There Is Only One Way To Improve Student Achievement

Harry K. Wong

All You Want to Know About Student Achievement

A. Two hundred studies have shown that the only factor that can create student achievement is a knowledgeable, skillful teacher.¹
B. A large scale study found that every additional dollar spent on raising teacher quality netted greater student achievement gains than did any other use of school resources.²
C. Researchers in the Dallas School District have shown that having a less effective teacher can significantly lower a student's performance over time, even if the student gets more competent teachers later on.²
D. A study comparing low and high achieving elementary school students in New York City found that teacher qualifications accounted for 90 percent of the variation between the best and the worst students.³
E. Schools with more experienced and more highly educated mathematics teachers tended to have higher achieving students. Even in very poor schools, students achieved if they had a well-prepared teacher.⁴
F. The most important factor, bar none, is the teacher. An ineffective teacher can affect student learning for years, but having two ineffective teachers in subsequent years can damage a student's academic career.⁴
G. As teacher effectiveness increases, lower achieving students are the first to benefit.⁴

The students will learn based on whether the teacher is effective or ineffective.

District variables do not matter. School variables do not matter. Program variables do not matter. It is the teacher that matters. The ineffective teachers get poor results. The effective teachers get good results, and it makes no difference to the good teacher what students you give them. What programs they teach. Who are the administrators.

The bottom line is that there is no way to create good schools without good teachers. It is the administrator who creates a good school. And it is the teacher who creates a good classroom.

Student Achievement Is A Result of Good Classroom Management

In a study by three researchers ranked-ordered 28 factors that govern student learning. This was based on a review of 50 years of research on student learning, encompassing 11,000 statistical findings.⁵ The Number 1 factor governing student learning is Classroom Management.

It is practices, teacher practices, that govern student learning. What the teacher does in the classroom to structure and organize a learning environment is the most important factor that will increase student achievement.

It is time to organize our schools based on what we want students to achieve, not on what fad is currently in vogue. The classroom must be organized for learning if student achievement is to increase.

Unfortunately, what typically happens in a classroom is the teacher does activities and then disciplines when problems occur. No time is spent organizing or managing the classroom. Then, of course, the administrator has to contend with this problem, which typically has nothing to do with discipline.

Why Some Schools Are Successful

At a fraction of the cost and time, money spent on staff development is a much better investment than the pouring of untold millions of dollars into one continuing faddish program after another. Programs do not produce achievement; teachers produce student achievement.

The major difference between successful and unsuccessful schools is that

• Unsuccessful schools stress programs. They spend millions of dollars adopting programs, fads-of-the-year, in constant pursuit of the quick fix on the white horse.
• Successful schools stress practices. They wisely invest in their teachers and the effectiveness of their teachers. They don't teach programs; they teach basic, traditional academic content—and they work at improving the pedagogical practices of their teachers.

People who adopt programs are more interested in the success of the program.

People who are effective teachers are more interested in the success of the students.

Forget programs unless you have effective teachers. Educational leaders know that what matters is whether schools can offer their neediest students good teachers trained in effective strategies to teach strong academic knowledge and skills.

The Teacher Shortage: Wrong Diagnosis, Phony Cures

John Merrow, who does the PBS series on education, argues that "we're misdiagnosing the problem as 'recruitment' when it's really 'retention.' Simply put, we train teachers poorly and then treat them badly—and so they leave in droves." He suggests that "where shortages exist, these are often what should be labeled 'self-inflicted wounds.' They fall into three categories: Schools underpay and mistreat their teachers. They spend much of their time fixing the leak by providing adequate training to their teachers. Unsuccessful schools stress programs. They don't teach programs; they teach basic, traditional academic content—and they work at improving the pedagogical practices of their teachers. Successful schools stress practices. They wisely invest in their teachers and the effectiveness of their teachers. They don't teach programs; they teach basic, traditional academic content—and they work at improving the pedagogical practices of their teachers.

People who adopt programs are more interested in the success of the program.

People who are effective teachers are more interested in the success of the students.

Forget programs unless you have effective teachers. Educational leaders know that what matters is whether schools can offer their neediest students good teachers trained in effective strategies to teach strong academic knowledge and skills.

The fact remains," says Merrow, "that our nation's 1,300 schools and colleges of education already produce more than enough teachers. But about 30 percent of those newly minted teachers don't go into classrooms. Many who become teachers don't stay long. An estimated 30 percent leave the field within five years; in cities, the exit rate is an astonishing 50 percent."

"Of every 100 new graduates with licenses to teach, 30 do not. Of the remaining 70, at least 21 will have left teaching within five years. At the very least, that is an inefficient use of human and material resources."

So how do we fix the leak? It's really quite simple. We fix the leak by providing adequate training and support for beginning teachers (known as induction), thereby increasing the retention of more competent, qualified, and satisfied professionals for America's classrooms.

Permission is granted to duplicate these pages with the intent of improving student achievement. Please give credit. Harry K. Wong, Ed.D., 943 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View, CA 94043.

This paper was a handout at ASCD, Urban and Title I Conferences, and others. Additional copies are available free of charge while supplies last. Call 650-965-7096 to request the "Student Achievement" document.
The major problem in our schools is not discipline. It is the lack of procedures and routines. Good administrators, principals, assistant principals, and staff developers can easily teach their teachers good classroom management skills. (See “Rappahannock High School” on the back page.)

Gordon Cawelti’s research on the practices and programs schools use has revealed that classroom management skills can substantially improve student achievement.10

1. Practices resulting in substantially improved student achievement (.4-.6 range)
   - Classroom Management Techniques
   - Time on Task
   - Behavioral Classroom Techniques
   - Tutoring
   - Early Childhood Program
   - Parental Involvement

2. Practices producing modestly improved student achievement (.3-.4 range)
   - Success for All
   - Accelerated Reader Program
   - Reading Recovery
   - Staff Development
   - Longer School Year
   - Computer-Assisted Instruction

3. Practices with mixed or controversial results
   - Bilingual Education
   - Detracking
   - Class Size
   - School Size

4. Changes rarely or never showing improved student achievement
   - Site Based Management
   - State or District Policies
   - Pupil Retention
   - Changes in Schedules or Organization

Education is a profession currently marked by an absence of goals. We must become goal-oriented and results-driven. Just implementing promising practices like site-based management, cooperative learning, or interdisciplinary teaching is not enough. We need to implement and obtain solid, purposeful, enduring goals.12

Carl Glickman

...continued from previous page...

There Is Only One Way to Improve Student Achievement

The teacher is the only factor that can improve student achievement.

How Schools Produce Student Achievement

Gordon Cawelti looked at six very successful but diverse schools, all structured differently.13 Yet, they all had five factors in common.

Prominent Features of Schools That Produce Student Achievement

1. Clear and High Standards
2. Multiple Changes
3. Strong Leadership
4. Collaborative Teams
5. Committed Teachers

The article headlined, “Principals Can’t Wait to Spend the Money.” This appeared in a large urban newspaper after the annual Title I funds had been made available. Then it went on to say that the principals were going to form teams of teachers to figure out how to spend the money. The teams would then be disbanded until the next annual allotment of funds was announced when another team would have to figure out how to spend the money.

The creation of a quality school is a continuous process guided by its goals. Effective schools don’t need to figure out how to spend money. They know what are their needs.

REFERENCES

1 What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future. NCTAF, PO Box 5239, Woodbridge, VA 22194.
4 Wyatt, Joe. USA Today, August 8, 1998.
7 Sanders, William L. (1996). “Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement.” University of Tennessee Value-Added Research & Assessment Center, Knoxville, TN.

Learning Achievement Has Nothing to Do With Literacy

In a study on the nature of first-grade literacy instruction,13 findings revealed that student achievement had nothing to do with what literacy program or approach was used. The factors that created effective literacy instruction (and all other instruction of any subject at any grade level) were

1. Excellent classroom management
2. High academic engagement
3. Positive, reinforcing, cooperative environment
4. Encouragement of self-regulation

Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement

In the best-selling ASCD book, Mike Schomoker’s research14 gives the most effective way to create a good school:

1. The staff must work as a productive family or team.
2. The team must set clear and measurable goals.
3. The team must regularly collect and analyze the data to see if the goals are being reached.

You improve schools with a staff that collects and analyzes data from measurable goals, not from faddish programs.

The Only Way to Improve Student Achievement

- A review looked at 40 years of educational innovations and did not find a single innovation that increased student achievement. The only factor that increased student achievement was the significance of a teacher.
- Studies have shown that teacher preparation is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement.
- Studies have shown that teacher expertise is the single most important factor in determining student achievement.
- The bottom line is that there is no way to create good schools without good teachers. It is the administrator who creates a good school. And it is the teacher who creates a good classroom.

Therefore, this is how to create a world-class school:

1. Teach classroom management skills and have school-wide procedures.
2. Create a school culture or family.
3. Have school goals and religiously collect and analyze the data.
4. Have an induction program for new teachers.
INDUCTION: Helping New Teachers

The mission of induction is to train, retain and create a culture of effective teachers.

"Your new teacher induction program not only saved my wife as a classroom teacher, but it also saved my marriage. My wife was miserable both at home and at school. Whatever you did at that induction program made her so much more successful as a classroom teacher and a happier person in general."

Received by Annette Breaux, Director of the Induction Program
Lafourche Parish Schools, Thibodaux, Louisiana

New teacher induction is more a process than a program, involving the period of transition where new teachers evolve from being students of teaching to teachers of students. Induction is a must, not only because new teachers require support and assistance in beginning their professions successfully, but because of the astounding number of new teachers entering into the profession.

Aging and Enrollment

1. Approximately 200,000 new teachers will enter the profession each year for the next decade and the corps of teachers, presently at 3.1 million will increase to 3.3 million by 2003. (AAAE, 1998)
2. Up to 50 percent of new teachers will leave teaching within their first seven years. (Wilkinson, 1994)
3. School enrollment will peak in 2006 with more than 54 million children, a dramatic increase from the mid-eighties when enrollment was around 38 million. (Walters, 1998; NCES, 1998)

Education will experience a double whammy with the graying of teachers and the expansion of enrollments. Finding qualified classroom teachers won’t be easy, yet the hiring practices of many schools will continue to involve finding warm bodies to fill holes in the schedule—then providing no induction process for these new hires.

The teachers will be hired, given a key, directed to their room, and given no support.

Why Induction?

The research is overwhelming in stating that the only way to improve student achievement is with competent, effective teachers.

Effective teachers can be trained, and once trained, the effective administrator retains them and builds a culture of effective teachers for a school, no different than a coach builds a winning team.

For this to happen, an induction process must have three components:

1. Training: Through a series of workshops, demonstration classrooms, visitations, and debriefing sessions, new teachers are taught and shown effective classroom strategies.
2. Support: A cadre of mentors, administrators, and staff developers work personally and in regularly scheduled sessions to support and assist the new teacher.
3. Retaining: Teachers, especially effective teachers, will be increasingly hard to find. The effective administrator retains these effective teachers and creates a culture of an effective school.

North Carolina Plan for Creating Effective Teachers

Teaching Fellows Program The program offers $25,000 four-year college scholarships to 400 graduating North Carolina high school seniors.

District Induction The state provides three days of pay for all new teachers to attend an induction program before school begins. Stipends for mentors are also provided for one year.

Teacher’s Union The North Carolina Education Association sponsors programs for new teachers and works in concert with school district induction programs to help new teachers succeed.

Project Induct A gathering of 45 leaders in public education and produced this highly recommended publication that offers practical, proven suggestions for induction programs. A Profession In Jeopardy: Why Teachers Leave and What We Can Do About It. Raleigh, NC: The Public School Forum of North Carolina, 3739 National Drive, Suite 210, Raleigh, NC 27612.

Permission is granted to duplicate these pages with the intent of improving student achievement.

Please give credit. Harry K. Wong, Ed.D., 943 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View, CA 94043.
Purpose of Induction

• Train new teachers
• Support new teachers
• Retain new teachers

Results of Induction

1. Reduce the intensity of transition into teaching
2. Improve teaching effectiveness
3. Increase the retention of greater numbers of highly qualified teachers

There is a difference between induction and mentoring.
• Mentoring is support.
• Induction is training, support, and retention.

The Induction Process

There is a need for a structured, systematic, instructional support system for beginning teachers in order to help them become effective professionals.

On the next page is a list of exemplary induction programs. These programs, although different because they cater to the cultures and communities they serve, all have some commonalities. They teach the following:
• Effective classroom management procedures and routines.
• Effective instructional practices.
• A sensitivity to and an understanding of the community.
• Life-long learning and professional growth.
• Unity and teamwork among the entire community.

The focus is on training, and the pace is steady. The trainers assume the roles of classroom teachers, and the new teachers become their “students.” The training briskly and firmly shifts to classroom management and instruction. The primary focus is on instructing teachers with techniques to allow their students to be successful.

A major role of the trainers is to immerse the new teachers in the district's culture and to unite them with everyone in the district in order to form a cohesive, supportive instructional team. The new teachers quickly become a part of the district family.

A major feature is the use of demonstration classrooms at appropriate grade levels or subjects. A master teacher (many times it’s one of the mentor teachers) simulates how the room is arranged and managed for the first day of school. The new teachers invariably sit in awe as they learn, firsthand, from the experts what it looks like to start school successfully.

At the end of the induction week, there is usually an awards ceremony and a civic function where the new teachers have now been introduced to their mentors, and their new teachers invariably sit in awe as they learn, firsthand, from the experts what it looks like to start school successfully.

1. Reduce the intensity of transition into teaching
2. Improve teaching effectiveness
3. Increase the retention of greater numbers of highly qualified teachers

Induction must be a structured training process coupled with an ongoing process of support from the school site administrators, staff developers, mentors, and teachers.

During the induction process, the administrators and staff developers provide ongoing training for the new teachers. The mentors then help the new teachers to implement what has been learned. In fact, mentors are often an integral part of the training process, resulting in a more consistent implementation of the district's vision for effective teaching.

You cannot have mentoring without an induction program. But, you can have an induction program without mentors.

Mentors must be part of a systematic induction process. For new teachers to be effective, there must be a structured training process coupled with an ongoing process of support from the school site administrators, staff developers, mentors, and teachers.

The Structure of an Effective Induction Program

• An initial four or five days of induction before school begins
• A continuum of professional development through systematic training over a period of two or three years
• A strong sense of support
• A mentoring component to the induction process
• A structure for modeling effective teaching during inservices and mentoring
• Opportunities for inductees to visit demonstration classrooms

Induction programs have such integrated components as
• Classes toward an advanced degree
• Demonstration classrooms
• Mentoring
• Workshops
• Portfolios
• Social events
• Visitation
• Sharing sessions

The Bridgeport, Connecticut, new teacher induction program includes
• Four days of preschool workshops
• One year of bi-weekly meetings (to be extended to two years)
• Formal meeting with the principal bi-weekly
• Trained mentor and a buddy


Induction: Helping New Teachers Reach Their Maximum Potential, Harry K. Wong

Increasing Retention

• 33 percent of all qualified new teachers leave within the first three years.
• 50 percent leave within the first seven years.
• 95 percent of new teachers who experienced support during their initial years remain in teaching after three years.
• 80 percent of the supported teachers remain after five years. (Wilkinson, 1994)

Continually recruiting teachers is expensive and retaining them is a challenge. Only by retaining qualified teachers can a staff build a culture of effective teachers. William Kimball, superintendent of the Port Huron Area Schools in Michigan says, “After seven years, there are more induction teachers now than non-induction teachers in our system and you can see it by the change in our culture.”

Since it takes five to seven years to create a culture of effectiveness in a school, it is imperative to increasingly retain a greater number of highly qualified, effective teachers. The induction process helps to accomplish this.

With a scarcity of effective teachers, it is imperative to have an induction program that will
• Train new teachers
• Support new teachers
• Retain new teachers

Highly Recommended Document

Recruiting New Teachers, an organization devoted to attracting new candidates to teaching careers, has a national study of urban teacher induction programs. Note that they talk about induction, not mentoring programs.

Support from a mentor is important, but far too often it is simply a temporary buddy arrangement. Recruiting New Teachers found that fully 94% of the induction programs they studied were “formal, in-depth, and sustained.”

They found that induction programs are needed
• To staunch the hemorrhage of new teacher attrition, particularly in our nation's urban schools;
• To eliminate unfit individuals and retain only those who have been deemed competent;
• To extend the preparation period of novice teachers through their crucial first few years upon the job so that they continue to develop as proficient, knowledgeable, and successful teachers of our nation's children; and
• To improve the climate for teaching and learning, build community between new and veteran teachers, and, in the process, help address urban teaching's “brain drain” to the suburbs.
**Successful Programs**

The Flowing Wells School District’s induction program is a five-year program with a prime objective of training novice teachers to become expert teachers. Their approach is so widely copied that they have an annual workshop provided for others who want to learn more about the induction process.

The Mesa, Arizona, and Medford, Oregon, induction programs are multi-year programs. The Medford program is a three-year program with year one focusing on classroom management, year two on instructional strategies, and year three on peer tutoring. Both the induction programs in Gaston County, North Carolina, and Henry County, Georgia, have won state awards for their implementation.

The Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palatine, Illinois, has a mandatory four-year new teacher program. The program trains, supports, and prepares each teacher to become candidates for National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification at the end of the induction curriculum.

The Parkway School District in Missouri has a staff development program called the "Zero to Thirty-Plus Development Plan." From recruitment to retirement, Parkway focuses its staff development program on building professional growth for 30+ years.

In Port Huron, Michigan, the induction program is a joint effort between the teacher’s union and the administration demonstrating that everyone wants to see the new teacher succeed. And, finally, the induction programs in Thibodaux, Louisiana, and Franklin Park, Illinois, have created two of the best induction programs, as repeatedly validated by their teachers.

---

**Welcomed and Bonded**

As part of their induction program, Las Vegas has a New Teacher Welcome Center to assist new teachers with relocation information such as places to live, banking needs, available roommates, and how to register their car and how to hook up utilities.

Cathy Lozen of the Port Huron Area Schools describes how she and her colleague walked back into their office after all the new teachers had gone home and found vases filled with flowers and notes saying, “Thank you! From your new teacher.”

“I belong. I belong,” was an excited comment shared by one of the new teachers on the afternoon of the last day of induction. They had become a cohesive and caring group in four days. We all bonded and our district is truly better for it. What a feeling!

---

**Exemplary Induction Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institute for Teacher Renewal and Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Susie Heintz, Flowing Wells School District, 1556 West Prince, Tucson, AZ 85712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Teacher Induction Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Cathy Lozen, Port Huron Area Schools, 1925 Lapeer Ave, Port Huron, MI 48060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Florida-R.S.T. Framework for Inducting, Retaining, and Supporting Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Annette Breaux, Lafourche Parish Schools, 110 Bowie Rd, Thibodaux, LA 70301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growing and Sharing Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nancy Flandach, Mesa Public Schools, 549 North Stapley Dr, Mesa, AZ 85203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Induction Program for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Linda Rader, Gaston County Schools 236 Eighth Ave, Cramerton, NC 28032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Induction Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wendy Hughes, Henry County School System, 396 Tomlinson St, McDonough, GA 30253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leyden University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Kathryn Robbins, Leyden High School, 3400 Rose St, Franklin Park, IL 60131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Medford Induction Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kathy McCollum, Medford Unified School District, 500 Monroe St, Medford, OR 97501</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helping Teacher Induction Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. John C. Conyers, CCSD 15, 580 North First Bank Dr, Palatine, IL 60067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero to Thirty-Plus Professional Development Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Frances M. Rahinowitz, Bridgeport Public Schools, 948 Main St, Bridgeport, CT 06604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Teacher Welcome Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Karyn Wright, Clark County School District, 4212 Eucalyptus Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**A Message of Love and Care**

An induction program sends the message to new teachers that you value them—that you want them to succeed, to stay with you, grow, and thrive. It is an invitational message of love and care.

Perry Rodrigue, an assistant superintendent in Thibodaux, Louisiana, excitedly says, “All of our new teachers returned the following year. This had never happened until we implemented an induction program.” Port Huron, Michigan, teacher, Cheryl Rogers exclaims, “I attribute much of my success to my district’s induction program. The program made me warmly feel like a part of the district family of colleagues.”

The most cost-effective, efficient, and proven successful way of reaching our students is with confident, supported, effective teachers. This can be done with an induction training process.

---

**Maslow’s Theory of Motivation**

Maslow’s theory of motivation (1954) postulates that individual needs are arranged in a hierarchy. You must satisfy the needs of the lowest level before a person will move to the next higher level. His five levels are:

- **Self Actualization Needs**
- **Esteem Needs**
- **Love and Belonging Needs**
- **Safety Needs**
- **Physiological Needs**

Some people give the simplistic formula that all a new teacher needs is a mentor to provide a forum for reflection. The last thing a new teacher wants is a forum of mentors glaring down waiting for reflection. They have more immediate needs.

**Physiological Needs:** Where are the restrooms; what will the cafeteria cost; how can I find food, shelter, medical and dental care, auto servicing, and insurance?

**Safety Needs:** Will my car be safe in the parking lot; what parts of town do I need to be careful in; should I stay after school late, weekends?

**Love and Belonging Needs:** Will there be an induction ceremony at the end of the week to make me part of the family of professionals?

**Esteem Needs:** Will I be told of my importance and the role I have as part of the staff? Will there be a lunch during the induction process with local business and civic groups so that I know of my importance to the community?

**Self Actualization Needs:** I am eager and I want to contribute to the work of the staff. I may be ready to reflect after a couple years of experience.

---

**REFERENCES**

**ONLINE REFERENCES:**


**REFERENCES:**

- Dr. Nancy Flandach, Mesa Public Schools, 549 North Stapley Dr, Mesa, AZ 85203.
- Dr. Kathryn Robbins, Leyden High School, 3400 Rose St, Franklin Park, IL 60131.
- Dr. Nancy Flandach, Mesa Public Schools, 549 North Stapley Dr, Mesa, AZ 85203.
- Ms. Kathy McCollum, Medford Unified School District, 500 Monroe St, Medford, OR 97501.
- Ms. Frances M. Rahinowitz, Bridgeport Public Schools, 948 Main St, Bridgeport, CT 06604.
- Ms. Karyn Wright, Clark County School District, 4212 Eucalyptus Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89121.
- Ms. Cathy Lozen, Port Huron Area Schools, 1925 Lapeer Ave, Port Huron, MI 48060.
- Ms. Wendy Hughes, Henry County School System, 396 Tomlinson St, McDonough, GA 30253.
- Ms. Cathy Lozen, Port Huron Area Schools, 1925 Lapeer Ave, Port Huron, MI 48060.
- Ms. Kathy McCollum, Medford Unified School District, 500 Monroe St, Medford, OR 97501.
- Ms. Frances M. Rahinowitz, Bridgeport Public Schools, 948 Main St, Bridgeport, CT 06604.
- Ms. Karyn Wright, Clark County School District, 4212 Eucalyptus Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89121.
Mentoring Alone Will Not Help New Teachers

"My brother-in-law is a first year teacher and was having a horrible time. The district provided no induction program and when he asked for help he was told to contact his mentor. He didn’t even know he had a mentor. So he called this teacher and informed her that she was his mentor. She said, ‘I am?’ He said, ‘Thanks, but no thanks’ and hung up."

New secretaries do not receive a mentor. They are trained and helped. Doctors, factory workers, computer programmers, chefs, electricians, and dental hygienists do not receive a mentor. They are trained and helped. Even million dollar per year athletes are trained, every year and all year long. In every aspect of the work world, people are trained and helped.

New teachers, on the other hand, often receive no training. Typically, they are thrown into a classroom to survive. They may be lucky enough to get an effective and caring mentor who has the time to help and may even be compensated for helping.

The problem is that giving a new teacher a mentor only is incorrect and ineffective. The issue is the word “only” not “mentor.” To begin, the term mentor and its concept are incorrectly used in education.

In Greek legend, Mentor was the faithful friend of Odysseus (Ulysses in Latin), the hero of the Odyssey. When Odysseus went to fight the Trojans, he made Mentor the guardian of his son, Telemachus, with instructions to be his teacher and advisor.

Thus, Mentor was Telemachus’s teacher, not his mentor. Mentor was the name of Telemachus’s teacher. This is where educators have misconstrued the whole intent of helping new teachers.

What Teachers Do Best

What teachers do best is teach. Recognizing this fact brings dignity to the profession. Yet, much of the literature on mentoring describes a mentor as a facilitator or support person. What a new teacher needs is a teacher, a tutor, and not a mentor or support person.

In the literature search one particular article said, “a new teacher is provided with a forum for reflection through conversations with a committee of mentors.” It is a well-known fact that new teachers will not reveal their weaknesses. Yet this article expected a new teacher to face a forum of mentors. The kids are walking in late; they won’t sit down; they are stealing the paintbrushes; they are yelling and throwing chairs; and they are talking back to the teacher. And this frightened new teacher, who goes home and cries each night, is given a forum for reflection? Get real.

Can you imagine an airline that does not have teachers, staff trainers, or administrators to teach and acculturate a new employee? Instead, the new pilot is just given a mentor. And someday, wherever pilots go after they crash an airplane with 250 passengers aboard, the pilot is met by a forum of committee members for reflection. Would you fly on an airline without a training program for its pilots? Oh, but each pilot is given a mentor.

Mentoring: A Critical Review

The following are the highlights of a review, “Teacher Mentoring: A Critical Review,” by Sharon Feiman-Nemser of Michigan State University, and published as an ERIC Digest, July, 1996.

- Mentoring burst on to the educational scene in 1980 as part of a broad movement aimed at improving education.
- Educational leaders and policy makers have pinned high hopes on mentoring as a vehicle for reforming teaching and teacher education.
- Research has highlighted the conservative influence of cooperating teachers and school cultures on novices’ practice, so studies show that mentors promote conventional norms and practices, thus limiting reform.
- Enthusiasm for mentoring has not been matched by clarity about the purpose of mentoring.
- Claims about mentoring have not been subjected to rigorous empirical scrutiny.
- A review of the literature found few comprehensive studies well informed by theory and designed to examine in depth the context, content, and consequences of mentoring.
- To inform mentoring policy and practice, we need more direct studies of mentoring and its affect on teaching and teacher retention.

Very simply put, after 20 years of trying mentoring as a process for helping new teachers
- there is no data to validate this process,
- few programs can be cited for its success, and
- we still need more “direct studies.”

Teaching Is Unique

“In no other profession other than teaching are inexperienced, untrained, and untried beginners left to their own devices and allowed to have autonomous responsibility to make substantive professional decisions. “With a lawyer, doctor, reporter, or peace officer, there is a structure that provides training, daily guidance, tutelage, and supervision.”

Dennis Evans
Univ. of Calif. at Irvine
“Assistance for Underqualified Teachers.”
Education Week, February 3, 1999. p. 35.
New Teachers Need a Tutor, a Teacher

A new teacher should not be given a mentor. A new teacher should be given a teacher, a master teacher, or even better, a group of teachers who will teach the new teacher and get him or her up to speed. We give dignity to the profession when we, who are teachers, teach.

Tutor New teachers need a tutor, a teacher—someone who will teach and show them what to do.

Coach Experienced teachers want a coach—someone who helps you refine what you already know but you need help to do it better like a personal health coach.

Mentor Successful teachers and administrators want a mentor—someone who serves as an inspiration and because of that person’s stature and success in life, that is what you aspire to become. The accomplished, effective teacher and administrator who wants to move on in the profession values the help of a mentor.

Unconsciously Foolish Way

We cannot jeopardize an entire generation of new teachers with a process that has produced few sustained results in 20 years and still needs more “direct studies.” The personal computer was introduced in 1980, and in 20 years it has become the focal point, financially and intellectually, in the world. Whereas, no advances have been made in 20 years of work with mentors as presently conceived.

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Commission says, “Giving a teacher a mentor only is a convenient and unconsciously foolish way for an administrator to divorce himself or herself from the leadership required to bring a beginning teacher up to professional maturity.”

The same Commission also found that principals and new teachers rated mentors the least effective way to help new teachers. One out of four new teachers claimed that they received either “poor” or “no support” from their mentors.

Simply assigning a mentor teacher does little to remedy the situation of teachers becoming discouraged and leaving the profession.

Leslie Huling, a nationally acclaimed expert on teacher induction and mentoring, says, “Simply assigning a mentor teacher does little to remedy the situation of teachers becoming discouraged and leaving the profession. Induction and mentoring must go hand-in-hand. You cannot do one without the other.”

Katherine Perez at St. Mary’s College in Moraga, California, writes what should be an obvious system with mentors as presently conceived.

Seven states have mandated induction: Colorado, Connecticut, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and West Virginia. The Pennsylvania state document is even titled “Guidelines for Teacher Induction and Professional Development.”

Several, such as California, Illinois, and Utah, are developing or contemplating legislation requiring induction programs. Whether mandated or not, hundreds of districts and thousands of schools have their own induction programs. These people know that new teachers must be trained if you want them to succeed and stay.

Three Options Face a Newly Hired Teacher

Assigned You are simply given an assignment and told to go and teach. There is no person or plan to help you if you need help.

Mentor You are simply given a mentor to contact if you need help. With luck, this person may be trained, compensated, accessible, knowledgeable, and willing to help.

Induction You are part of a systematic, integrated plan formulated by the district's core of administrators, teachers, and perhaps the union, designed to welcome you, make you feel a part of the school or the district, and assigned a trained mentor. The purpose of this multi-year process is to help you become an effective and professional educator who will stay with the school or district.

Induction and Achievement

If a bad hire costs a company nearly 20% of the employee's initial salary in recruitment and personnel costs, as well as lost productivity, then each teacher who leaves the profession during the induction years likely costs taxpayers in excess of $50,000.

“An even more important cost is that related to student achievement. When a novice teacher resigns and is replaced by a second novice teacher who is unsuccessful and is replaced yet again by another novice teacher, it is easy to see how three years down the road, the instruction being provided in that classroom is not as high a quality as it would likely be with a teacher who had three years teaching experience. If an administrator is serious about student achievement, he/she must also be serious about induction support for novice teachers.”

Virginia Resta and Leslie Huling

Terry Dozier of the U. S. Dept of Education says, “I agree that strong and sustained induction programs are critical to retaining teachers and to reteaching sure that they develop excellent teaching skills. That is why we made certain that induction is a required element of the new Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants (authorized under Title II of the Higher Education Act). We have proposed a priority in all professional development grant programs for strong induction for new teachers.”

During the induction process, the administrators and staff developers provide ongoing training for the new teachers. The mentors then help the new teachers to implement what has been learned. In fact, mentors are often an integral part of the training process, resulting in a more consistent implementation of the district’s or school’s vision for effective teaching.
Retention of Effective Teachers

A principal builds an effective school by retaining trained, effective teachers. The research says the attrition rate in education is 50% in the first seven years. However, in Las Vegas, where they hire 1800 new teachers each year, the attrition rate is 5 percent, and they can do this with an induction program that is still being refined.

The attrition rate at Goldfarb Elementary School in Las Vegas is 0 percent. The principal, Bridget Phillips, builds on the district's induction program by conducting her own site induction program. As the instructional leader at her school, she and her staff spend one semester training all of their student teachers, from which she plucks off the good ones to add to her staff. She also spends another semester continuing the induction training of the first year teachers ensuring that they will become successful and be part of the Goldfarb culture.

Effective schools have a culture of effective teachers, but the school leader must work at building that culture. A visit to Goldfarb Elementary School is a joy to behold. The teachers are positive; the students are happy; and everyone at the school from the principal to the students is learning.

In the Lafourche Parish Schools in Thibodaux, Louisiana, of the 218 new teachers hired in the past three years, 99 percent are still teaching and 88 percent are still in the Lafourche Parish Schools.

The attrition rate at the aforementioned Flowing Wells School District is 5 percent and it's less than 5 percent at the Leyden High School District in Franklin Park, Illinois.

Reform in One Decade

There are two million teachers scheduled to enter the profession over a ten-year period. In 2000, 50% of the teachers will have been in the classroom seven years or less. Of the teachers teaching in the year 2000, 75% will have been trained after 1990. Education will never be reformed by continuing to use the concept of providing new teachers with a mentor only. It has not been successful.

Education can be reformed within a decade by using an induction process that trains new teachers in effective teaching practices. What it will take are administrators who: want effective schools, know what constitutes an effective school, and have an induction process that trains people to teach effectively in an effective school.

A principal builds an effective school by retaining trained, effective teachers. New teachers must be trained if you want them to succeed and stay.

What’s Wrong With Mentoring Only

- Mentors are given to novice teachers only, whereas an induction program encultivates all newly hired teachers.
- Veteran teachers who are mentors are getting older and are retiring, thus there will be a shortage of mentors.
- Some districts have up to a 50% attrition rate each year, thus there are no qualified mentors.
- All the talk about mentoring (only) leaves administrators, such as staff developers and principals, out of the training and support process.
- Mentoring is a one-to-one support process, whereas induction is a group process. You build a culture with a group process.

“The nature of the relationship among the adults at the school has more to do with the school’s quality, its characteristics, and the achievement of its students than any other factor.”

Roland Barth

Induction: What It IS and IS NOT

What is induction? Induction is the process of systematically training and supporting new teachers, beginning before the first day of school and continuing throughout the first two or three years of teaching. Its purposes include, but are not limited to 1) easing the transition into teaching, 2) improving teacher effectiveness through training in classroom management and effective teaching techniques, 3) promoting the district’s culture—its philosophies, missions, policies, procedures, and goals, and 4) increasing the retention of greater numbers of highly qualified teachers.

The process begins with four or five days of initial training prior to the first day of school where new teachers are instructed in the rudiments of classroom management, first-day procedures, discipline, instructional strategies, and more. Support and training continue, systematically, over a period of two or three years.

The term “induction” is often mistakenly used synonymously with the terms mentoring and orientation. Mentoring is only one component of an induction program. Orientation is another. Mentoring and orientation in and of themselves will do little to aid in the retention of highly qualified new teachers. However, as integral components of a structured induction program, they are valuable. Induction is an ongoing and systematic process that provides assistance, support, information, feedback, coaching, guidance, modeling, and much more. It unfolds in progressive stages, following the teacher’s development over a period of time.

Teacher induction programs provide beginning teachers the support needed during the often difficult transition from preservice education to actual classroom teaching—from students of teaching to teachers of students. Clearly, the research supports not only the success of induction programs but also the importance of developing such programs for all new teachers.

Therefore, the question is no longer whether or not to provide induction, but rather how to develop an induction program, in every school district, that will help to ensure the success and retention of highly qualified teachers in every classroom.