

NEW TEACHER SUPPORT IN WASHINGTON: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND SHARED BENEFITS

Summary Lessons and Implications from the
New Teacher Alliance of the
Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession

Prepared by Inverness Research
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The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession operated the New Teacher Alliance (NTA) from 2006-2009, sponsored by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation (see ctsp-wa.org). Inverness Research evaluated the NTA through the four years, measuring the growth in district and school capacity to provide effective support to new teachers, and learning from new teachers about their needs and about the benefits of the support they received.

This brief distills key lessons learned from the research, along with implications for all levels of the system, from the state to the new teachers.

I. Lessons from the NTA Evaluation

- It is vital that new teachers receive well-designed and structured support, including mentoring, that is targeted to their unique needs **and** that their daily workplace context is conducive to their development.
- New teachers gain usable knowledge for their practice by observing exemplary teaching, co-planning instruction with colleagues, and reflecting on their own teaching and their students' learning.
- New teachers benefit most from support—formal and informal—that is relevant to their teaching assignment and tailored to their developmental needs as novices.
- Mentoring is not cookie-cutter work. It requires specialized knowledge and skill. The match between the mentor and the new teacher matters.
- New teachers' need for targeted support doesn't end after their first year

"A more collaborative department would have been incredibly helpful in my first year. Unfortunately, this is one of the reasons I chose to leave my first school. My second year was monumentally better because I had peers in my content area to plan and discuss strategies with."
2nd year teacher

II. The Implications for Policy and Practice

All levels of the system and the profession have a stake in new teacher support and development.

The state role

- State signals affect district choices. In the absence of state-level advocacy and policy support, district leadership turnover and budget shortages can easily push new teacher support off local agendas.
- Districts are far more likely to fund formal mentor positions with targeted state funding.

The district role

- Early hiring helps new teachers start their careers with greater preparation and confidence.
- Having a well-qualified, well-selected, and well-trained mentor makes a difference for new teachers.
- Providing time, training, and collegial support for mentors strengthens their capacity to support new teachers.
- Mentoring is necessary but not sufficient. New teachers begin with greater confidence and efficacy when they work within well-designed curricula and have adequate teaching materials and resources.
- Formal professional development that is relevant to new teachers' subject matter responsibilities is a very important contributor to new teacher confidence and efficacy.

The school role

- It's best when new teachers meet with mentors, get help with planning, and get oriented to their school's vision of teaching and learning before the start of the school year.
- Teacher teams that have structured work time and that function as professional learning communities focused on teaching and learning are very powerful settings for new teacher development.
- Principals' regular support for and recognition of new teachers are more valuable to new teachers than an annual visit for formal evaluation.
- Taking care to respect professional norms and standards, content coaches and mentors can cooperate effectively in the support of new teachers.
- New teachers rarely have enough opportunities to observe other teachers, in school or away. School leaders and colleagues can help make this happen.

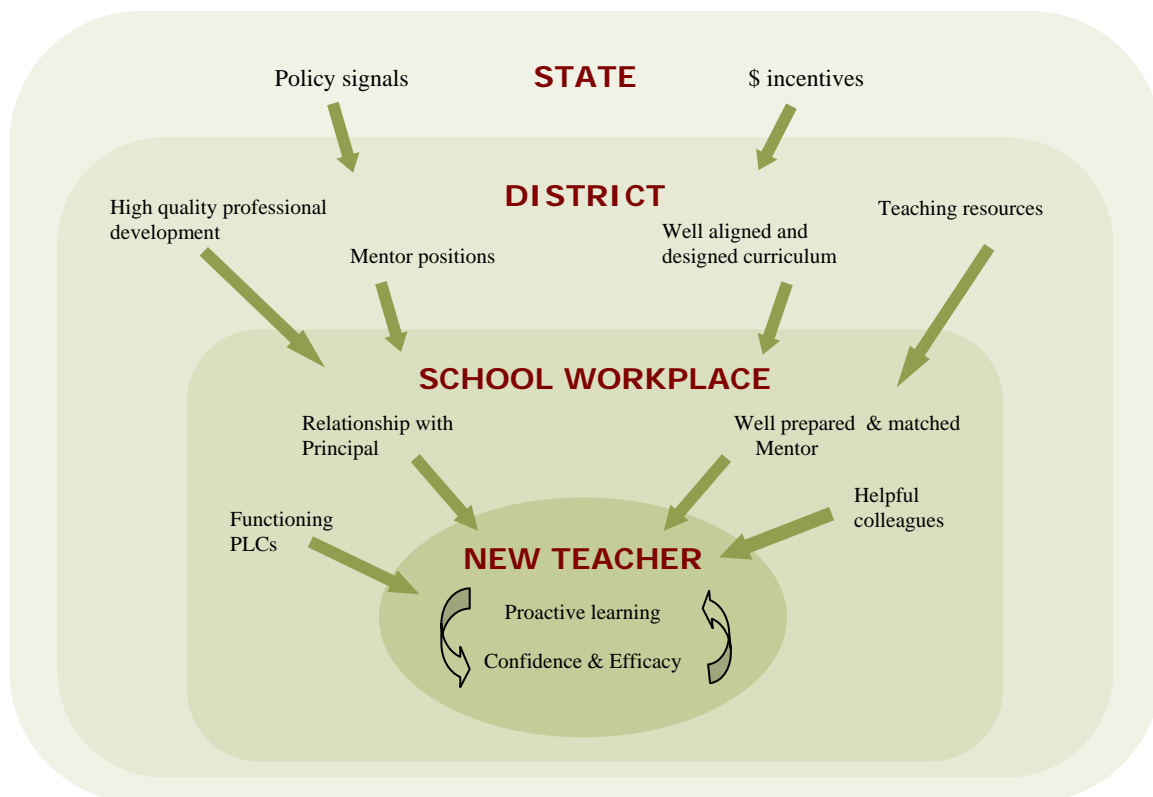
The role of the profession and professional community

- A positive workplace culture—where “no one sinks and everybody swims”—is the most important contributor to new teacher confidence and commitment to the profession.
- New teachers need ready access, formal and informal, to colleagues who know the same subject matter the new teacher is teaching.
- Mentoring new teachers is a rewarding leadership role for veteran teachers, and more so when they have sound training and support for the role.

The role of new teachers

- New teachers who take the initiative to ask for help and proactively seek out learning opportunities feel more confident and satisfied with their jobs than those who are silent.

Embedded Contexts for New Teacher Support



What Matters in Designing Mentor Programs

Selection and match

Create a pool of full- or part-time mentors based on qualifications: knowledge, skill, disposition.
Select from the pool based on best match for the new teachers' assignments.

District size

Larger districts

- A cadre of mentors on released time can be available to spend designated periods of time in new teachers' classrooms and can accompany new teachers on observations of others' classrooms.

Note: Case loads are ideally fewer than 15 novice teachers.

- New teachers still need access to helpful colleagues every day in their buildings.

Smaller districts

- Mentors are more likely to work in the same school as the teacher.
- Mentors' time is limited by their own full-time teaching jobs.

Grade level

The higher the grade level, the greater the need for subject-specific mentoring.

Mentors provide management advice, moral support, and help with teaching

"My mentor gave me advice on dealing with peers, parents, students, and administrators."

"The greatest thing about having a mentor is that they can show you the ropes because you don't get it from anyone else in the system."

"We discussed classroom management and practical applications of behavior modifications that truly helped me focus on student engagement."

"When I was unsure of how to proceed in order to meet district mandated curriculum, my mentor clarified what I needed to do."

Colleagues help with practical knowledge and motivation to stay in teaching

"Hands down, the most important supports and experiences I have had this year came from my grade-level team."

"There was a particular teacher who took me under her wing. This colleague had the greatest impact on the success of my first year and has been instrumental in my decision to keep teaching."

"Other teachers in my content area gave me the most valuable support."

Principals offer direct support and shape a positive workplace culture

"My principal pushed me to question and learn new ways of teaching. He encouraged me, came to my room almost every day to see what was going on, gave me opportunities. He didn't assume I knew nothing because I was a first year teacher."

"The principal had a great deal of appreciation for me and it showed. That creates a much more enjoyable work environment."