

First-Year Teacher Support Strategies and Programs

On average each year, 8% of teachers leave the profession. Reasons for educator departure vary, but among first-year teachers, lack of support is one of the top reasons cited in national teacher surveys for early career departure. To retain teachers and help them become better educators, comprehensive first-year support is vital. This paper highlights some of the supports offered throughout the region, such as mentorship and innovative professional growth support, as well as how states across the nation fund support programs.

Mentorship Support

The [New Teacher Center](#) found that as of 2016, only 29 states require some type of support for new teachers. Of those, just 15 require ongoing support past a new educator's first year.

[Mentorship](#) has proven to be one of the most useful tools in helping support preservice teachers and new teachers. It is important that mentor teachers are highly effective with their own students and have been trained to support their mentees. There are many ways to structure mentorship support. The following are examples of promising programs.

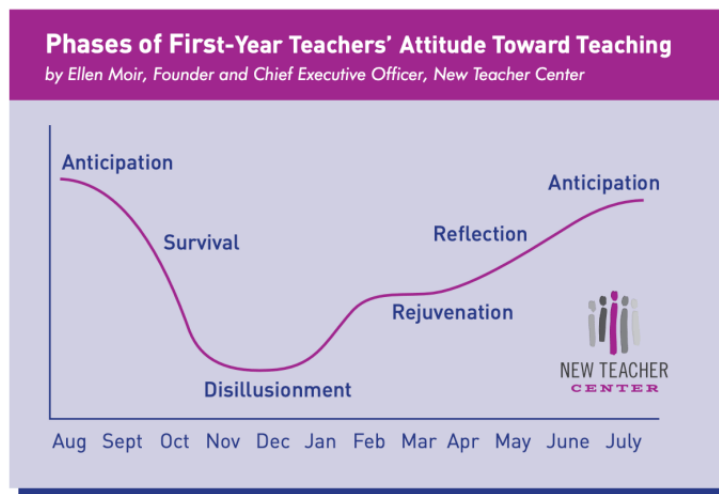
Delaware Induction Program

Delaware provides a four-year mentoring and induction program for all new educators and other school professionals, as well as a one-year program for all educators who are new to the state but not to the profession. The Comprehensive Induction Program focuses on a comprehensive suite of ongoing professional learning activities and supports spread over the four years. Each year has requirements that must be met for both mentor and mentee, including weekly meetings, observations of and by the new teacher, and professional development. To become a mentor in CIP a candidate must have satisfactory teaching evaluations, and lead mentors must complete a series of questions and observations in order to qualify. The program addresses three key induction program elements: classroom observations of and by beginning teachers, formative assessment of or feedback on teaching from mentors, and participation in a professional learning community or beginning educator peer network.

North Carolina Beginning Teacher Support Program

North Carolina requires a three-year Beginning Teacher Support Program for the states' new educators. In January of 2010, the state board of education adopted five standards for both the beginning teacher and the mentor, including professional development and formative assessments.

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beginning teacher and the mentor, including professional development and formative assessments. These standards require programs to provide protected time for mentors to work with beginning teachers during and outside of the school day.

To begin the relationship, the mentor must initiate contact with a mentee before or near the start of the school year in order to build rapport and understand the mentee's needs. Another requirement is for the mentor to conduct at least four observations of the beginning teacher throughout the school year. North Carolina requires mentors to hold regular formative assessment conferences to reflect on the progress of the beginning teacher toward professional growth goals. The program addresses three key induction program elements: classroom observations of and by beginning teachers, formative assessment of or feedback on teaching from mentors, and participation in a professional learning community or beginning educator peer network. Beginning Teacher Support Programs are formally reviewed every five years to verify that proficiency is demonstrated on all program standards.

Arkansas Novice Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program

In 2015 Arkansas legislature enacted Act 1091, which requires the Arkansas Teacher Excellence and Support System to include an induction and mentoring program for all novice teachers. Under the [Novice Teacher Mentoring Program](#), all traditionally trained novice educators are required to have one full year of mentoring support, while novice teachers receiving their Master of Arts in Teaching are mentored for a minimum of one year but not exceeding two years. Arkansas Professional Pathway to Educator Licensure novice teachers and novice teachers with a Provisional Professional Teacher License must be mentored for two full years.

During the allotted mentoring time, novice teachers will receive support through face-to-face mentoring sessions as well as online instruction. Each novice teacher is matched with a mentor teacher certified in the Arkansas Novice Teacher Mentoring Program model. Every mentor has completed three or more years as a successful teacher of record under a provisional or standard educator license and is rated as proficient or higher in their most recent overall evaluation.

Training Mentor Teachers in Louisiana

In July 2019, Louisiana adopted a new year-long residency program for all teacher candidates. Part of this residency program is pairing teacher candidates with experienced mentor teachers. In order to guarantee an appropriate number of mentor teachers, between 2017 and 2020 Louisiana plans to train a cohort of at least 2,500 experienced teachers as mentors. As of the 2018-2019 school year, a reported 1,475 experienced teachers have gone through mentor teacher training.

Mentor teachers in Louisiana support residents, new teachers, and experienced teachers in need of support. Through training, mentor teachers learn to:

- Build strong rapport with their resident, as well as with new and developing teachers
- Identify and address the needs of those they are supporting
- Deliver resources and coaching to enable their mentees to improve
- Track the progress of their mentees while facilitating self-reflection and improvement

States can learn from different mentor and induction programs in order to shape the best mentoring program for them. Successful programs often commit to [the following actions](#):

- Identify the number of new teachers to be served each year
- Address how to identify, train and assess enough quality mentors
- Recommend appropriate teaching conditions for first-year teachers and mentor teachers, such as reduced caseload, release time for mentor teachers to observe and coach, and time for first year teachers to participate in professional development and collegial collaboration
- Define program quality and minimum program standards
- Address the need for program accountability standards and mechanisms
- Map out minimum funding needed
- Recommend an induction or residency teacher license for first-year teachers regardless of whether they have completed an educator preparation program, as well as any relevant adjustments needed for the existing lead or master teacher licenses.

Innovative Professional Support for New Educators

In addition to mentorship programs, other forms of professional development may prove beneficial to new educators. In 2017, the [Learning Policy Institute](#) published a report which found that effective professional development is sustained, content-focused, uses active learning and models of effective practice, supports collaboration, provides coaching and expert support, and offers feedback and reflection.

[Appalachian State University Beginning Teacher Support](#)

Appalachian State University's [Reich College of Education](#) offers a support program for both teaching candidates and beginning teachers that graduate from their program. The support provided is for the first three years of a new educator's career and is in addition to state and district mentor support programs. The program aims to support new teachers and reduce teacher turnover. Common areas addressed are planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities.

[Arkansas Novice Teacher Quest](#)

Arkansas has developed a scaffolded support structure to expand mentoring support to the first three years of employment for novice teachers. [Novice Teacher Quest](#) is offered by the Education Services Cooperative in Arkansas and involves different "journeys" each year. Master teachers lead each journey by using research-based educational strategies, including Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*, which is the basis for Arkansas's Teacher Excellence and Support systems. This extended program gives novice teachers opportunities to engage in focused professional growth and to network with other educators. Journeys include coursework, micro-credentials, and online and in-person meetings throughout the school year, as well as coaching from master and lead teachers across the region and state.

Tennessee Educators and Micro-Credentials

In a partnership with the [Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center](#), the [Tennessee Department of Education](#) developed a three-year pilot to use micro-credentials for teacher professional development. The pilot began in the 2016-2017 school year with a small group of 75 teachers and currently includes approximately 800 teachers.

The program provides teachers with flexibility and choice, allowing them to earn micro-credentials in topics they believe are most relevant to their position and professional learning needs.

Tennessee officials, and those in Arkansas and Delaware, suggest [a few items to consider](#) when beginning to use micro-credentials:

- Decide on your purpose
- Start small
- Provide choice (but not too much)
- Keep an eye on the score (quality assurance)
- Employ constant, consistent communication

Professional Learning Communities

[Professional learning communities](#)

are groups of educators who are dedicated to collaboratively working in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for students they serve. PLCs foster collaboration and allow new teachers to learn from more experienced peers while encouraging them to add their view-point to problems being addressed by the community.

It may be beneficial to give new teachers a lighter course load so that they can fully participate in collaborative PLCs and other professional development efforts.

Case Study: PRiSSM

The Partnership for Reform in Secondary Science and Mathematics was a 3-year professional development project that established professional learning communities across six school districts in Washington state, in concert with Washington State University. The project included a steering committee made up of university researchers and district math and science specialists. Through PRiSSM, the Madrid PLC was formed to help the instructors of the Integrated 2 math course. The Madrid PLC used a collaborative inquiry process to address their textbook, which all the collaborating teachers felt “lacked a great deal of rich tasks.” Through the PLC, the teachers tackled how to improve student engagement, understanding, and problem-solving. [A case study by Slavit and Holmlund Nelson \(2009\)](#) showed that teachers in the Madrid PLC exhibited explicit connections between their work in the PLC and their instructional practice. The study also showed that PLC teachers were able to build and explore theories as a group, as well as individually, around scaffolding mathematical tasks and fostering student conversation.

Funding New Teacher Supports

Another crucial question for new teacher support is how to fund programs. In 2016, the [New Teacher Center](#) identified only 16 states with some dedicated funding for teacher induction. While nine states provide induction funding for all school districts, only six of those states provide funding for local induction program costs, not just for mentor teacher stipends. In addition to the 16 states dedicating funding, four others allow or require use of other funds for new teacher training.

Alaska uses multiple revenue sources, including state and federal funds such as an “Investing in Innovation” Grant from the U.S. Department of Education and money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to finance their Alaska Statewide Mentor Project. At the state level, there is a partnership between the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and the University of Alaska.

Connecticut provides state funding of \$3 million for their Teacher Education and Mentoring program. These funds provide for mentor stipends, mentor and administrator training, and training for TEAM reflection paper reviewers. The reflection papers are a tool used in the Connecticut TEAM program in order to make sure new educators are successfully completing and fully understanding the professional development modules they are required to complete during their first full year of teaching.

The federal government provides a few different revenue sources to help states develop induction and mentoring programs. They are:

- The Every Student Succeeds Act Title II-A provides funds that can be used by states to help local education agencies develop induction and mentoring programs.
- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I provides funds that can be used to develop and pilot strategies for improving teacher quality and retention. (It does not specifically mention first year teachers.)
- The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) provides funds for the Innovation and Modernization Program grants including funding programs that aid in the recruitment, retention and professional development of CTE teachers.

Questions for State Policymakers

1. How can your state structure a new or improved program to effectively grow and support educators in their first year(s) of teaching?
2. What type of professional development is currently available for teachers in your state? Do the professional development choices allow teachers to focus on their specific needs and challenge areas while using an approach that works for them?
3. How can your state use available resources as well as innovative revenue streams to fund quality new teacher supports accessible to teachers in all school districts?