACHER RETENTION AND IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

BY KATHY WIEBKE  
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**N**ew teachers need help. From day one, new teachers, largely on their own, are responsible for running a classroom and ensuring student learning, as well as fulfilling administrative requirements. Little wonder that 14% of new teachers leave by the end of their first year, 33% leave within three years, and almost 50% leave in five years (Ingersoll, 2003). Teachers cite lack of support and poor working conditions as primary factors.

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The Arizona K-12 Center, which provides professional development — including new teacher support — throughout Arizona, has studied the topic extensively in order to develop best practices for our programs. This has been especially relevant for the Arizona Master Teacher Mentor Program, which is designed to reduce new teacher attrition and improve performance. Below is what we have learned.

## COMPREHENSIVE INDUCTION: DEFINING NEW TEACHER SUPPORT

Programs to support new teachers are most often discussed in terms of induction programs. Such programs can vary widely from informal buddy systems in which mentors receive no compensation, training, or time release to comprehensive, formal support provided by highly prepared mentors who are paid for their work.

Here, we concentrate on comprehensive induction, which should include a combination of mentoring, professional development and support, and formal assessments for new teachers, typically during their first two years of teaching. The Alliance for Excellent Education in 2004 defined comprehensive induction programs as consisting of:

- **High-quality mentoring**, structured from carefully selected teachers in the same field or subject. Mentors guide work, offer feedback, model effective methods, assist with lesson plans, and help analyze student work and achievement data;
- **Common planning time**, regularly scheduled;
- **Ongoing professional development**, consisting of regular learning opportunities to expand content knowledge, address diverse learning needs, manage student

behavior, and improve pedagogical skills;

- **An external network of teachers**, offering participation in a community of colleagues to collaborate and receive ongoing support; and
- **Standards-based evaluation**, a mechanism for determining whether new teachers should move forward in the profession.

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In addition, we strongly recommend that induction begin before school starts. New teachers need guidance and support before students arrive to be better prepared to handle the demands of classroom teaching in full swing.

In terms of content, it's important that induction and mentoring remain focused on instructional success. Emotional support is certainly necessary, and logistical assistance, such as finding certain resources in a school, can also be important. But the focal point should remain improving teacher efficacy based on addressing specific teaching standards and maintaining data-driven conversations. Making a positive impact is essential to teacher job satisfaction. Most teachers join the profession to make a difference in students' lives. Their frustration at being unable to perform successfully often drives them away. In this sense, professional support is the best emotional support.

The following criteria help to distinguish comprehensive, purposeful induction from haphazard support (New Teacher Center, 2008):

- Rigorous mentor selection rather than choosing mentors without an explicit criteria and process.
- Ongoing professional development and support for mentors.
- Authorized time for mentor-teacher interactions rather than occasional meetings depending on availability.
- Intensive and specific guidance moving teaching practices forward rather than nonspecific coaching and merely personal support.
- Standards and data-based conversations rather than casual feedback not supported by evidence.
- Ongoing professional development specifically designed for beginning teachers.
- Clear alignment and collaboration with administrators and stake-

holders rather than operating in isolation.

**WHAT WE KNOW: The research on new teacher induction**

A growing body of research provides a clear picture on what works in induction and what its true value is. Here's what the research tells us.

• **The time is right**

Induction can impact an entire teaching career. Research shows that teacher experience is unrelated to effectiveness, except during the initial years in the profession (Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005). High-quality induction can enhance a teaching practice at the time when teachers need it most.

• **One-year vs. two-year programs**

In a study conducted across three school districts, teachers received induction support from a full-time mentor with a caseload of not more

**BEYOND THE SINK-OR-SWIM**

**MODEL: What makes induction effective?**

The presence of an induction program is no guarantee of success. Poorly conceived and underfunded mentoring endeavors that follow the old buddy system have "no impact on teacher retention, job satisfaction, or sense of efficacy, let alone the quality of instruction and student learning" (Gless, 2008).

Effective induction programs share certain key elements. Strong principal support is vital to maintaining the credibility of mentors with their mentees and facilitating the time and resources needed to make mentoring work. In addition, high-quality mentors must be identified and then provided with relevant training. Being a good teacher is not adequate preparation for mentoring. Mentors need support just as new teachers do.

We have also learned that it is beneficial to recruit mentors from within the communities where they will be working. This is particularly true of remote or lower-income populations. These seasoned teachers understand the cultural or socioeconomic challenges of a particular school or community. They tend to have the respect of parents, and, just as importantly, they stay. There is little chance of lowering new teacher attrition when those facilitating induction don't stick around themselves.



than five teachers. In the second year, those who continued to receive support realized a greater percentage of gains in student achievement than in their first year. This suggests that second-year teachers may benefit from mentoring even more than first-year teachers, perhaps because they are more able to focus on instructional improvement (Strong, 2005).

“A one- to two-year period of induction can make the difference between a teacher who succeeds early in their career and one who does not, and between a teacher who remains in the profession and one who does not. Too brief, and the program may have little more impact than a stint of student teaching” (AFT, 2001).

- **Part-time vs. full-time mentors**

Research has shown for some time the benefits of full-time over part-

time mentorship. Mentors without classroom responsibilities have the opportunity to think through the mentoring they provide rather than simply trying to give quick-fix answers on the spot. They also have time to meet with colleagues and participate in a professional learning community that helps them attain a broader more progressive understanding of their role (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992).

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- **Formal vs. informal mentoring**

“Formal mentoring programs that are part of a school’s culture are more successful than those that are informal and unstructured. ... A mentoring program should encourage exemplary teachers to grow professionally, be a way to retain experienced and new teachers, and support new and mentor teachers to elevate student achievement because there are competent educators in the classrooms” (The Principals’ Partnership, 2003).

- **Mentor training**

“Successful mentor programs are

### LEARN MORE

- The New Teacher Center offers information on what works in mentoring and induction and on the services the center provides. Visit [www.newteachercenter.org](http://www.newteachercenter.org).
- The Center for Teaching Quality provides research and data on mentoring and induction. Visit [www.teachingquality.org](http://www.teachingquality.org).
- Teachers Network is an online resource developed by teachers for teachers. A section is devoted to new teachers. Visit <http://teachersnetwork.org>.

dependent upon the quality of training afforded the mentors” (Weiss & Weiss, 1999).

- **Grade level and content area**

Assigning a mentor to a beginning teacher who has taught the same grade level and content area is more likely to be accepted as credible by the new teacher (Odell, 1990).

- **The high cost of attrition**

Estimated conservatively,

American schools spend more than \$2.6 billion annually replacing teachers who have

dropped out of the profession. The cost may actually be much higher, given that the loss in teacher quality and student achievement could be added to the bill (Ingersoll, 2003).

- **Induction impacts attrition**

Two studies at the New Teacher Center tracked teachers six years after they had received comprehensive support from the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project as beginning teachers. In both cohorts, 88% of the teachers were still teaching after six years, and a further 6% to 7% performed other

roles in education (Strong, 2005).

- **The dollars make sense**

According to the New Teacher Center at University of California, Santa Cruz, when costs and benefits are summed up for society, the program secures a return of \$1.66 for every dollar invested after five years (New Teacher Center, 2008).

### THE CASE FOR QUALITY INDUCTION

Brenda Kreidler is an Arizona Master Teacher and a participant in a mentoring and induction program founded and facilitated by the Arizona K-12 Center. She works at Lulu Walker Elementary School in the Amphitheater School District of Tucson, where she is a full-time instructional coach. Before this assignment, she taught kindergarten and 1st grade for more than two decades.

“The structured mentoring that we have now is an intervention instead of a Band-Aid,” Kreidler says. “The ongoing training has prepared me for more challenging situations, such as how to approach and support new teachers who aren’t open to a mentor-mentee relationship. I didn’t know how to do that before, to tackle those tough conversations.”

Kreidler gives a compelling exam-

ple. One of her mentees was resistant to opening up

to her. A young man in his second year, he constantly deflected her inquiries by saying everything in his class was fine.

“He didn’t think he needed support, and it was hard for me to get in with him,” Kreidler says. “To him, mentoring was just one more thing on his plate. It was easier for him just to say everything’s OK and not be pushed.”

Underneath this nonchalance was fear — fear that his principal would learn that not everything was right in his classroom, fear that he would be

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judged rather than supported. Kreidler broke through by applying her training from the Arizona K-12 Center to have evidence-based conversations.

“Instead of just asking him, ‘How’s it going?’ I started asking very focused, data-driven questions,” she says. “If everything is OK, show me in the data where everything is OK.”

The mentor soon learned the class wasn’t doing as well as the teacher had made it seem. But rather than becoming more defensive, this data-driven conversation actually took the tension out of the mentor-mentee relationship.

“It wasn’t me telling him how the class was doing. It was the data,” notes Kreidler. “It took the focus off of me and got us looking at students.”

What did the data reveal? That differentiated instruction was sorely lacking. “The data

showed the kids at different levels of learning, but he wasn’t looking at this.”

Backed up by this evidence, Kreidler met weekly with her mentee to coach him on how to teach his students based on their personal needs. She guided him towards organizing his class into groups and modeled effective strategies. In addition, this teacher has set individual goals with each student.

“Once you see the different levels

and you begin to address them, differentiated instruction happens automatically,” she says. “Anytime a student knows where they’re going and how

to get there, you’re going to see results.”

This is the power of quality induction and mentoring. Thoughtful preparation combined with dedicated and ongoing support can yield real improvements in the classroom. In a make-or-break year for a new teacher, Kreidler was able to guide this young professional on a course that will lead to enhanced performance throughout his career.

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