Getting Serious about Induction

New programs aim to speed up learning curve for new teachers

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

Thousands of new teachers started this school year by participating in teacher induction programs, now required in 27 states. And as they grow in number, induction programs are changing. No longer simple orientation sessions to help teachers feel a part of a new school, they are evolving into comprehensive, formal programs to team up new teachers with savvy mentors, sometimes for multiple years.

"There is growing recognition that general mentoring—the old approach of having a 'buddy down the hall'—isn't actually that effective," explains Charles Coble, an expert on teacher education and development who oversaw teacher preparation programs across the University of North Carolina system.

The ultimate goal is to make new teachers more effective with students more quickly. And that goal, say experts, requires an approach that is more targeted to instruction than past efforts, using rigorously selected, trained mentors who observe new teachers in their classrooms, provide instructional guidance, and model effective practice. According to Coble, "These components have been in place in some isolated districts for up to 10 years, but now we're seeing them become more expansive."

The shift is driven by several factors. One is the high number of teachers leaving the profession and the cost of replacing them. Forty to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years, and that turnover is extremely costly to districts, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. In five large districts it studied, the costs ranged up to $86 million per year.

Another factor is that first-year teachers tend to be less effective than more experienced ones, combined with the fact that the American teaching workforce has been getting less experienced since the 1980s. Researchers Richard Ingersoll and Lisa Merrill reported that in 2007–2008, 25 percent of American teachers had five or fewer years of experience and that more teachers were first-years than any other level of experience. Tammy Phuong, who oversees the mentoring program in the Austin Independent School District, points out that "a student in a high-needs school may have a novice teacher three or four years in a row. If we don't make sure those novice teachers are highly effective, then a domino effect could occur and we could be creating big gaps for those students."

A third factor driving the shift is the growth of high-stakes teacher evaluation policies and an increasing acknowledgment that districts need to provide adequate support and training in order to set up new teachers for success rather than failure. Coble, for example, says he believes that "it would be unethical and unprofessional to use measures of student growth for [teacher] dismissal decisions without first providing an opportunity for that teacher to grow and improve their practice."

He and others say that support during the first year is crucial, even when preservice teacher education programs are high quality. Induction helps new teachers navigate challenges specific to each position, such as district policies and new programs like the Common Core State Standards, says Sharon Iorio, who leads the Wichita Teacher Quality Partnership. Also, most student teachers aren't in the classroom at the beginning or end of the school year, and so most new teachers lack experience with these critical transition times, notes Hilda Potrzeba, educator quality and certification specialist at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). "Ours is one of the only professions that doesn't do a [yearlong] internship or residency program," she says.

Improving Student Achievement

Research shows benefits of new teacher induction. A meta-analysis by Ingersoll and Michael Strong published in 2011 found that teachers who had participated in mentoring or other induction programs showed higher levels of commitment, retention, and student achievement and better classroom instructional practices (see R. Smith, "The Promising Practice of Induction," *Harvard Education Letter*, January/February 2013).

And recently some districts have been reporting impressive results. Hillsborough County, Fla., the eighth-largest district in the country, includes an intensive induction program in its Empowering Effective Teachers initiative, a comprehensive effort funded in part by a $100 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that also includes peer evaluation for both new and veteran teachers. The district has seen retention of first-year teachers jump from 72 percent the year before the program began to 94 percent after the second year. More importantly, third-year teachers who received two years of mentoring and other induction supports outperformed the

district average on the number of teachers meeting the "accomplished" criteria on observations of teacher effectiveness.

The New Teacher Center (NTC), a national nonprofit organization founded by teachers and based in Santa Cruz, Calif., works with Hillsborough County and other districts, schools, and states around the country to improve student achievement by increasing the effectiveness of new teachers and administrators. According to Jordan Brophy-Hilton, senior director of programs and partnerships, an effective induction program includes both classroom-level support and a districtwide infrastructure, with the vision and goals of the program well integrated into the district's strategic plan as well as into its approach to developing teachers' skills and careers over time.

At the Core: Full-time Mentors

At the classroom level, NTC recommends that programs provide at least two years of support for new teachers, including high-quality mentoring by outstanding veteran teachers, regularly scheduled common planning time, ongoing professional development, and standards-based evaluation. Brophy-Hilton says that mentoring is at the core. As a result, NTC recommends that mentors be fully released from their teaching responsibilities so that they have the time to observe and document new teachers' practices, conference with teachers, and model effective lessons.

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Hillsborough County follows this model, with fully released mentors providing 90 minutes per week of support for all first-year teachers and 45 minutes per week for second-year teachers. Mentors serve a caseload of about 15–20 teachers each for one to four years. After this period, they are expected to return to the classroom or transition into administrative positions, because, according to David Steele, project director for Hillsborough's Empowering Effective Teachers, "there is a point at which the mentors stop being peers" whose knowledge and relevance is trusted by new teachers.

In Rhode Island, with support from a Race to the Top grant, RIDE oversees and supports a statewide cadre of 27 mentors, or "induction coaches," who provide 90 minutes of coaching per week. In the first year of the program, coaches work with all first-year teachers, and in the second year they also support second-year teachers in the state's four "urban core" districts.

But not all states or districts have the resources to provide fully released mentors, so some rely on a tiered model of support. In Fairfax County, Va., and Austin, Texas, novice teachers in the highest priority schools (based on factors like Title I status, low student achievement levels, or high teacher turnover) work with fully released mentors, while those in other schools receive less frequent support from mentors who are also full-time teachers.

Building "Career-long" Habits

The new generation of induction programs focuses on developing teachers' reflections about their instruction and students' learning. Mentors observe teachers in their classrooms and guide them in considering their strengths and challenges, typically using structured tools and data. In this process, mentors help teachers come to their own conclusions and establish their own goals rather than telling them where they should improve. Mentors "might know the focus, but we need the teacher to find that focus," says Barbara Miraglia, Hillsborough County's lead mentor. She and other experts say that this helps teachers build career-long habits of reflection and make continuous improvement. After establishing goals, mentors provide whatever support is needed for improvement, including lesson planning, modeling, co-teaching, and navigating their schools.

Many districts and states use NTC's tools, including a "collaborative assessment log" to document needs and plan next steps, as well as other tools for mentors to record data observed in the classroom. According to Potrzeba, project leader for RIDE's induction program, "The tools are really critical. They not only focus the conversation, but they really teach new teachers to be reflective. The conversations [between mentors and mentees] really change over the course of the year."

Hillsborough County also uses NTC's tools and grounds all of its observations in Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. The framework drives coaching, teacher evaluation, and teacher improvement districtwide. Steele says it has given everyone in the district a common language and set of objectives. "Before this we were doing induction in a compliance way rather than a supportive way" that focused on observers using a checklist of teacher competencies, he says. The shift, he believes, has made the induction program and all of the district's teacher-effectiveness efforts more student centered, reflective, and ultimately effective.

Experts counsel that mentoring and other induction supports need to be flexible enough to address whatever needs new teachers discover. District leaders report, however, that the most common requests for help from new teachers include assistance with classroom management, assessing whether students really understand the material taught, and knowing when and how to take risks, like spending more time than planned on a unit to ensure student mastery.

For Further Information

E. Britton, S. Raizen, L. Paine, and M. A. Huntley. "More Swimming, Less Sinking: Perspectives on Teacher Induction in the U.S. and Abroad." Paper presented at the National Commission on Teaching Mathematics and Science in the 21st Century, March 6–7, 2000, Washington, DC. Available online at www.wested.org/online_pubs/teacherinduction/

R. M. Ingersoll and M. Strong. "The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research." *Review of Educational Research* 81, no. 2 (2011): 201–233.

G. Marietta. *Multiple Measures of Teacher Effectiveness in Hillsborough County Public Schools: The Role of Principals.* Tampa, FL: Hillsborough County Public Schools. Available online at http://communication.sdhc.k12.fl.us/eethome/casestudies

M. Strong and A. Villar. *The Costs and Benefits of a Comprehensive Induction Program.* Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center, 2007. http://www.newteachercenter.org/products-and-resources/costs-and-benefits-comprehensive-induction-program

Planning for Sustainability

District leaders also underscore the importance of selecting the right mentors—those who have a strong understanding of adult development and relationship-building skills as well as a history of excellent classroom teaching. They recommend that interviewers ask applicants to role play or react to videotaped scenarios, looking for qualities like flexibility, thoughtfulness, and relationship building. Providing ongoing support and professional development for mentors after they are hired is also essential, experts say. Social support for mentors is crucial, too, so that they don't feel isolated or overwhelmed, according to Hillsborough's Miraglia.

The intensive mentoring called for by these programs also requires resources for salaries, training, and other expenses. Some administrators say that colleagues in other districts struggle to find sufficient funds, and state laws requiring induction have raised the possibility of districts claiming unfunded mandates. But districts are finding creative ways to leverage funding. RIDE's program, which costs approximately $6,800 per teacher, according to Potrzeba, is currently supported by a Race to the Top grant that ends in 2014. State administrators are working to educate districts about other funds—for example, through federal Title II resources—and Potrzeba says that districts are starting to reallocate their existing funds because "administrators are seeing a difference" in their new teachers. Steele acknowledges that the $100 million Gates Foundation grant made Hillsborough County's program possible. But he says that the cost of the induction program and the peer evaluation initiative combined represents only about 1 percent of the district's budget, and he is quick to point out that the district has been planning for sustainability since the beginning, including reallocation of other funds.

Steele projects that the teacher induction program will save money in the long run by reducing costs associated with hiring and training new teachers. Coble agrees about the potential savings of high-quality induction, counseling districts to "invest now or invest more later." A cost-benefit analysis of one district's new teacher induction program conducted by the NTC supports their argument. It found that "four groups—students, new teachers, districts, and the state—all benefit from the investment in comprehensive induction," including a return of $1.88 per dollar invested to the district and $3.61 to new teachers.

But it's not just the economic benefit that Steele and others cite when they advise districts to invest in induction. It's the benefit to the many first-year teachers, as well as to the teaching profession as a whole. As Potrzeba puts it: "You can't rewind that first year in your career. It has to be great from the beginning." ■

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"What's Going on Here?"

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sorts of unfamiliar material—from historical artifacts to scientific phenomena to poetry. Research done by our organization and others (available at vtshome.org) has shown that with a minimal investment of time (10 one-hour discussions per academic year), VTS improves not only visual literacy but also problem solving, evidence gathering, communication, and other academic skills now explicitly called for by the Common Core State Standards. It also promotes cooperation, respect, and tolerance. In addition, teachers have documented its power to develop language skills among English-language learners and others; to engage all students, including those who normally hold back or whose attention wanders; and to erase distinctions applied to students, like "gifted" or "challenged."

In VTS, the teacher facilitates a student-centered discovery process focused on images carefully selected to address age and developmental readiness. The teacher is central to the process but not the authoritative source; instead, the students drive the discussions, aided by the teacher. As facilitator, a VTS teacher helps students to:

- look carefully at works of art;
- talk about what they observe;
- back up their ideas with evidence;
- listen to and consider the views of others;
- discuss and hold as possible a variety of interpretations.

Here is just a quick snapshot of a VTS image discussion as fourth-graders consider the Depression-era photo "Cheevers Meadows and His Daughters" by Doris Ulmann. In this black-and-white photo, a grim-faced man in overalls sits, hands in lap, as a girl stands staring at him and a younger girl buries her face into his sleeve.

Teacher: All right, everyone. Take a minute to look at this picture. *(After a pause)* What's going on in this picture?

Student 1: I think a poor family, and there's a little daughter and a dad, and maybe the mom left and they're just living in this little tiny place. And that's why—I don't know if that's a little girl or boy—is crying. *(As the student speaks, the teacher points to all that is mentioned: the family, the dad, the child, the place.)*

Teacher: Okay, so you're looking at these figures and thinking they're a family. And that they're poor. Maybe the mother left them. What did you see that made you say they were poor?

Student 1: Because they don't have, like, a very good house really. I think they're in that house. They don't have very good clothes either. Like their clothes are all wrecked up and ripped, and the children's clothes are really dirty.

Teacher: Okay, so you have several pieces of evidence that suggest they're poor to you. You're looking behind