

Investing in Teacher Mentoring to Strengthen the Foundation for School Improvement: Recommendations from Teach Plus California Policy Fellows

+++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

Central to implementing California's new model of support and improvement is the continuing development of our teachers, particularly those new to the profession. As current classroom teachers, with a range of experience from three to over forty years, we know firsthand how effective mentoring and support are critical to the development and retention of teachers, and directly correlate to student success.

We are a group of 10 California Teach Plus Policy Fellows, who teach in schools across the state serving a diverse group of students with a range of life experiences and needs. While we spend most of our time working to ensure the students in our classrooms experience success, we believe it is important that we also advocate for our students by sharing our insights with policymakers who have the power to shape our education system.

+++++ BACKGROUND +++++

When new teachers struggle, their students struggle too. Supporting and retaining beginning teachers continues to be a challenge for many California schools, particularly those serving the most vulnerable student populations. Research indicates that high-quality induction programs can accelerate the professional growth of new teachers, reduce new teacher attrition, and improve student learning.¹ A recent analysis of the New Teacher Center (NTC) induction model revealed positive impacts on student achievement, as well as new teacher preparation and retention.² Unfortunately, not all induction programs provide high-quality mentoring support for beginning educators. Our early experiences in the classroom, coupled with our experiences mentoring new colleagues, give us a unique window into the challenges new teachers face. We know firsthand the power of high-quality teacher mentoring.

Building on lessons from this research, in recent years, California has transitioned from the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program to a mentor-based induction model.³ Unlike BTSA, which evolved into a burdensome compliance exercise, current induction programs are intended to provide a mentor and coach to meet the needs of each individual teacher, when they need it. California's primary vehicle for enacting the shift to a mentor-based model has been program standards, adopted by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) in 2015.⁴ The expectation was that all current induction programs would transition to programs that meet the revised standards by the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

These new standards represent a significant shift for districts, as they require well-qualified and extensively-trained mentors who are guided by robust individualized learning plans. Developing these sorts of high-quality induction programs requires a substantial investment in time and resources.

Historically, BTSA programs were partially funded by the state, with an in-kind match from each district. In contrast, with the state's adoption of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in 2013, there hasn't been dedicated funding for local induction programs. As a result, current induction program funding varies significantly among districts. Indeed, not all school districts, county offices of education, charter schools, and state special schools fund teacher induction programs at the same level, if at all.⁵

While no dedicated funding is authorized for local educator induction programs, there have been funding sources that could be used by local education agencies (LEAs) for this purpose. For the past several years, the state has provided one-time flexible funding that districts were encouraged to use for teacher professional learning, but without any dedicated spending requirement. Further, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides Title II funding, designated for the preparation, training, and recruitment of high-quality educator induction and mentorship programs for both new teachers and principals.⁶

Based on a strong body of research indicating the importance of mentoring support for new teachers, we believe that the state should enact policies to ensure that all LEAs are providing their new teachers the support they require to meet the needs of their students, particularly in the first few years of teaching.⁷

We also believe that the state should invest directly to build the capacity of local districts and county offices of education to ensure every new teacher has an effective induction and mentoring experience. We introduce the following recommendations to protect and enhance current and future financial investments that our lawmakers dedicate to education by directly supporting those on the frontlines—teachers.

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

RECOMMENDATION 1: CREATE A GRANT PROGRAM THAT PROVIDES LEAs WITH FUNDING THAT SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGH-QUALITY INDUCTION PROGRAMS.

The transition from the compliance-focused BTSA program to robust induction programs with quality mentors involved a significant shift and investment on the part of districts and county offices. While some districts and counties have been able to make the necessary investments, others have not. By establishing a grant program, the state does not undermine the value of local control but signals the value of ensuring these mentoring programs are effective. Through this grant program, LEAs can apply for funding to support programming for new teachers that directly responds to the needs of their students and teachers, as identified in their needs assessment and in their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). The grant program can target LEAs that have struggled to transition to the new model of mentoring.

RECOMMENDATION 2: INVEST IN INDUCTION AND QUALITY MENTORING AS A STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT BY INTEGRATING MENTORING INTO THE STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT.

As California embarks on its new statewide system of support to improve student outcomes, it seems intuitive that a critical strategy will be to support and develop teachers. But it shouldn't just be assumed. The state should make it clear that induction and quality mentoring is a

central strategy in our statewide system of improvement. As schools, districts, and counties conduct their local needs assessments and planning processes, the state can provide guidance mechanisms to help ensure they look at high-quality mentoring as a driver for improvement.

There are a number of ways California can do this. In previous budgets, the state has allocated funding for the selection of expert lead agencies to provide support on a specified statewide issue within the system of support. Similarly, the state could invest one-time funding for lead agencies to build the capacity of school districts and County Offices of Education statewide to provide robust induction and mentoring to improve teacher effectiveness and retention. Alternately, the state could appropriate funds to the Regional Lead Agencies (established through the 2018-19 Budget Act) to incorporate strategies for the recruitment and training of high-quality mentors as a strategy to support struggling schools and districts. In both cases, as part of this work, the lead agency could conduct a landscape analysis that will identify resources and gaps in those resources to support LEAs and districts in improving supports for new teachers.

+++++ CONCLUSION +++++

Research and our lived experiences as teachers show teacher inexperience and rates of turnover negatively impact student learning. Historically-disadvantaged students are more likely to experience these disruptive patterns. We call on our state leaders to invest intentionally in supporting teacher induction programs, supporting our struggling schools and students with dedicated funding for new teacher induction programs and mentor training. We believe this worthwhile investment in new teacher development with rigorous, high-quality mentor support can contribute to improved outcomes for our students, particularly those who have been historically underserved.

+++++ ENDNOTES +++++

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- ⁵ California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2015). *Report on New Teacher Induction*. Retrieved from https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/reports/new-teacher-induction-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=8c80da92_0
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- ⁷ Ingersoll, R. & Strong, M. (June 2011). "The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research." *Review of Education Research*, 81(2), 201-233

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