



ILLINOIS

RURAL & SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS STUDY

STUDY OBJECTIVE: To learn more about how school personnel in rural and small school district settings in Illinois are supporting new teachers.

METHODOLOGY: During Phase 2 of the study, follow-up interviews were conducted 1:1 on Zoom. Twenty-three participants who provide support to new teachers through induction and/or mentoring participated in the interviews which ranged from 14-68 minutes with an average of 29 minutes in length.

Interviews were coded by two members of the research team. Coders read each transcript separately and met to reach coder agreement. The finalized codebook was applied to all interviews.

MAIN FINDINGS:

- Variation of Supports
- District Challenges
- New Teachers Challenges

VARIATION OF SUPPORTS

Support systems for new teachers are unique to the district. While 82% of districts in this study report they have a formal program, the definition of formal varies.

Range of Induction

- Assistance with basic logistics
- Days of induction including curriculum support and collaboration with mentors
- Monthly meetings hosted by a new teacher coordinator or district administrator
- Book studies

Variety of Mentor Models

- Variety level partner
- Assigned by administrator
- Paired with district coach
- Assigned informal mentor, “go-to person”
- IEA virtual mentor

Other Types of Support

- Professional Learning Community format not specific to new teachers
- Opportunity to observe other teachers in either the same building, district, or other district
- District professional learning targeting the whole staff

DISTRICT CHALLENGES

Small and rural districts face an array of challenges when trying to support new teachers. Common challenges include: number of mentors, time to meet, smaller budgets, and reduction of applicants.

- Districts reported having only 1-2 teachers per grade level/content area making it difficult to match mentors.
- Districts reported limited or no common time during the school day for mentors and new teachers to meet.
- Mentor induction programs are not always well funded, and it can be difficult to pay mentors.
- Participants reported limited resources and lack of professional learning opportunities specifically geared towards mentors or new teachers.
- Districts are recovering fewer applicants, less quality applicants compared to the past, or unqualified applicants.

“When we’re talking about one content teacher per subject area, the challenges can...exist when you’re trying to connect different classes and different teachers.”

“How do I find the time to get a teacher from one end of the building to work with a teacher on the other end of the building when their schedules don’t necessarily align?”

“When you have less teachers to choose from, it’s more likely that you’re just not going to hit a home run with every hire.”

NEW TEACHERS FACE MANY CHALLENGES

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

- New teachers are provided limited professional learning opportunities designed specifically to address the needs of a beginning teacher such as classroom management and learning the curriculum
- Many struggle with “policies, procedures...that don’t always get told to new teachers.”
- Special education teachers in particular struggle with “lots of rules and procedures.”

“We have a lot of new teachers who are kind of floundering a little because they don’t necessarily have the professional development geared towards new teachers.”

UNDERPREPARED

- Some participants reported that new teachers face a learning curve when leaving a university and entering the profession.
- “You can assume that they’re going to already know this stuff coming out, but they’re not knowing it. So we have to get more specific with it.”
- “There’s so much you don’t know your first year of teaching that a semester of a student teaching does it zero justice.”



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- Participants reported that new teachers may struggle to build relationships with students and communicating with families and staff.
- “I think the biggest challenge...for new teachers is realizing that the academics, although the matter, they don’t matter. Because if you don’t build relationships, I think that’s hard for them to understand that that’s the most important thing.”

“The demands are a lot more as far as knowledge of assessments, of their students, of the SEL components. And our prep programs just don’t have the ability to give them everything they need. There’s a certain level of training and knowledge they need to obtain the kind of on the job training to get them where they are able to fly on their own.”

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SUMMARY

Interview participants generally expressed that induction and mentoring programs are valuable for recruitment and retention purposes and the development of their staff. Some participants feel the state of Illinois should be a systemic money source supporting new teacher initiatives.

“We’re making a financial investment in a new teacher, and we want them to stay in a rural school.”

1 “To retain teachers, we need to provide these services. They need to be **broad, personalized, and consistent**, because if not, we’re going to be a training ground for teachers to go to other districts.”

2 “There’s not enough people coming to the pipeline, and there’s too many people leaving, so as public schools...we’re got to be more systematic...**let’s love them and let’s keep them. Let’s coach them up.**”

3 “One of the challenges is trying to figure out how to hang on to the really good ones. And how we can **support them in a way that helps us get some longevity**...We invest a lot of time and energy and resources into these people and then they just take that information and go somewhere else.”