



We need a more systemic approach to mentoring to guarantee every teacher has the support to be successful.

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POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Melinda George

MENTOR SUPPORT CAN EASE THE TEACHER RETENTION CRISIS

When I was a new teacher, I spent my day asking questions — from how to use the copier to how to reach a struggling student and everything in between. It was sometimes exhausting. I felt like I was the only one in my building who didn't know how things worked. When my classroom door was shut, I felt cut off from the rest of the world.

When I got a mentor, things changed. My mentor consistently stopped by to check on me and my students and ask how she could help. She offered to observe some of my classes and even, occasionally, to teach a lesson so that I could get some ideas. She was a lifeline I knew I could reach out to — and I did. She supported me and challenged me to grow my practice and connect with my students academically and personally. She was someone to whom I was accountable not for my annual evaluation but because I valued her input and wanted her to see it put into use.

Unfortunately, not every new teacher has that kind of mentoring relationship. We need a more systemic approach to mentoring to guarantee every teacher has the support to be successful.

Education is facing a teacher retention crisis. And while some states and districts have begun to require mentoring, many do not, and the quality of existing mentoring programs varies. Educators can change that pattern by advocating for more mentoring policies and resources.

Local and state policies should include:

- Recognizing mentoring as a high-quality professional learning intervention;
- Providing mentoring for the first three years of a teacher's tenure;
- Hiring full-time mentors to work with new teachers, providing observation and feedback as well as resources and strategies for improving practice;
- Hiring or promoting experienced teachers of color to mentor new teachers of color;
- Building time into the school schedule for mentoring interactions, observations, and reflection; and
- Building in resources for data collection on mentoring efforts to measure impact and make decisions that improve practice.

When advocating for resources and policies, it is always helpful to include examples that have had a positive impact. These two examples provide a starting point.

In 2017, in Norman, Oklahoma, district-level administrators noticed a troubling trend. They needed to hire an increasing number of new teachers each year because new teachers — in whom they had invested resources and training — weren't staying in the profession. The district intensified its professional learning efforts to support and retain entry-year and emergency-certified teachers. This included hiring mentor teachers and classroom support specialists to work with 109 new teachers.



In the first year, teacher support specialists logged 270 classroom visits. The results were terrific. Between 2017 and 2019, the number of new teachers that had to be hired dropped from 225 to 168 (Norman Public Schools, n.d.).

In 2019, the New Teacher Center, a national nonprofit focused on strengthening the practice of beginning teachers, released findings from a study of a high-intensity mentor support program for new teachers in urban school districts (Schmidt, 2019). The study found that teacher retention

rates after one year were 11% higher in the group that received high-intensity mentoring, compared with a control group of new teachers (78% compared with 67%). The study also found that “although the cost of running the program was high, at \$9,223 per teacher, this was significantly lower than the cost of hiring a new teacher, at an average of \$17,872” (Schmidt, 2019).

Fending off a shortage of teachers needs attention at both ends of the teaching career spectrum. Mentoring is a proven way to support beginning

teachers and increase their tenure in education systems.

REFERENCES

Schmidt, R.A. (2019). *Evaluation of the New Teacher Center (NTC) i3 scale-up grant: Teacher practice impacts.* SRI International.

Norman Public Schools. (n.d.). *Norman’s Title II professional learning investment cuts new teacher attrition.* learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/NormanDataAltsV2_10-6-19.pdf ■

STANDARDS IN PRACTICE

 / Paul Fleming

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aligned professional learning.

To assist affiliates in this important work, Learning Forward provides ongoing information and support about implementing the standards, facilitating professional learning around the standards, and advocating for their adoption in policy. In July, Learning Forward leaders met with affiliate leaders on a deep dive into the revised standards and the new and emerging tools for implementing them.

Recognizing that leaders need

to have deep understanding of the standards to help others, we explored new knowledge, skills, and mindsets that are embedded in and necessary for implementing the revised standards. We also considered policy guidance and examined tools that focus on the awareness, engagement, and implementation strategies necessary for policy adoption. In keeping with the standards and best practices in professional learning, we engaged in structured reflection, small-group discussion, and thoughtful next steps.

We are grateful to the Learning

Forward Affiliates for their leadership in communities around the globe, and we look forward to continuing to support them in their role as experts on how the standards can add value to state, province, or district efforts to build comprehensive professional learning systems. And we encourage all Learning Forward members and professional learning leaders to engage with their state or provincial affiliates as we all support each other in creating excellent professional learning for all educators in the service of excellent learning for all students. ■

About the **Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI)**

Learning Forward’s Standard Assessment Inventory (SAI) is a 50-item survey that measures the alignment of a school’s professional learning to the Standards for Professional Learning. The SAI also measures teachers’ perceptions to provide important data on the quality of professional learning.

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