Fostering the Success of New Teachers: Developing Lead Teachers in a Statewide Teacher Mentoring Program

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Though there may be many reasons for teacher attrition and mobility, results from a recent survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) suggest that an exceedingly high percentage of teachers who abandoned their careers as teachers may have entered the teaching profession under-prepared, overwhelmed, and under-supported — resulting in frustrated teachers who became burned out after only a few years of teaching (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Stitzek, & Morton, 2006). Global research documents that mentoring must be emphasized if teachers are going to experience success during the induction phase of their career and become more likely to remain in the profession. Developing teacher leaders that have the dispositions to mentor, such as those in the Alabama Teacher Mentor Program, can help meet these challenges as teachers lead teachers through mentoring. The manuscript presents an overview and impact of a statewide mentoring initiative that embraces one role of teacher leaders.

Keywords: mentoring, mentors, professional development, induction, mentoring programs, global mentoring, new teachers, effective mentoring

This manuscript presents an overview of the components of a statewide mentoring initiative that focused on developing teacher leaders and the initial impact of its implementation. The evaluation program attempted to answer these guiding questions:

1. Was every new teacher assigned a mentor?
2. How frequent did mentoring occur?
3. Was the mentoring based on the needs of the new teacher?
4. Was the mentoring professional development effective in providing mentoring strategies to mentors?
5. Did the mentoring program help to retain new teachers in the profession?

Establishing the Need for Mentoring

The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (Ingersoll, 2003) states in its national study of teacher turnover and teacher shortage, *Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?,* that even though the demand for teachers has risen (p. 6), "overall there are more than enough prospective teachers produced each year in the U.S." (p. 8) In addition, this study concluded that the turnover is not due to teacher retirement increases, but rather that "teachers are moving from or leaving their teaching jobs — and most of this [phenomenon] has little to do with a graying workforce." (p. 9) Retirement accounts for about a third of the public school teachers who leave the field but "when examined in the context of total turnover that public schools experience, retirees are responsible for only 16 percent of the attrition" (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2008, p. 2).

During the 2007 and 2008 school year, the NCES began conducting the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study as part of a continued effort to monitor the attrition and mobility rates, and the early career patterns of beginning teachers. Initial results from the first three years indicated that out of 1,900 beginning teachers surveyed, approximately 10 – 12 % left the teaching profession entirely in *each* of the consecutive years (Kaiser & Cross, 2011). Other research has

suggested that many teachers leave the profession due to increasing teacher workloads and the growing demands placed upon teachers to improve student achievement and performance regardless of each school's and each student's unique circumstances (Haberman, 2005).

Ultimately, students need dedicated teachers who want to be there and who believe that students can learn no matter what they look like or where they come from (Wright, 1980). Unfortunately, many new teachers have no desire to pursue a career in an academically challenging school environment, often because of fear of failure (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Specifically, less than 36% of new teachers reported feeling "very well prepared" to implement curriculum and performance standards in the classroom (NCES, 1999). If action is not taken to alleviate this growing problem, continued dissatisfaction will only increase teacher attrition, thus exacerbating the problem and inadvertently creating a cycle that is likely to continue threatening the framework of America's education system.

Teacher Leaders: The Responsibility of Mentoring

New teachers are expected to assume the same job responsibilities as skilled teachers who have years of experience, often with little assistance or guidance during their first year of teaching. Initiatives to measure and improve teaching effectiveness would have the ultimate payoff if they fueled practices known to support student learning and were embedded in systems that also develop greater teaching competence (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Novice teachers must address the challenges of a new school culture, cope with the emotional ups and downs associated with a new work experience, meet high expectations of the school and the community, and master all the new knowledge that must be acquired about policies and practices of the school district.

A quality-mentoring program, with quality teacher leaders, has the promise of assisting new teachers face these daily challenges in a manner that promotes success (Breaux & Wong, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2012). Mentoring is not a choice, but the responsibility of every professional within a school who is interested in seeing new teachers become comfortable in their new position. Through enhanced professional development of new teachers by mentors, teacher effectiveness increases as teachers become more highly qualified. Highly qualified teaching is absolutely essential in promoting effective teaching (Barry, Daughtry, & Wieder, 2010). The result of this action is enhanced student learning, which is the goal of everyone involved.

A Global Perspective of Mentoring

Teacher mentoring has become a global trend. Due to the impact of globalization, governments across the world are in the constant state of reviewing their educational systems and reform efforts in order to remain competitive in a global economy (Kestner, 1994). In the United States, teacher-mentoring programs have been in existence for approximately 50 years, with more than half the country now requiring mentoring for novice teachers (NCES, 2007). Some countries are still in the process of refining mentoring programs, while others like New Zealand and Japan have formally used teacher mentoring for decades (Britton, Raizen, Paine, & Huntley, 1999). In Japan, beginning teachers were mentored during their first year, which is considered professional development since it precedes certification. Asada and Uosaki's (2006) research on the Japanese In-SeT program, a teacher mentoring program that resulted from the National School Education Act of 1988 in Japan, indicated that models used by mentors helped beginning teachers reflect and resolve problems in the classroom. According to Ekiz (2006), recent studies show that teacher mentoring in Turkey was regarded as a strategy for training student teachers and new teachers alike. Taiwan's "Teacher Education Law" enacted in 1994 requires all newly certified teachers to complete pre-service training with an additional one year of mentoring (Chi-tak, 2005). England is widely known for its strict internship policies requiring student teachers to complete a full year statutory period followed by an assessment that must be deemed satisfactory by the school administration (Britton et al., 1999). During that time period, intern teachers are monitored and mentored by colleagues.

In an international study, Britton et al. (1999) found that (academically) high performing countries such as New Zealand, Japan, and China have successfully implemented teacher mentoring programs designed to help novice teachers transition into their new roles. New Zealand is perhaps one of the strongest supporters of teacher mentor practices. Their academic performance and high literacy rates are a testament to their investment in novice teachers. New Zealand's mentoring program is unique because it allows the teacher to ease into their new roles to avoid the risk of becoming overwhelmed or burned out too soon. This induction phase is known as the Advice and Guidance (AG) program (Wong, Britton, & Gasner, 2005). The New Zealand government provides funding to schools with new teachers to compensate for release time, mentoring, and professional development (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Unlike the U.S., countries like New Zealand, Japan, and China tend to offer a variety of resources during this induction phase instead of relying on one person for assisting teachers (Wong et al., 2005). In Shanghai, schools provide many learning opportunities for new teachers such as workshops, study groups, and research groups (Britton et al., 1999). Ultimately, the mentoring programs in Shanghai and Japan are centered on opportunities to collaborate with other teachers and creating a culture of support and encouragement (Wong et al., 2005).

However, in the U.S., mentoring programs and goals tend to be ill defined in that they are typically

informal and vary from state to state; whereas other countries have national standards and systematic programs they abide by (Tak, 2005). Many studies conclude that novice teachers have more needs than the U.S. teacher induction programs typically address (White & Mason, 2003). These failed programs were also plagued with unrealistic or unreasonable expectations of both mentor teachers and new teachers. Further, these studies suggest that it is not uncommon in the U.S. for mentors to be assigned to a mentee to fulfill a policy requirement and rarely interact with new teachers.

Findings from Britton et al. (1999) suggests that principals have assigned veteran teachers with mentoring roles only as an extra job perk with little or no expectations. The lack of accountability entirely defeats the purpose of the program. Thus, history suggests that mentor teacher programs have not yet proved to be a consistent method for increasing teacher success rates. In a study done by Darling-Hammond, data suggested that individual supervision of teacher learning better promotes self-efficacy of teachers and personal obstacles with mentoring and the teacher/mentor relationship (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

Most teacher mentors believe that a teacher-mentoring program with explicit goals is essential in order to retain beginning teachers in the United States (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010). In order to retain these new teachers, mentors must be highly qualified teachers designed to improve the preservation of new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2007, 2009). There is a national deficit in keeping qualified teachers and it is vital to examine the crucial need for teacher-mentoring programs in order to keep facilitating the development of highly qualified teachers.

A study was conducted in South Texas concerning teacher-mentoring programs, which provided many answers to the lack of the importance of them in the United States (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010). South Texas mandated that teacher mentoring programs be implemented to new teachers in order to avoid teacher attrition due to many upcoming vacancies in the district. This study proved that teacher-mentoring programs must provide clear and concise goals for mentors to adhere to in order for teacher-mentors to impart fundamental information and feedback to their corresponding new teachers.

A study by Ingersall and Strong in 2011 suggested that teacher attrition is still very prevalent in the United States. The findings from this study further suggests that teacher-mentoring programs can provide new and incoming teachers with essential information and effective teaching strategies from a mentor that is necessary to succeed past the first years of teaching. The goal of these programs is to improve the retention of new teachers and aid them in gaining a better understanding the classroom that they might not have gained insight into

during pre-employment. These programs should not be implemented as a job perk for a principal nor should they be regarded as a failed experiment because teacher mentoring programs can yield new teachers with the information needed that may be vital for their survival in the profession.

However, the U.S. was not the only country that had a tendency to inadequately support new teachers. Across the globe, studies showed that novice teachers are experiencing the same types of challenges and feelings in their new role (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Hudson, Beutel, and Hudson (2009) found in their one year study that mentoring programs were needed to help new teachers transition into their roles so they would remain in the profession. To combat teacher attrition, Asada and Uosaki (2006) found that the Japanese Educational Reform focused on professional development of new teachers through various forms of mentoring. Other countries across Asia followed suit by incorporating similar strategies and including more authentic field experiences during their pre-service training. In addition, Britton et al. (1999) found that educators in Asian countries were widely known for creating a culture of support for new teachers, which plays an important informal role in their induction. It is evident that successful mentoring programs in other countries receive full support from governments, law-makers, and schools alike. These types of programs are formalized and structured requiring participants to be accountable.

Characteristics of Effective Mentoring

The NEA suggested that, if mentor programs are to be effective, they must combine the best aspects of teaching strategies from both the past and the present (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993). Mentor teachers must be identified as leaders, therefore, understand and be able to relate important long term professional goals to novice teachers, including helping new teachers uncover the ways in which students think and aiding in the development of students' sound reasoning skills. Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002) suggested that teachers who are leaders and receive specific training before working as mentors to novice teachers may have greater success in impacting professional growth, development, and success. Also, several reports indicated that highly qualified mentors may be associated with an increase in student achievement, improved student behavior, and greater teacher enthusiasm (White & Mason, 2003).

Thus far, few mentor teacher programs have taken on the responsibility of including, on such an in-depth basis guidance for the specific purpose of improving current rates of teacher attrition and mobility within urban school districts from:

- a state department of education,
- university instructors,
- regional professional development centers,
- district and school level administrators, and

• classroom teachers.

The current study described the implementation and the results of the Alabama Teacher Mentor Program that was designed to address this very issue.

Developing Lead Teachers: The Alabama Teacher Mentor Program

In an attempt to improve education in Alabama, the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching was established in 2005. The Commission worked for two years and, still in operation today, made some initial recommendations in the spring of 2007. While the Commission's recommendations dealt with improving the quality of education in Alabama schools, specifically, the Commission recognized the importance of mentoring and made a recommendation on its implementation. The Alabama State Board of Education endorsed the recommendation (see Figure 1) regarding mentoring and inducting new teachers into the profession. Subsequently, the Alabama Legislature funded the Alabama Statewide Mentoring Program.

Specifically, the purposes of the Alabama Mentor Teacher program were:

(a) to provide every first year teacher a mentor to create a successful bridge from pre-service teacher to in-service teacher;

(b) to reduce teacher attrition, thereby reducing recruitment and retention costs by implementing a well-planned and well-implemented mentoring program;

(c) to provide professional development in mentoring techniques for the mentors; and,

(d) to increase student achievement.

An overview of guidelines for the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program include six primary components:

Component 1: Each new teacher will receive mentoring for a minimum of two years with an option of a third year based on mastery of competencies.

Component 2: Active teachers will mentor new teachers on a 1 to 1 basis.

Retired teachers can mentor new teachers on no more than a 15 to 1 ratio.

Component 3: Each new mentor should be chosen by a committee comprised of teachers and administrator(s) and must successfully complete Alabama Beginning Teacher Mentor Training or an equivalent locally developed training program. In this first year of the Alabama Teacher Mentor (ATM) program, individual mentors for each new teacher must be in place by the end of September 2007.

Component 4: Mentors will receive a stipend of $1,000 per year for each new teacher they mentor.

Component 5: Mentors and mentees should strive for an average of 2.5 hours of contact time during each week of the school year. It is understood that contact hours will vary from week to week, but sufficient time should be scheduled to provide the mentee with the appropriate level of support and guidance.

Alabama Statewide Mentoring Program	The Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching recommends the immediate implementation of a statewide mentoring program for every new Alabama teacher. The program will include a standard rubric developed by the SDE in partnership with LEAs and colleges of education; required training and compensation for mentors; and, guidelines for implementation. The Commission recommends that the Alabama Legislature fund the program at the amount determined by the Implementation Committee.

Figure 1. Mentoring Recommendation.

Component 6: Each mentored new teacher will complete regularly scheduled assessments of mentor program effectiveness. Critically, Alabama Department of Education identified the success of the program as dependent upon the knowledge and support of the leadership team overseeing its implementation and the ability of the leadership team to ensure that:

(a) teacher leaders with mentoring potential being selected as mentors;

(b) the right matches are being made between mentors and mentees;

(c) mentors and mentees are being provided ongoing support; and,

(d) a supportive culture of trust, mutual respect, and collegiality is in place to support the program.

In addition, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) recognized that some local education agencies (LEAs) may have an existing mentoring program in place that meets the ATM guidelines (stated above). These LEAs were given the flexibility to use various professional development components of the ATM based on their current mentoring capacity.

The program was supported by district level Mentor Coaches, Regional In-service (Staff Development) Center Mentor Liaisons, and personnel from the Alabama State Department of Education. The Alabama Department of Education felt that the success of the program was dependent upon the knowledge and support of district and school based administrators who were overseeing implementation.

Program Details

Beginning in the fall of 2007, each newly hired teacher was assigned a Mentor Teacher. A committee comprised of teachers and administrator(s) selected teacher leaders to complete the *Alabama Beginning*

Teacher Mentor Training. A rubric for selecting mentors is presented in Appendix A. In brief, in order to be selected as a mentor, teachers were required to:

(a) have a minimum of three years' successful teaching experience and subject-area expertise.

(b) demonstrate effectiveness in classroom instruction via provision of such evidence as: (a) student achievement growth including standardized test scores; (b) portfolio of student work documenting evidence of student learning; and (c) documentation of effective teaching, e.g., results of observations by principals/supervisors, videotaped lesson.

(c) model professional learning and growth through participation in (and/or leadership of) job-embedded professional development activities.

(d) demonstrate excellence in communicating and collaborating with colleagues.

The mentor was compensated $1,000 ($500 per semester) for providing the mentoring for each beginning teacher for the academic year.

Professional Development for Mentors

During the academic year, mentor professional development sessions were provided throughout the state (see Figure 2). A "train the trainers" model was used at the state level for each Regional In-service Center. Representatives, called Mentor Liaisons, from each of the 11 in-service centers throughout the state met at the State Department of Education to receive professional development on research-based mentoring strategies. It was the responsibility of the Mentor Liaisons to provide the professional development throughout the state to the mentor teachers via district level Mentor Coaches and In-service Center Consultants.

Topic
Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships
Coaching for a High-Performance Learning Environment
Monitoring and Assessing for Increased Student Achievement
Increasing Student Engagement to Maximize Student Achievement
Connecting Students to the Content

Figure 2. Mentor Professional Development Topics.

The mentor training in year one took place during five sessions spread throughout the academic year. In year two, the training was streamlined on the same five topics, presented in two days at the beginning of the school year, and again at mid-year for new mentors for newly hired teachers. The training was based on the premise that a well-planned, comprehensive mentoring program would decrease the attrition rate of talented new teachers (ALSDE, 2007a; ALSDE, 2007b; ALSDE, 2007c). All mentors were required to participate in a comprehensive training, regardless of whether the resources available from the ALSDE were used to enhance an existing program or develop a new mentoring program.

Mentoring activities. It was the belief of the ALSDE (2007a) that a well-planned, comprehensive mentoring program increases the instructional effectiveness of new teachers. Therefore, the philosophy of Susan Johnson was adopted, "Stated simply, the challenge is to make all schools places where teachers find the support they need to succeed with their students." (p. 249, as cited in ALSDE, 2007a). Along with a strong commitment to the mentoring process, teacher leaders in the role of mentors were expected to possess knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to support new teachers' effectiveness with all learners.

The ALSDE suggested that the mentors/mentees engage in two and a half hours of mentoring each week. This engagement takes place in various forms, with the school principal determining specific regulations. In general, mentors were to provide a "beginning-of-year" induction into the school and system's culture. Throughout the year, mentors were encouraged to provide ongoing classroom coaching and assistance to maximize the learning and achievement of all students. Though mentors were taught how to conduct observations for the purpose of formative feedback, the mentors were not involved in formal evaluations of new teachers.

The mentors used *The Continuum for Learning and Performance*, a two-sided document that provided an abbreviated version of the Quality Teaching Standards and guidelines for productive conferences, as a tool to help teachers understand the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards, and as a framework for feedback. Emphasis was placed on confidentiality between the mentor liaison, mentor, and mentee. Ultimately, mentor teachers were to provide personal support to the new teacher during their transition into the profession.

In addition, local school districts determined the method of documenting mentoring activities. The purpose of requiring the documentation was to create a simple accountability system to ensure that mentoring was taking place. Most LEAs created a form to include mentoring activity, time, and date. The documentation was kept at the district level.

Beyond the Mentor

It is recognized that in order to enhance beginning teachers' effectiveness with all of their students, and to ultimately make a difference in the lives of beginning teachers, the role of additional school personnel was also important (ALSDE, 2007b; ALSDE, 2007c). The success of a new teacher's induction experience heavily depends on the culture of the school. A school culture that is centered around professional learning communities, and mentoring focuses on students and their learning. This culture encourages collaboration, has a faculty that is committed to life-long learning, and has a collective sense of responsibility for the success of all students as well as for the success of all beginning teachers (ALSDE, 2007b).

The principal's leadership role was defined from the onset as the critical person for communicating the purposes of the ATM program to their faculty (ALSDE, 2007b). The role of the principals in selecting quality teacher leaders who had the dispositions needed to be effective mentors was critical to the ATM program because good matches between the mentor and the mentee was essential for a positive experience for both. In arranging appropriate matches, principals were to consider both professional and personal qualities. Professionally, consideration was to be made for assigning mentors to mentees at the same school with similar teaching assignments, and common planning periods (Danin & Bacon, 1999). Personal considerations included characteristics such as personalities and learning styles.

Assigning a workload that was reasonable and doable for beginning teachers was an important consideration for principals. Ensuring that mentors participated in the professional development provided was also critical. In addition, the principal was expected to set expectations regarding the interactions of the mentors and new teachers as well as assist in creating the time for mentors and mentees to work together on a weekly basis. The principal was also asked to respect the confidentiality of the mentor-mentee relationship. Ultimately, the principal was to provide an environment that supported the development of a positive relationship between mentors and new teachers by creating a culture that was supportive of the mentoring process.

Methods and Modes of Inquiry

The mode of inquiry for this study is the mixed methods research paradigm, not in an attempt to replace either a pure quantitative or qualitative design, but rather to utilize a model that is perhaps more appropriate for an inquiry that involves both objective and subjective elements. In effort to triangulate the data to get a complete picture of the implementation of the first two years of the Alabama Teacher Mentor Program, data sources included:

- electronic surveys, and
- focus groups of regional in-service center consultants, district level mentor personnel, principals, mentor teachers, and mentees.

Quantative and qualitative data from the electronic surveys were examined carefully as the mentor and mentee surveys had matched questions, and information from the focus groups were coded to determine patterns in the responses both within and between groups.

Data Sources

Electronic Surveys

In the 2007 – 2008 implementation of the ATM program, web based electronic surveys were used to gather information related to the research questions. The survey was constructed based on the evaluation questions by the Coordinator of the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching and the staff in charge of the mentoring program at the state level with collaboration from one of the public universities College of Education in the southern part of the state that had been involved with the mentor teacher program from the inception.

Mentor teachers and mentees throughout the state completed a web based electronic surveys that addressed the match between the mentors and mentees; the amount of support provided to the mentors and mentees; the types and amount of mentoring that took place; and if a supportive culture of trust, mutual respect, and collegiality was in place to support the program. In addition to demographic questions, there were 17 mentoring questions on the mentor survey and 20 questions on the mentee survey. Respondents were asked to supply any narrative responses they would like to add following each question. Though the highest response rate is sought, considering that a response rate of 30% is considered average (Hamilton, 2009), the response rate for these surveys may be considered well above average with 1,518 mentors out of 2,326 (65%) and 1,078 mentees out of 2,355 (46%) responding to the survey.

Focus Groups

In the 2008 – 2009 implementation of the ATM program, focus group data was collected from a sampling of Regional In-service Center Consultants (n = 26), district level mentor personnel (n = 12), principals (n = 34), mentor teachers (n = 84), and mentees (n = 54). A narrative analysis was conducted to identify those elements of the program that were effective and to determine common areas of concern. Focus group questions can be found in Appendix B.

Discussion

Overall results indicate that the ATM program was successful in that the majority of first year teachers received great support in many of the challenges they encountered throughout the entirety of their first year as teachers. These challenges included classroom management and organization, differentiating instruction in order to help meet the needs of all students and thereby reduce the achievement gap, and providing the daily positive encouragement and emotional support that is often missing for a beginning teacher.

The ATM program was seen as a collaborative effort of Regional In-Service Centers, the ALSDE, LEAs, and schools working together to create a strong support system for new teachers. Throughout the program, specific goals were designed to implement a team-based approach of developing a cadre of teachers better prepared to meet the educational challenges of teaching today; and to enhance teacher retention by graduating teachers who were better prepared to provide quality teaching instruction to diverse student populations during their first official assignment as a certified teacher. Fortunately, as new teachers were experiencing teaching challenges for the first time, they were able to look to their mentors for support and guidance. As previously stated, quality teacher mentors are there to help new teachers endure such challenges and to help them survive and succeed as new teachers. A quality teacher mentor program aims to guide new teachers to success through mentors. The data revealed that the majority of teacher leaders selected that participated in the study adequately fulfilled the role of mentor. Select descriptive statistics from the electronic survey completed by 65% of the mentors and 46% of the mentees in year one are presented in Table 1.

According to the electronic survey data, the mentoring program also helped reduce the number of first-year teachers leaving the profession. Between 30%-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of employment (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Nationally, 10% of first-year teachers do not return for their second year (NCES, 2011). On the mentoring survey, less than two percent of Alabama's first-year teachers indicated that they did not intend to return, which was supported by data from the LEAs the following school year. The systems that have reported their data indicated hiring 25 percent fewer new teachers for the 2008-2009 school year as compared to the previous year.

An analysis of the focus Group data revealed the following common themes in year two of program implementation (see Appendix B for focus group questions):

Regional In-service Center Consultants

(a) district level mentor personnel welcomed the ATM program

(b) logistical issues regarding pay to the mentors caused some confusion for district level mentor personnel

(c) the "train the trainers" model used by the state was an effective means of disseminating the professional development statewide

(d) the mentoring professional development tools were grounded in mentoring research and were interactive and effective

Table 1
Perception of Mentees and Examples cited by Mentors

Mentor Characteristic	Mentee Perception	Mentoring Examples
Mentors are important or extremely important	84.2%	Mentors collaborated with mentees to prepare for principal observations and high stakes tests
Mentors are enthusiastic about mentoring	79.9%	Mentors reported enjoying the mentoring process, and expressed a willingness to help new teachers be successful and improve their craft
Mentors spent more than one hour per week with mentee	72.4%	Mentors made themselves available to mentee, collaborating with mentee through face-to-face meetings, email, phone calls, etc.
Mentors observed mentee teaching	65%	Mentors found innovative ways to organize schedule to engage observations of mentees
Mentor provided classroom effectiveness assistance	78%	Mentoring sessions often dealt with instructional planning and strategies to enhance mentee's teaching
Mentors provided extensive insights and strategies for classroom management	82.9%	Mentors gave specific suggestions on how to manage classrooms, and facilitated classroom observations with teachers strong in classroom management
Mentors provided strategies to assist in identifying and closing achievement gaps	77.8%	Mentors helped new teachers analyze classroom data, facilitated meeting between new teacher and building based instructional coach, and helped new teachers develop and revise lesson plans to meet the needs of their students
Mentors provided emotional support and confidence building	88.1%	Mentors were sincere in their praise as they acknowledged the hard work of new teachers, acknowledged when they noticed improvements in the academic achievement of the students or with classroom management. When novice teachers experienced frustration, they made themselves available to listen, provide encouragement, and help new teacher generate ideas to implement for immediate improvement
Mentors were important to mentees successful induction to the teaching profession	73.2%	Mentors spent time with spent with mentees on weekly basis, collaborating with mentees on all dimensions that impacted classroom instruction and student achievement

(e) mentor teachers welcomed the mentoring professional development and found it helpful

District Level Mentor Personnel

(a) the success of the program was highly dependent upon principals, their support of the program, and their selection of teacher leaders as mentors

(b) though many districts had informal mentoring programs in place, the initiative the state took had a direct impact on formalizing mentorships

(c) the mentoring training was a critical and effective component of the program

(d) the number of new teachers in a district was directly related to the complexity of program implementation

(e) the process of payment was complicated to some district level administrators

Principals

(a) recognized the value of mentoring in retaining new teachers and impacting student achievement

(b) thought the modest stipend was a positive step to help them ensure that actual mentoring occurred

(c) were better able to match mentors and mentees in year two given what they learned about creating

the time for mentoring in year one

(d) supported the teacher leaders attending the mentoring professional development

(e) found it difficult in some cases to create a school culture of mentoring due, attributed to the fact that only the assigned mentor received the stipend

Mentor Teachers

(a) finding time to engage in mentoring activities was challenging, especially given they were pre-established as teacher leaders in their own right which came as an addition to other responsibilities

(b) the more supportive the principal of the program, the more likely meaningful mentoring was to occur

(c) the sharing of ideas between mentors and principals regarding creating time to mentor was beneficial

(d) the mentoring training was perceived as helpful

(e) documenting mentoring activities was perceived as cumbersome to some mentors

Mentees

(a) found the mentors guidance in determining local school policies and classroom management among the most helpful mentoring activities

(b) developed a trusting relationship with mentors

(c) felt they received adequate support from their mentors via multiple means of communication (i.e. email, phone conversations, face – to – face meetings)

(d) in cases where mentoring lacked, it seemed to be mostly in situations where the mentor had many roles in the school (i.e. chair of various committees, served on other committees, lead special activities, etc.)

(e) most mentees felt their mentor was a critical to their survival and level of success in the year of teaching

Challenges

Upon implementation of new programs such as the Alabama Teacher Mentor Program, challenges often arise. The ATM program was no exception as there were several limitations that should be improved upon in any future implementations of this program. First, there were notable variations in the type of mentoring the first year teachers received. Some mentors engaged in daily mentoring contacts with their new teachers, planning with them, explaining paperwork, teaching intervention strategies, and generally sharing large doses of their experienced teacher knowledge. Other mentors spent much less time mentoring and instead, made brief contact with their mentee, "checking on" them. Still others acted as a participant observer unless otherwise requested by the new teacher. Though this was not a wide spread problem, it is an issue that must be addressed, beginning with the initial selection of mentors. A plausible

explanation of this finding was the fact that the teachers selected as mentors were already leaders in their schools, and may have been over-extended in terms of expectations and time to fulfill the expectations.

Another challenge arose when there were personality conflicts between the mentors and mentees. Although a principal may have selected a person who was qualified to fulfill the duties of a mentor, the new teachers were in fact new, which meant that there were some instances in which the principal did not have adequate insight into a new teacher's personality in order to make a good mentor match. In other cases the mentors were not excited about the program so they did not willingly engage in mentoring activities. In still other situations, the new teacher had an attitude of not wanting any help. In all cases, if the situation arose to the level that mentoring was not taking place, the success of the situation largely depended upon the intervention of the principal.

There were some mentoring matches dealing with specialized subjects that presented unusual circumstances. For example, if the new teacher was a physical education teacher and there was not another physical education teacher at the school, the new teacher would be assigned a physical education mentor from another school or a general education teacher at the same school. In either case, the logistics of mentoring changed. Consideration should be made for creative mentoring techniques in these situations, such as assigning the teacher two mentors, a building based mentor and a content area mentor.

Finally, the complexity of paying approximately 2,000 mentors in 131 districts throughout the state is difficult. The logistics as well as the required documentation was seen as a problem. However, as the program continues implementation, these problems are being worked through.

Conclusions

The evaluation program attempted to answer these guiding questions:

1. Was every new teacher assigned a mentor?

As previous research supports (Darling-Hammond, 2009), the data from this program indicated that through implementation of the Alabama Mentor Teacher Program, every new teacher was assigned a mentor teacher. While many of the mentors were in the same school and in the same program area as the mentees, in more rural districts, mentors had to travel to several schools to engage in mentoring. Also, in some situations, mentor/mentee pairs were not matched regarding content area due to a lack of an available mentor. For example, a there was likely only one foreign language teacher of a specific language in a school, so the mentor may have been in the foreign language department, but not teaching the same content.

2. How frequent did mentoring occur?

Those that instituted the Alabama Mentor Teacher program suggested that mentors and mentees strived to

spend 2.5 hours each week engaged in mentoring activities. The data revealed that 84% of mentees were mentored for at least one hour each week, with 46% percent engaging in mentoring activities more than two hours each week. However, nearly 17% received less than one hour of mentoring each week.

3. Was the mentoring based on the needs of the new teacher?

It is the responsibility of mentor teachers to help new teachers be able to relate important long term professional goals without ignoring the classroom challenges they face on a daily basis (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993). The data revealed that the mentoring was based on both areas of focus for specific schools as well as the needs of new teachers, which often overlapped. The professional development the mentors received helped to prepare them to objectively observe mentees and utilize questioning techniques to help determine the needs of the new teachers so they could provide mentoring based on needs that were noted. The mentors were trained to avoid questions such as, "Do you need anything?" as often new teachers do not know what they need or the questions to ask.

4. Was the mentoring professional development effective in providing mentoring strategies to mentors?

As Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002) suggested, mentor teachers should engage in professional development before working as mentors to novice teachers in effort to have a positive impact on professional growth, development, and success of new teachers. The mentor teachers, district-level personnel, and regional in-service level administrators perceived the mentoring as a critical component to the implementation of the program. Helping mentors focus on the goals of mentoring is critical for the success of mentoring programs (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010).The professional development provided for the mentors in the Alabama Teacher Mentoring program included research-based mentoring strategies and techniques designed to engage mentees in reflective conversations, focusing on self-problem solving. Mentors were taught to discuss strengths and areas for growth with mentees objectively, without being evaluative, and always including praise for what the new teachers were doing well.

5. Did the mentoring program help to retain new teachers in the profession?

The examination of this program reveals what has been postulated by mentoring research, that is implementing a quality-mentoring program will likely help new teachers face daily classroom challenges so they are successful (Breaux & Wong, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2012). The data supported that more first year teachers in Alabama returned for a second year of teaching, with only two percent of new teachers not returning the following year as compared to the national average of ten percent (Kaiser & Cross, 2011) of new teachers not returning for a second year in the classroom.

Policy. In times of economic uncertainty, a focus of establishing, maintaining, and improving mentoring programs must remain central to educational reform. Demographic and policy trends now lend greater importance to mentoring programs than perhaps at any other time (NEA, 2000). In order for them to be effective, mentor teachers must be intentionally selected, with a focus on providing professional development to enhance the dispositions of mentoring. Increasing student enrollments, an escalation of teacher retirements, and the popularity of class-size reduction efforts in many states represent serious challenges to districts seeking to ensure the quality of classroom instruction. Concerted action must be taken to assist the anticipated two million new teachers who will enter the profession within the next decade and uncounted numbers of experienced teachers who will assume new assignments.

Practice. It is imperative that quality mentoring and induction for new teachers be placed at the center of improving our educational system. Emerging educators should be provided with a comprehensive induction program that emphasizes methods of best practice for meeting the needs of all students including those who are behaviorally or academically challenging. Providing new teachers with intensive mentoring by exemplary lead teachers that possess the dispositions to mentor teachers and concentrated administrative support will likely produce successful new teachers who will remain committed to providing consistent, quality education and instruction on a long-term basis. An argument can be made that the teaching profession each year loses talented teachers because of a lack of proper mentorship in the profession. In order for this attrition to stop, it is crucial for teacher-mentoring program to be mandated. If schools, districts, or states really want to invest in an educational system that benefits students, they should invest more time an effort into the teachers that they employ. "No single principle of school reform is more valid or durable than the maxim that student learning depends first, last, and always on the quality of the teachers" (Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2001, p. 1). As stated previously, mentoring is not a choice, but is a responsibility that every professional should possess in order for enhanced student learning to take place. The ultimate impact of these efforts will lead to greater student achievement.

Future Research. The Alabama Teacher Mentor program produced immediate positive results. Ensuring the selection of quality mentors, providing research-based professional development for mentor teachers, implementing a mentoring accountability system, and engaging in meaningful mentoring practices in a statewide initiative is powerful. Success for new teachers in Alabama is sure to breed success for the entire

educational system, experienced teachers, administrators, and most importantly, students. However, since the inception of the program, difficult financial circumstances have diminished the funds used to pay the mentor teachers. Research should be done to:

    • examine the sustainability and impact of the professional development for mentor teachers and the implementation of mentoring without the monetary backing for the mentors;

    • determine if new teachers hired since the program has been suggested rather than mandated is still being implemented, and if so, what elements and to what extent;

    • examine effective mentoring practices that can be institutionalized regardless of funding opportunities;

    • determine how Teacher Leader programs now prevalent in many institutions of higher education can work collaboratively with school districts and state departments of education to provide opportunities for those earning Teacher Leader certifications to mentor new teachers.

The critical need for quality mentoring does not lessen; rather the need must continue to be the focal point of educational systems globally.

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Appendix A

Alabama Beginning Teacher Mentoring Program—

Rubric for Mentor Selection

<u>Purpose</u>: The purpose of this rubric is to serve as a tool for individuals charged with recruiting and selecting mentors as well as a reflective tool for prospective mentors. Indicators on this rubric supplement basic requirements for mentors, e.g., three successful years of teaching and subject-area expertise

KNOWLEDGE, SKILL, DISPOSITION	3	2	1
Professional Alabama Quality Teaching Standards (AQTS)	Uses the AQTS as a tool for personal growth	Is conversant with the AQTS	Is not that familiar with the AQST
District and school policies and procedures	Seeks ways to improve policies/procedures	Adheres to all district & school policies & procedures	Sometimes seems confused about policies/procedures
Alabama Educator Code of Ethics	Consistently aligns behavior with Code	Understands the implications of the Code for professional behavior	Does not appear to be familiar with the Code
Continuous learner	Seeks professional growth experiences; current with research and professional literature	Actively participates in professional development; is somewhat familiar with current literature	Does not seek professional growth opportunities
Collegiality and collaborative approach	Actively works with colleagues in promoting the development of professional learning communities	Works with colleagues and is not averse to sharing ideas and teaching strategies	Rarely works with colleagues in a collaborative manner
Personal Building and maintaining relationships	Has positive relationships with all adults and students	Gets along well with most adults and students	Has occasional relationship problems
Personal Communications	Expresses self clearly orally and in writing; exemplary listening, questioning, and nonverbal skills	Adequate communication skills; is seldom misunderstood	Sometimes develops misunderstandings due to communication errors
Respect for diversity	Seeks to understand divergent points of view; works well with students and adults of all backgrounds	Demonstrates a basic respect for all individuals, regardless of their background	Does not always exercise tolerance for different points of view or for individuals of different backgrounds

Problem solving	Uses critical thinking skills to identify problems, outline alternatives, seek relevant data, and find evidence-based solutions	Usually makes good decisions and/or identifies workable solutions	Oftentimes jumps to conclusions without seeking relevant information
Reflecting	Consistently thinks back on experiences and behaviors for the purpose of self-assessing and learning to continually improve performance	Engages in occasional reflection individually and with others	Does not exhibit reflective approach to practice
Instructional Relationship between identified instructional practices and student achievement	Uses appropriate instructional strategies to improve achievement of all students	Has a repertoire of research-based practices associated with increased student achievement	Does not demonstrate knowledge of research-based best practice
Curriculum and state standards	Has deep knowledge of assigned content areas and of state content standards	Has good working knowledge of assigned content areas; familiar with state standards	Does not have mastery of all content assigned content areas and/or of state standards
Classroom Management	Demonstrates exemplary classroom management; handles almost all behavior issues without administrator involvement	Knows best practice in classroom management; experiences few management problems	Does not always exercise effective classroom management
Student Assessment	Uses a wide repertoire of strategies to monitor and assess student progress for purpose of providing students with formative feedback; uses a wide range of techniques to evaluate student learning for purposes of grading and reporting	Knows the importance of both assessment for learning and assessment of learning and uses a range of assessment strategies	Does not use a wide range of formative assessment strategies and/or has some difficulty in accurately or appropriately evaluating student progress
Differentiated Instruction	Uses assessment results to plan appropriate instruction for all learners, making modifications in strategies as appropriate	Knows the basic principles of differentiation	Tends to provide the same instruction to all students, regardless of their prior learning or readiness
Commitment to Mentoring	Has a strong desire to serve as a mentor; articulates a commitment to inducting new members to the profession	Is willing to serve as a mentor, but not altogether enthusiastic	Expresses reservations about ability (or time) to serve in this capacity

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

Regional In-Service Center Consultants

1. How did the district level personnel react to the implementation of the ATMP?
2. What is your opinion of the professional development model that is being used to prepare mentor teachers?
3. Have you received any feedback from your mentor teachers, principals, or district personnel regarding the professional development?
4. What challenges have you faced in implementing the Mentor Teacher program at the regional level?

District Level Mentor Personnel

1. What were the critical components in the successful implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program?
2. How did the State initiative impact your local mentoring programs, if at all?
3. Have you received any feedback from your mentor teachers or principals regarding the mentoring professional development?
4. What challenges have you faced in implementing the Mentor Teacher program at the district level?

Principals

1. What were the critical components in the successful implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program?
2. What challenges have you faced in implementing the Mentor Teacher program at the district level?
3. Have you received any feedback from your mentor teachers regarding the mentoring professional development?
4. Do you think the Mentor Teacher Program helped to meet the over-arching goal of retaining teachers in your school?

Mentor Teachers

1. What were the critical components in the successful implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program?
2. What challenges have you faced in implementing the Mentor Teacher program?
3. Did you perceive the Mentor Teacher program professional development as helpful?

Mentees

1. Did you receive adequate support from your mentor?
2. What areas of mentoring did you find most helpful?
3. What challenges did you face with your mentor or the mentor teacher program?

Article Citation

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