

SMART START: MENTORING FOR NEW TEACHERS BENEFITS KIDS



TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

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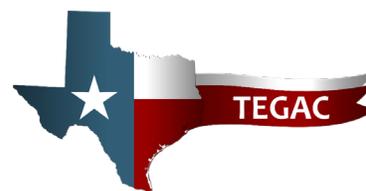
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Created in 2011, the Consortium focuses its work on leveraging private resources to produce credible and necessary data on the most important educational challenges facing Texas. For more information on the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium please visit www.tegac.org.



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+++++++ INTRODUCTION ++++++

High-quality teacher mentorship is critical to the future of Texas schools. If we are to ensure that students across the state have equitable access to effective teachers, we must invest in our classroom teachers through mentoring. The 29 Teach Plus Texas Policy Fellows are classroom teachers committed to impacting our students' lives, not only within the classroom but also through policy and advocacy. We represent 28 schools across 14 school districts. Eighty-six percent of us teach in schools in which over 75 percent of the students receive free and reduced-price lunch. We seek to be the voice of some of the state's most at-risk students. As Teach Plus Fellows, we strive to improve the quality of education for children across the state of Texas. We believe the best way to do this is to invest in classroom teachers by providing them access to research-based, high-quality mentoring as part of their induction program.

To better understand mentorship best practices and the experiences of Texas teachers, we examined research on the effectiveness of mentoring programs and conducted a statewide survey of 147 teachers about their experience with mentoring early in their careers. In this report, we present our findings and a set of recommendations for states and districts. Our recommendations are:

1. All teachers should have access to a high quality mentor in their first two years of teaching.
2. Districts should provide mentors and mentees with release time during the school day to observe one another in the classroom and collaborate.
3. Mentoring programs should be grounded in research-based practices with induction programs for mentor and mentee that focus on improving instruction.

+++++++ THE PROBLEM ++++++

It is estimated that schools across the nation are footing a \$2.2 billion bill to replace those leaving the profession, and high-need schools are disproportionately affected.¹ Dallas ISD is paying \$80 million annually to replace teachers who leave their positions.² These numbers do not take into consideration the impact that this revolving door has on student achievement.

Despite the desire to see all children succeed, many new teachers find it difficult to navigate the various demands of the teaching profession. Teacher preparation programs are only part of the equation. Unless teachers continue to be supported and developed throughout their career and especially in the early years, they will not be able to meet the demands of the profession. Teachers across Texas who participated in our survey reiterated that schools are simply not offering sufficient support for teachers to ensure high student outcomes. Wrote one Austin ISD teacher,

It was nearly impossible to make the lessons, figure out even how to teach the different types of students, and being overwhelmed by the never-ending other 'stuff' besides teaching that was required. I had absolutely no idea how to do it and without my mentor and others helping, would not have continued.

Many teachers across Texas are leaving the teaching profession before retirement. It is estimated that 60 percent of new teachers hired each year are replacing colleagues who left the classroom early.³ The cost to the state and our school districts is high. On average, urban districts spend more than \$20,000 on each new hire due to hiring and training.⁴ According to the Learning Policy Institute, new teachers who do not receive mentoring and other supports leave at more than twice the rate of those who are supported.⁵ The money districts spend could be utilized more effectively by investing in high-quality mentorship programs that would help prevent teacher turnover and benefit the next generation of Texans.

+++++++ THE SOLUTION ++++++

One of the best ways to increase student performance is to invest in classroom teachers by providing them with high-quality mentorship in their first and second years. Teaching is not a one-size-fits-all profession, and teachers need individualized support. It takes time, determination, and a support system within a school and district to be able to increase positive student outcomes in the areas of academics and social-emotional learning.

We believe that providing Texas teachers with opportunities to participate in mentoring programs will significantly improve student performance, while saving districts money by reducing teacher turnover. For example, through peer assistance review support in San Antonio's Southwest Teacher Union Reform Network (SW TURN) program, administrators have seen positive changes in teacher practices.⁶ The evaluation of the Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program (BTIM) reports, "A highly qualified teacher workforce has been shown to be the single most important factor within a campus's control in influencing student achievement."⁷ According to a San Antonio ISD teacher, "Even before my first year finished, I knew that I would teach beyond two years. My mentor's infectious passion and investment inspired me to consider the possibilities if I continued to grow as an educator."

Research demonstrates that mentoring is an investment that will pay dividends by keeping teachers in the classroom. The BTIM report indicated that while there were several factors that contributed to a beginning teacher's retention, nearly half of beginning teachers attributed their decision to remain in teaching to the experiences with their mentor.⁸

San Antonio ISD also conducted research showing that when schools invest in making high-quality mentorship a priority, the teacher retention rates increase, allowing students to experience success. "New teachers who receive concentrated, coordinated support are more likely to remain in the district, thereby saving precious district funds and resources and contributing to a culture of continuous growth and improvement, leading to improved student performance," according to a case study on the impacts of SW TURN on the SAISD.⁹

Programs for new teachers that prioritize improving instruction and teacher effectiveness have been proven to increase teacher retention and student achievement. An analysis of national data found that a comprehensive induction program cut the new teacher turnover rate in half.¹⁰ A cost-benefit analysis of a high-quality induction program showed that the students of new teachers who experienced strong induction on average, have similar achievement rates to students assigned to more experienced mid-career teachers.¹¹

Despite their long-term financial benefits, mentoring programs can be costly upfront. At a time of tight budgets, funding mentoring programs can be difficult. However, the federal government has set aside funds for mentorship programs that can be harnessed by districts. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, federal Title II monies can be used to support induction and mentoring programs. Title II, Part A funds are available for every state and district, and there are competitive grant programs such as the Supporting Effective Educator Development program that districts and the state can use to support mentoring programs.¹²

+++++++ **RECOMMENDATIONS** ++++++

We recommend that state and district policymakers place a strong emphasis on teacher mentorship across Texas. The following research-based practices will help ensure that quality mentorship is occurring in every school. When effective mentoring programs are enacted with fidelity, student achievement will increase. We recommend the following:

- 1 All teachers should have access to a high quality mentor in their first two years of teaching.
- 2 Districts should provide mentors and mentees with release time during the school day to observe one another in the classroom and collaborate.
- 3 Mentoring programs should be grounded in research-based practices with induction programs for mentor and mentee that focus on improving instruction.

RECOMMENDATION 1: ALL TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO A HIGH QUALITY MENTOR IN THEIR FIRST TWO YEARS OF TEACHING.

Research conducted by the New Teacher Center shows that multi-year mentoring offers the best results for student achievement. According to the New Teacher Center, "Mentoring should be intensive and ongoing (for at least two years) in order to

improve teacher practice and consequently student achievement." The NTC and other research also suggest that most deep learning about instruction (through mentoring) happens during the second and third years of teaching.¹³ Teachers reinforce this point.

My mentor helped me to recognize my strengths and weakness, which in turn impacted student achievement. For example, she would collect data for me through observation and tally how many times I called on specific students so that I could ensure I was communicating equitably.

— Austin ISD teacher

RECOMMENDATION 2: DISTRICTS SHOULD PROVIDE MENTORS AND MENTEES WITH RELEASE TIME DURING THE SCHOOL DAY TO OBSERVE ONE ANOTHER IN THE CLASSROOM AND COLLABORATE.

Texas has already identified the qualities of highly effective mentoring programs in statute. Section 21.458.c.2 of the Texas Education Code states that funds provided to districts for mentoring can be used for “scheduled release time for mentor teachers and the classroom teachers to whom they are assigned for meeting and engaging in mentoring activities.” According to the New Teacher Center’s research, “mentors and beginning teachers should have 1.25–2.5 hours per week to allow for the most rigorous mentoring activities.”¹⁴ While the spirit of this statute is well-placed, the language is nonbinding and the funding for education in Texas has been dramatically slashed in recent years.¹⁵ And according to our statewide teacher survey, only 12 percent of Texas teachers reported that their districts provide release time.¹⁶ (See Appendix B.)

Despite these obstacles, Texas teachers

continue to ask their legislators to support highly effective mentoring programs. Last session, Representative Diego Bernal, a Democrat from San Antonio, introduced HB 816, a bill that would have increased the state’s support for high-quality mentoring programs that require frequent meetings between mentors and new teachers and provide release time for mentor teachers to observe and provide feedback to their mentees.¹⁷

Teach Plus teachers testified and spoke at legislative briefings about the value of this bill. As classroom teachers, we know the amount of time necessary to invest in new teachers is extensive, but it is well worth it. By providing teachers time during the day, this allows for mentorship to become a priority throughout the school year. Below are excerpts from three teachers’ testimony on H.B. 816 regarding release time:

TEACH PLUS TEXAS FELLOWS ON MENTORING

In addition to training, mentors need to have the time to watch each other teach and a time set apart to reflect.

— Mario Piña, Austin ISD

As a mentor, I was part of TxBESS, which provided release time to observe each other teach and reflect on the observations together. It was crucial to our success. As a first year teacher, my mentor did not get this time. I've now been a mentor with and without release time. Mentoring with release time is much more effective

— Jolisa Hoover, Leander ISD

RECOMMENDATION 3: MENTORING PROGRAMS SHOULD BE GROUNDED IN RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES WITH INDUCTION PROGRAMS FOR MENTOR AND MENTEE THAT FOCUS ON IMPROVING INSTRUCTION.

The New Teacher Center has concluded that to be effective, feedback to beginning teachers must be grounded in evidence about their practice, including information gathered through classroom observations and student work. Use of professional teaching standards, documentation of mentoring conversations, and data collection on various components of classroom practice ensures a solid structure for focusing on continuous instructional growth.¹⁸

New York's mentoring guide for principals offers suggestions and strategies focused on teacher development for student achievement. For example, principals are taught how to ensure consistency in

scheduled classroom support throughout the year, despite schedule interruptions, testing, and special school events.¹⁹

San Antonio ISD has seen success with their implementation of the Peer Support Partnership (PSP) Program. The PSP is a nationally-recognized method of supporting teachers through mentoring, professional development, and progress monitoring. The PSP has shown positive results in teacher growth and retention rates, and in student achievement. It has proven especially beneficial in urban areas with large populations of low socio-economic and at-risk populations.²⁰ According to a San Antonio ISD teacher,

My mentor offered strong support and valuable feedback allowing me to target my students' needs.

My mentor was the person I went to during each problem and success and she had so many suggestions and ideas to push me to be a better teacher and ultimately kept me in that district.

— Teacher from rural Texas District

+++++ CONCLUSION +++++

High quality mentorship for early career teachers is necessary in every Texas school district. Effective mentoring programs can drive student achievement, especially for our most at-risk students. Our students deserve a quality education regardless of where they come from. In the expansive ecosystem of education, teachers are the main drivers of student success. And teachers across the nation are pointing out that the most meaningful and effective source of professional development is through peer mentoring.

Investing in high-quality teacher mentoring is an investment in Texas' future. With so much to offer, experienced teachers are willing to train each other, learn from each other, and give the beginning classroom teacher the support and training necessary to positively impact student achievement. All students deserve equitable access to high quality teachers and devoting resources towards mentoring programs is a powerful way of closing equity gaps in Texas.

"Mentoring is crucial in helping to retain our awesome new to profession teachers. I did NOT have a mentor my first few years and it nearly cost me my beloved profession. Instead of encouragement and guidance when I needed it, I received scolding. In response, now as a well-seasoned teacher I have a passion for mentoring new teachers, and do so whenever I am able. A little guidance and encouragement goes a long way."

+++++ ENDNOTES +++++

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¹⁶ Question: Does your district schedule release time or a reduced teaching load for mentor teachers to facilitate mentoring activities, including classroom observations or participate in supportive coaching? (N=98)

¹⁷ An act relating to a school district assigning a mentor teacher to a new classroom teacher 2017, Proposed in the 85th Texas Legislature. Retrieved from <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/851/billtext/html/HB000981.htm>

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+++++ **APPENDIX A** +++++

Select Quotes from Survey of Texas Teachers

“I was assigned to mentor someone in the same subject but different grade. I was also assigned to mentor someone in a different subject. Neither of these were as beneficial as working with someone in the same subject and grade. While that isn't always possible, I think it is an important factor in having a successful mentor/mentee relationship.” Teacher, Dickinson ISD

“For a mentor to be truly effective time has to be built in for meeting, planning, and reflecting together. Having been a mentor myself, the most effective practice with my mentees has been when they could be in my room while I am teaching, and I could be in their room while they teach. As teachers we get so little time to observe other teachers without any other agenda than to learn from them.” -Teacher, Leander ISD

“I did not have a mentor, but I have been a mentor and I can see the benefits of having mentors for new teachers. It is especially beneficial in rural areas where there may not be a “team” of teachers to provide support. He/She may be the only teacher of that subject or grade level. New teachers need people they can ask questions of, get feedback from, and discuss the day to day challenges of teaching.” -Rural Texas Teacher

“I wasn't assigned a mentor until my second year of teaching. Without her, I would not have remained in the teaching profession, or I would be a much less effective teacher. My experience with my mentor is the number one reason why I'm still teaching.” – Teacher, Austin ISD

“I'm an aunt to three elementary-aged Texas students and have a classroom of fourth-graders. When I think about my hopes for them and the teachers who will teach them in future years, I want teachers who are both highly effective and well-supported. The support of the right mentor is especially important for teachers who are new to profession. While some Texas teachers have access to high-quality mentoring, there is no state mandate for districts to provide research-based mentoring programs like TxBESS. Despite a multiyear external evaluation of TxBESS by the Charles A. Dana Center that showed the success of high-quality mentoring for Texas teachers, the state has not chosen to invest in mentoring new teachers.” -- JoLisa Hoover, Leander ISD

+++++ **APPENDIX B** +++++

Release Time for Mentors & Mentees

Does your district schedule release time or a reduced teaching load for mentor teachers to facilitate mentoring activities, including classroom observations or participate in supportive coaching?

98 Total responses from teachers who had mentors:

Yes – 12%

No – 86%

Other – 2%

+++++ **APPENDIX C** +++++

Comparing Mentoring Frequency to Perceived Need

How often did you meet for mentoring purposes with your mentor teacher?

Category:	Responses:	Percentage:
Daily	11	11%
Weekly	27	28%
Every-Other-Week	9	9%
Monthly	13	13%
Quarterly:	8	8%
Rarely:	12	12%
As Needed:	16	16%
No Answer:	2	2%

What amount of time would have been realistic and beneficial to meet with your mentor teacher?

Category	Responses	Percentage
Daily	11	11%
2-3 times per week	2	2%
Weekly	50	51%
Every other Week	23	24%
Monthly	4	4%
More frequently at the beginning, but then tapering off.	4	4%
No Answer	2	2%
Other:	2	2%