

TeLL Illinois Research Brief: Supporting New Teachers

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In May 2008, nearly 3,000 educators (34 percent) in 16 school districts across Illinois participated in the Illinois Teaching, Leading and Learning (TeLL) Survey, providing critical information 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 induction, of which mentoring is a central strategy, is dependent on the presence of many of these teaching 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.

A comprehensive account of the survey and analyses of results can be found in the *Illinois Teaching, Leading and Learning Survey Final Report* at www.tellillinois.org. This brief highlights findings specific to new teacher support. Specific questions were designed to assess perceptions of the quality of mentoring across the state and 384 beginning teachers—those in their first three years in the profession—in the participating Illinois TeLLS districts answered a series of questions about the additional support they received as new educators. Additionally, 869 Illinois educators surveyed reported serving as a mentor to new colleagues over the past five years and were asked about their perceptions of the frequency of mentoring and additional support they received.

Findings: Induction Support Is Not Reaching All New Educators

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

- New teachers are more likely than mid-career and veteran teachers to agree that they have positive teaching conditions. On virtually all questions, teachers in their first year are the most likely to note the presence of positive teaching conditions, followed closely by those in their second and third years.
- New teachers are more likely to report needing professional development to be effective than veteran teachers. Novices are significantly more likely to report needing professional development in their content area, classroom management, methods of teaching, reading strategies, and student assessment. For example, while six in ten first year teachers (63 percent) and half of teachers with two to three years experience (51 percent) indicate a need for more professional development in classroom management, less than one-quarter of those with eleven or more years report such a need.

Ideally, induction can build upon and foster new teachers' positive perceptions of supportive teaching conditions and resources while also providing the additional support new teachers identify as necessary. However, at least in the 16 districts surveyed, it appears that not all beginning educators are receiving the support they need.

Only seven out of ten responding novices report that they were assigned mentors in 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 research demonstrates is necessary to improve performance and keep them in the profession (Table 1).

- Over one-third of participating new teachers report never designing or reviewing students’ assessments with their mentors (35 percent), receiving help in using the Illinois State Teaching Standards for reflection and self-assessment (36 percent), aligning lesson plans with Illinois Course of Study (44 percent) or observing their mentor’s teaching (48 percent).
- One-quarter of new teachers receiving support report never being observed by their mentor (25 percent) or analyzing student work with their mentors (31 percent), while one-fifth never once developed or reviewed lesson plans with the mentors (20 percent).

New teachers, however, report much more frequent support in some areas. One-third of beginning teachers assigned a mentor work with them at least once a week on addressing student behavioral issues (34 percent) and reflecting on teaching (31 percent).

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.

- About 80 percent of participating Illinois TeLLS new teachers report that their mentor provided personal and emotional support (84 percent), modeled professionalism and ethical behavior (82 percent), and provided effective support in school and/or district policies (79 percent).
- About 70 percent of new teachers receiving mentoring agree that their mentor was effective helping them complete documentation required of new teachers (73 percent), completing school or district paperwork (70 percent), facilitating personal reflection (70 percent).
- About half agreed that their mentor provided effective support in connecting them with key resource professionals (e.g., coaches, counselors) (55 percent), and enlisting the help of parents/guardians (44 percent).

Of the participating Illinois TeLLS novice teachers who received a mentor, 82 percent agreed that they were able

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY OF MENTORING ACTIVITIES REPORTED BY NEW TEACHERS

Mentoring activity	Supported New Teachers		
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>At Least Once Per Week</i>
Developing/Reviewing Lesson Plans	20.1%	53.5%	26.4%
Being Observed by My Mentor	25.2%	63.0%	11.9%
Observing my Mentor’s Teaching	47.6%	44.6%	7.7%
Analyzing Student Work	30.6%	55.7%	13.7%
Designing/Reviewing Students’ Assessments	34.7%	51.3%	14.0%
Addressing Student Behavioral Issues	9.3%	56.3%	34.4%
Reflecting about Teaching	10.7%	57.9%	31.4%
Using Illinois State Teaching Standards as Reflection Tool	36.2%	50.6%	13.3%
Aligning Lesson Planning with Illinois Course of Study	44.3%	41.7%	14.0%

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

to develop a trusting and respectful relationship with their mentor.

Mentors, like new teachers, are not receiving systematic support across schools and districts participating in the Illinois TeLLS initiative. While about six in ten (58 percent) educators serving as mentors to new teachers received some mentor training (i.e., seminars or classes), other supports are rare.

- Only four in ten mentors report receiving release time to observe their mentee (40 percent) and only about three in ten indicate receiving common planning time with their mentee (30 percent), and time to meet with other mentors (26 percent). Less than one out of five (18 percent) of mentors report regular communication with school administration.
- Less than one out of ten receive release time to observe other mentors (9 percent) and virtually none receive a reduced teaching schedule (3 percent), reduced supervisory duties (e.g., bus or cafeteria duty, etc.) (2 percent), reduced number of preparations (1 percent) or extracurricular responsibilities (e.g., club sponsorship, etc.) (1 percent).

Impact of Mentoring

On the Illinois TeLLS, 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 remain working in their current school consistently receive more frequent mentoring support than those who want to move to another school or leave the profession (Table 2). For example, new teachers wanting to leave teaching were twice as likely as those who want to stay to have never developed or reviewed lesson plans or designs with their mentor (38 percent versus 19 percent) or analyzed student work (28 percent versus 63 percent). In all areas of mentoring support (except aligning lesson planning with the Illinois Course of Study where a substantial proportion of all new teachers received no support and reflecting on teaching), both movers and leavers were more likely than stayers to have never worked with their mentor.

TABLE 2. FUTURE EMPLOYMENT PLANS OF NEW TEACHERS WHO NEVER PARTICIPATED IN SELECT MENTORING ACTIVITIES

Mentoring activity	Percent of Supported New Teachers Who Report Never Participating in the Activity		
	<i>Stayer</i>	<i>Mover</i>	<i>Leaver</i>
Developing or reviewing lesson plans or designs	18.9%	21.6%	37.5%
Being Observed by My Mentor	23.7%	27.8%	37.5%
Observing my mentor’s teaching	46.0%	48.6%	75.0%
Analyzing student work	27.7%	40.5%	62.5%
Designing or reviewing students’ assessments	33.0%	40.5%	50.0%
Addressing student or classroom behavioral issues	9.0%	8.1%	25.0%
Reflecting on my own teaching	9.4%	21.6%	0.0%
Helping me use Illinois State Teaching Standards as a reflection and self-assessment tool	32.6%	56.8%	50.0%
Aligning my lesson planning with the Illinois Course of Study	41.5%	62.2%	37.5%

Note: “Stayers” refers to teachers who intend to continue teaching in their same school, at least until a better opportunity comes along; “movers” includes teachers planning to continue working in education but in another school or district; “leavers” refers to teachers who plan to leave education.

Conclusion

Currently, an induction policy team consisting of several partners, including Illinois TeLLS partners the Consortium for Educational Change and the Illinois Education Association, is working to approve and implement new induction program standards to ensure that programs reach all novice educators with high quality support. The state provides programs that comply with Article 21A of the Illinois Code with up to \$1,200 per new teacher and is funding up to \$3 million in grants for Beginning Teacher Induction Pilot Programs in 2009.

Yet, less than half (49 percent) of all teachers participating in the Illinois TeLLS Survey agree that school leadership makes a sustained effort to address concerns about new teacher support.

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

References

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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.

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