

National Association of State Boards of Education

➔ State Mentoring Policies Key to Supporting Novice Teachers

By Jordan Koch

In 2016–17, I embarked on my first year of teaching. I was assigned a mentor, also a teacher, who received neither leave from the classroom for one-on-one coaching, nor formal training in the role, nor a rigorous screening process.

Luckily, I was also selected into a university program that paired me with a different sort of mentor. A past educator with mentor training under her belt, she devoted five hours a week to providing me with new teaching and management strategies, helping with lesson plans, and teaching my class while I observed other master teachers, among other things. Not only did

she help me grow professionally, she provided support during stressful, emotionally difficult times. My mentor made me a better teacher and servant of children.

Needless to say, I believe strong mentors and mentoring policies are vital for novice teachers, especially because there are so many of us. In 1987–88, the typical teacher had 15 years of experience; by 2007–08 the typical teacher was in their first year, whether straight from college or after a career switch.¹

One-third of teachers leave the profession within the first five years.² In states without strong mentoring policies, new teachers' feelings of isolation may be contributing to high turnover rates.

Teachers make, on average, four instructional decisions every minute, or around 1,300 decisions per day.³ Novice teachers—those who have been in the profession for less than three years—may be overwhelmed by the demands of the classroom without proper support and guidance from experienced, highly qualified teacher mentors.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Clear formal mentoring program standards help guide district policy as well as frame the purpose for mentoring. Standards help districts develop strong programs without limiting their scope, as guidelines and requirements sometimes do.⁴

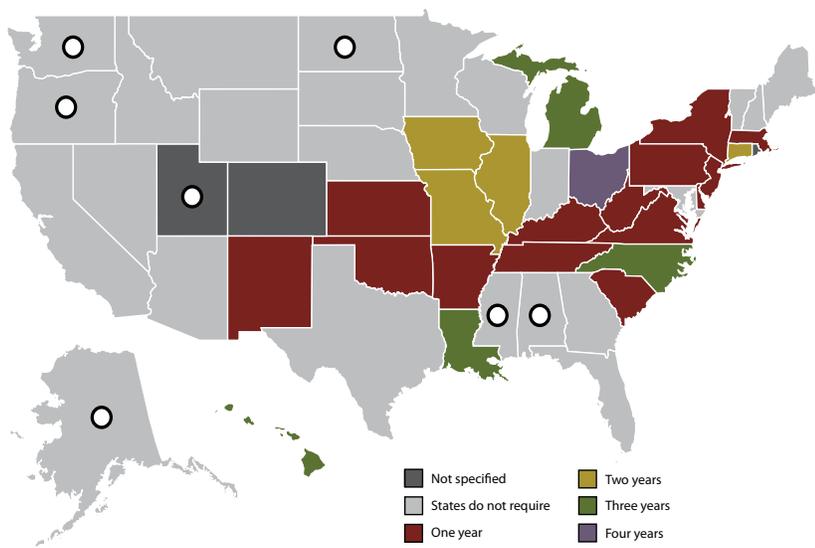
Many states are launching mentoring initiatives, yet many state policies fail to follow research-based practices. For example, there is evidence that formal induction programs lasting at least three years increase teacher retention and student achievement.⁵ Formal induction programs include professional learning opportunities and a form of evaluation in addition to mentoring. All these components ought to work together to support novice teachers.

Strong state policies should require at least three years of formal mentoring. Yet of the 26 states with policies for novice-teacher mentoring, only 5 require three or more years (see map).

Another practice that should be reflected in state policies and standards is allocation of time for novice teachers and their mentors to meet. According to a National Center for Education Statistics report, only 36 percent of novice teachers who met with their mentors a “few times per year” reported that it improved their instruction. When mentors and mentees met weekly, that figure increased to 88 percent.⁶

Placement, mentor selection criteria, and requirements for mentor training and support should also be reflected in discussions on mentoring policy. Selecting quality mentors may be one of the most important factors,

Five States Require Three Years of Novice Mentoring



Alabama: Teacher mentoring is provided for all teachers for two years.
Alaska: Statewide mentor project offers mentoring for two years.
Mississippi: online modules
North Dakota: Teacher support system grant program for some districts.
Oregon: Beginning teacher and administrator mentoring program available.
Utah: Entry years enhancement program provides support for three years.
Washington: Beginning educator support team available.

Source: Author's research and Liam Goldrick, "Support from the Start: A 50-State Review of Policies on New Educator Induction and Mentoring," policy report (Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center, March 2016).

as poorly qualified mentors are unlikely to improve novice teachers' skills.

Dedicated state funding for formal mentoring is another characteristic of strong mentoring policy. Every year, teacher turnover costs U.S. school districts an estimated \$1 billion to \$2.2 billion.⁷ Out of a sample of 1,990 first-year teachers included in a National Center for Education Statistics study, 86 percent of teachers who had been assigned mentors were still teaching after five years compared with 71 percent who did not have mentors.⁸ Thus, state boards who have mentoring policies in place should assess whether retention of new teachers has improved.

Strong formal mentoring policies not only help states and districts retain and develop teachers, they also help students. Students who had teachers that received three years of formal mentoring saw significant achievement gains, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The average student moved from the 50th percentile up 4 percentile points in reading and 8 points in math.⁹

State boards of education can greatly influence the design of district mentoring programs. They can approve comprehensive guidelines and ensure there is ongoing evaluation of program implementation. If a state does not have a mentoring policy, convening key stakeholders, such as current teacher education students, novice teachers, master teachers, administrators, and community members, can make the planning and implementation more effective. Stakeholders can also be valuable in program assessment and improvement. State board members can follow up with individual districts on their implementation of mentoring policy and ask novice teachers to share their experiences with mentoring programs.

STATE EXAMPLES

Modeled after the New Teacher Center's model, the **Alaska** Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) provides mentorship to first- and second-year teachers. Mentors are retired teachers who each provide full-time mentorship to 15 novices. The selection process is rigorous, and mentor training is aligned to Alaska's professional teaching and learning

standards and state cultural standards. Mentors and mentees meet face to face six times per year and connect virtually each week. They use formative assessments to track teachers' needs and provide tailored mentorship. Surveys suggest that novice teachers greatly appreciate the program and believe they received the support they needed during their first two years of teaching.

The **Kansas State Board of Education** approved new-teacher mentoring guidelines in 2017 to help districts develop effective programs. The guidelines cover mentor selection criteria, mentor training requirements, mentor-mentee communication principles, and measures of program effectiveness. The state requires each teacher to complete a needs assessment to shape their mentoring. Kansas policy states that the program must relate practical application of teaching practices to evaluation standards.

State regulations in **Massachusetts** require classroom release time for the novice teacher and their mentor to allow for master teacher observations, which are to be frequent, short, and targeted. Regulations outline criteria for mentor selection, assignment to mentees, and roles and responsibilities of each. Financial compensation to mentors is suggested but not required.

North Carolina created novice teacher mentoring standards closely aligned to the state's professional teaching standards. The state also developed ways for districts to meet the standards and a rubric to assess mentors either as developing, proficient, accomplished, or distinguished.

Detailed reviews of all states' policies on teacher mentoring are provided by the New Teacher Center, <https://newteachercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016CompleteReportStatePolicies.pdf>.

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NOTES

1 Richard Ingersoll, "Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force" (Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2014).

2 Jimmy Shaw and Jodi Newton, "Teacher Retention and Satisfaction with a Servant Leader as Principal," *Education* 135, no. 1 (fall 2014): 101–06.

3 Philip W. Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

4 Liam Goldrick et al., "Review of State Policies on Teacher Induction," Policy Paper (Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center, 2012).

5 Steven Glazerman et al., "Impacts of Comprehensive Teacher Induction: Final Results from a Randomized Controlled Study," NCEE 2010-4028 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

6 Laurie Lewis et al., "Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers," NCES 1999-080 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999), table 18.

7 Richard Ingersoll, University of Pennsylvania, analysis of data from the 2007–08 Schools Statistics and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its supplement, the 2008–09 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), cited in Alliance for Excellent Education, "On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers" (Washington, DC, July 2014).

8 Lucinda Gray and Soheyla Taie, "Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results from the First through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study," NCES 2015-337 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

9 Glazerman et al., "Comprehensive Teacher Induction."