

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF
STATE-FUNDED INDUCTION AND
MENTORING PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS
FINAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 2009

The following is a summary of the report titled “State-Funded Induction and Mentoring Programs in Illinois Final Report: December 2008.” The data were compiled in the months of October/November 2008, and the report was written in December 2008. During the 2008-2009 school year, forty ISBE funded programs were operating in 204 school districts and in 998 school buildings. These programs served 2,881 beginning teachers (1,759 first-year and 1,122 second-year) and 1,813 mentors. This report represents data from programs from all areas of the state including large urban districts, smaller urban districts, mid-sized districts and rural districts. Names and other information that might reveal individual program identities have been removed from this report in order to preserve confidentiality.

The Illinois General Assembly’s decision to provide state funding for induction and mentoring programs has generated an impressive and unprecedented level of activity within regions and districts that includes, but is not limited to: innovative program development, formative evaluation of program development and impact; networking and sharing resources across groups and communities; and sustained, thoughtful attention to what is meant by program quality, given the variety of contexts in which programs operate. Across all programs there was considerable evidence that the funding received from the state grants has enabled the creation of support structures that are considerably more robust than those that have existed before. In addition, the sustained focus on program documentation and ongoing evaluation (internal and external) provided valuable information for the programs and for learning more about how to assist programs.

The report makes recommendations in six areas:

- Program variation
- Differentiated support
- Program administration
- Networking and communication
- Evaluation and research
- Technical assistance

Program variation – This report documents a range of programs located in widely varying contexts: large urban districts, smaller urban districts, mid-size districts and rural districts. Personnel in districts, regional offices, professional organizations, and universities all might serve as administrative bases for the programs. Programs administered by consortia faced a set of challenges related to working with many different buildings and districts, often with little or no authority to require program participation.

In addition, college- and university-based programs that provided support for alumni as they began teaching reported challenges that related to assisting the beginning teachers who were also participating in a district-based program. Consortia and higher education connections enabled districts to accomplish goals that they would be unable to complete alone, but it is important to understand how to support them in ways that are different from supporting district-based programs.

Some programs were mandatory for new teachers; others were voluntary. Reasons for optional participation by new teachers included uncertainty in the timing and amount of program funding, reluctance by administrators to impose this requirement on all beginning teachers, and variation in the target population served by the grant. Optional participation may represent a weak treatment and, therefore, it may be difficult to build a critical mass of participants within a district or region or to study the impact of the program most effectively.

Recommendation #1: Continue encouraging and selecting state funded programs across varied contexts and with different implementation styles and strategies, and continue the concerted efforts to understand and address the various challenges of these program types.

Recommendation #2: Conduct regional meetings among consortia to identify common specific concerns and suggest strategies for improving training and the delivery of services.

Differentiated support – This report notes that general information (i.e., school policies and procedures, discipline, lesson planning) was necessary and desirable for first-year teachers. Content-specific issues were not frequently mentioned as part of induction and mentoring training. However, professional standards as well as governmental priorities dictated that teaching must focus on student achievement. This focus necessitates content-specific as well as grade-specific induction.

At this point, programs for second-year teachers were less well defined than those for first-year teachers in most programs. Many programs reported that they perceived that second-year teachers were ready to begin systematic reflections on their own practice and to focus more closely on curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy.

The programs served beginning teachers at all grade levels and in many different content areas. Many of the sites were elementary districts or unit districts that include elementary schools. It is possible that there is an over-representation of elementary beginning teacher induction programs, and it is also possible that the programs that work well for elementary schools do not work as well for secondary schools. In addition, programs serve teachers in a number of content areas, and program administrators are concerned that they may not be meeting their needs.

Most of the programs reported that their beginning teachers were graduates of more traditional, university-based teacher education programs, and several urban programs were working with teachers who went through alternative preparation programs. Finally, a number of program coordinators voiced challenges related to meeting the needs of student services staff such as counselors, psychologists, and librarians.

Recommendation #3: Promote the use of the Continuum of Professional Growth

beginning in all pre-service teacher education programs, including alternate route programs.

Recommendation #4: Consider developing requests for proposals that give some preference to programs targeted for secondary teachers and teachers that are in areas such as special education, physical education, art and music education, and foreign language education.

Recommendation # 5: Program developers should begin working together to plan comprehensive and appropriate programs for second-year teachers and for teachers in areas that are typically staffed by few teachers such as special education, physical education, art and music education, and foreign language education.

Program administration – Administrative knowledge, support, and participation were important components throughout many of the funded-program sites narratives. Programs reported that administrators who received induction and mentoring training increased their awareness and understanding of the importance that the induction and mentoring program can have for first-year teachers. They also reported that administrative support assisted with pragmatic issues such as release time and obtaining substitute teachers for observations and conferences.

Current state requirements for an approved program indicate that beginning teachers must be observed three times within a two-year period. Recommendations about minimum expectations for numbers of observations or paired meetings beyond that provided within the state's guidelines cannot be made at this time. There was wide variation among programs regarding quantity of observations and interactions, but there was consistency across most programs regarding lack of methods for assessing the quality of these interactions. Differentiation based on individual need or context is important, but this should occur within a context of known quality. As funded program leaders assess their own programs, they are realizing what types of expectations do and do not work for their mentors and beginning teachers.

While time to meet and observe was included within all programs, many programs required participants to use their planning time to observe. Very few programs planned for regularly scheduled release time for beginning teacher/mentor interactions, and this was least likely to occur in consortium-based programs. The issue of sufficient time to meet and observe was a complicated one. The time out of the classroom would, ideally, be valued by the mentor or the beginning teacher and should not be burdensome. Yet having to plan for a substitute teacher on a regular basis was often an additional stressor as well as a costly endeavor. Arranging predetermined, regularly scheduled time within the school day required strong cooperation from building administrators.

Recommendation #6: Require programs that prepare administrators to include content on teacher development in general and on induction and mentoring specifically.

Recommendation #7: Develop guidelines, based on the program standards that make recommendations for programs in areas such as classroom observations by mentors, observations of other teachers by new teachers, administrator training, etc.

Recommendation #8: Develop guidelines for school boards and districts that enable

them to create time for mentors and new teachers to work together and provide sufficient funding to allow for these guidelines to be implemented, regardless of district size.

Networking and communication – Programs reported that communication among program coordinators and administrators were important in establishing liaisons with boards of education and the general public.

Exemplary practices noted in this report include collaboration among various stakeholders. Collaboration was especially important for consortia that serve a number of schools/districts and create induction and mentoring training relevant to all. Considerations include time schedules, travel distances, and differing levels of administrative involvement.

Consortium-based programs needed the opportunity to network with other consortium-based programs on a regular basis to learn from and problem solve with one another. Single-district programs had similar needs when it comes to coordination across multiple buildings and varied central office departments.

Recommendation #9: Develop structures and templates that programs can adapt to meet their own communication needs such as chats and discussion boards, visits by boards of education, the public, and members of the local media, and websites and newsletters.

Recommendation #10: Encourage all programs, regardless of size, to create and utilize a leadership team representative of all stakeholder groups impacted by the induction program.

Evaluation and research – The programs reported that predictable data collection cycles would be advantageous because specific dates and data requirements could be established and programs would be able to plan ahead. Some programs noted that it was difficult to procure some of the requested information once the school year had begun.

Data collection to this point has consisted largely of information self-reports by program participants. Rarely do these data collection cycles include administrators' perspectives unless the program coordinator is also a district or building administrator.

Recommendation #11: Collect data from administrators regarding their roles in induction and mentoring and how best to increase further participation and effectiveness in working with beginning teachers and mentors.

Recommendation #12: Coordinate internal (i.e., CDEs) and external (i.e., SRI surveys) data collection and analysis. Set and publicize regular data collection cycles so that all participants understand the information required and the deadlines established. This cycle can be repeated from year to year.

Recommendation #13: Create case studies that provide an external investigation and evaluation of promising practices within and across the funded programs.

Technical assistance – Program leadership needed greater access to the tools and knowledge of how to enable continuous growth for programs and individuals, particularly those activities that lead to exemplary practices addressing all the Illinois Standards for Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs. This included instruments that better assess the quality and the impact of mentor/beginning teacher observations and other interactions, program impact on retention, beginning teacher impact on student learning and well-being, and the cost-effectiveness of induction and mentoring efforts.

Recommendation #14: Develop a system of statewide technical assistance to provide multiple opportunities for both face-to-face and electronic networking and provide a centralized location of easily accessible, non-proprietary resources and tools for program implementation and assessment that are available to all programs.

Final recommendation – The final recommendation is one that impacts all of the recommendations listed above and the quality of teaching across the state.

Recommendation #15: Establish a stable and dependable funding cycle for programs that enables all programs to continue the progress over the past three years and to monitor that progress.