

Supporting New Teachers

In February 2011, the second iteration of the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Initiative (TELL Colorado) was conducted. Nearly 30,000 educators (47 percent) from across the state gave their perceptions of the teaching and learning conditions they work in to examine whether they have the kind of supportive school environments necessary for enabling teachers and students to be successful.

A total of 3,379 survey respondents (12 percent) of are teachers in their first three years in the profession, with nearly one thousand (987) in their first year of teaching. Understanding beginning teacher perceptions of their conditions and induction support has critical implications for the effectiveness of novice educators as:

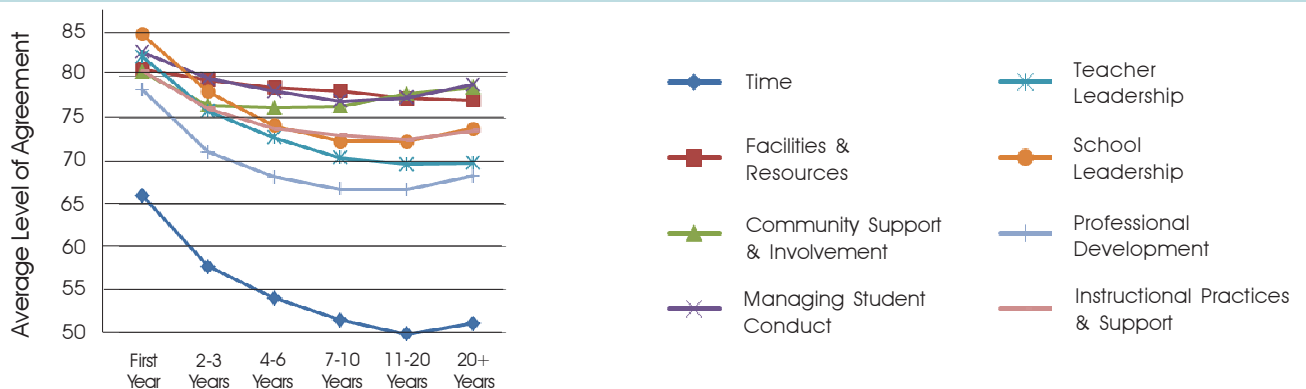
- Beginning teachers need additional supports to enable them to learn and refine best teaching practices, classroom management, lesson planning, and acclimate to the school community. When adequate supports are in place for beginning teachers, they have the best chance of delivering high quality instruction and expediting pedagogical mastery.

- Research has shown that teaching conditions significantly affect teacher turnover. In particular, Leadership within elementary schools, teachers' role in decision making at the middle school level, and Facilities and Resources in high schools are statistically significant in explaining teacher retention (Hirsch and Church, 2009). In an educational environment where teacher attrition is high and teachers new to the profession are less inclined to view teaching as a life-long career, the profession can ill afford to lose its newest members from a lack of adequate supports.

Beginning Teachers Are More Positive About Their Teaching Environment

Colorado's newest educators are more likely to agree that they have positive teaching conditions. An examination of average agreement to the questions in each area assessed on the TELL Colorado Survey shows that beginning teachers—including all teachers in their first three years—are more likely to report key conditions are in place than their veteran colleagues (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE LEVEL OF AGREEMENT BY SURVEY AREA ACROSS EXPERIENCE LEVELS



The greatest differences between beginning teachers and veteran teachers is in the area where educators report the greatest challenges, time to plan, collaborate and teach.

- More than six out of 10 beginning teachers (62 percent) agree that efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine administrative paperwork teachers are required to do compared to about half (50 percent) of veteran teachers.
- More than six out of 10 teachers in their first three years (61 percent) report that teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students compared to about half (51 percent) of veteran teachers.
- Two-thirds of beginning teachers (67 percent) agree that they have reasonable class sizes compared to almost six out of 10 veteran teachers (58 percent).
- More beginning teachers are in agreement than their veteran colleagues that teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues (63 percent versus 55 percent) and that the non-instructional time provided for teachers in their school is sufficient (54 percent versus 48 percent).

Novice teachers are more positive about professional development opportunities and quality. While these

perceptions may be driven by a greater need for support and more targeted emphasis on newer teachers in districts, there are significant differences in perception about availability and impact.

- Beginning teachers are more likely to report sufficient resources for teacher professional development than veterans (74 percent agree compared to 67 percent).
- More than half of beginning teachers (51 percent) report that professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers compared to about four out of 10 veterans (44 percent).
- More than four-fifths (82 percent) agree that their professional development enhances teachers' abilities to help improve student learning compared to about three-quarters of veteran teachers (76 percent).

In every area but one, beginning teachers report a greater need for additional professional development opportunities than veteran teachers (Table 1). Beginning teachers report needing additional support in the areas of classroom management, teaching methods, and differentiating instruction than their veteran colleagues. Not surprisingly, novice teachers are more comfortable with their knowledge and skills in integrating technology.

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS REPORTING A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Professional Development Area			
	<i>Beginning Teachers*</i>	<i>Veteran Teachers**</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Classroom Management Techniques	49.5	25.3	24.2
Methods of teaching	54.4	36.3	18.1
Reading Strategies	57.6	40.9	16.7
Special Education (students with disabilities)	69.3	54.0	15.3
Differentiating Instruction	69.5	54.6	14.9
English Language Learners	59.8	45.6	14.2
Student assessment	49.1	35.7	13.4
Special Education (gifted and talented)	68.3	55.2	13.1
Data Gathering, Management and Use	53.3	45.1	8.2
Closing the Achievement Gap	69.6	62.1	7.4
Your Content Area	40.1	33.7	6.4
Using Technology in Classroom Instruction	54.8	66.8	-12.0

* Beginning teachers are defined as those teachers who indicated having three or less years of experience in the classroom.
 ** Veteran teachers are defined as those teachers who indicated having more than three years of experience in the classroom.

Beginning teachers also report more positive conditions related to teacher and school leadership. As a group, they are more inclined to agree that they are empowered to make decisions, are included in decision-making processes, and work in trusting environments than their veteran colleagues. Consider these differences:

- More than two-thirds of beginning teachers (68 percent) report that teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in this school compared to six out of 10 veteran teachers (60 percent).
- Beginning teachers are seven percent more in agreement than veteran teachers that teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues (80 percent versus 73 percent), that the faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems (70 percent versus 63 percent), and that teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction (82 percent versus 75 percent).
- Seven out of 10 beginning teachers (70 percent) agree that teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them compared to six out of 10 veteran teachers (61 percent).
- Eight out of 10 beginning teachers (80 percent) agree that teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching compared to less than three-quarters of their veteran colleagues (73 percent).

Ideally, induction can build upon and foster new teachers' positive perceptions of supportive teaching conditions while also providing the additional support new teachers identify as necessary. However, it appears that not all beginning educators are receiving the support they need.

Induction Support Does Not Reach All New Educators, and For Many It Is Ineffective

Of the 3,379 beginning teachers who responded to the survey across Colorado, more than one out of every five (654 or 22 percent) were never assigned a mentor. Of those new teachers who were assigned a mentor, many do not receive the kinds of supports that research demonstrates is necessary to improve performance and keep them in the profession (Table 2).

- Nearly three out of 10 beginning teachers *never* analyzed student work (29 percent), aligned their lessons with state or local curriculum (29 percent), or reviewed results of students' assessment (28 percent) with their assigned mentor.
- More than one quarter of those beginning teachers who did receive mentoring support *never* met with them to develop lesson plans (26 percent) or were observed by their mentor (25 percent).

TABLE 2. FREQUENCY OF MENTORING ACTIVITIES REPORTED BY NEW TEACHERS

Mentoring Activity	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes*</i>	<i>At Least Once Per Week</i>
Observing My Mentor's Teaching	45.4	49.0	5.6
Analyzing Student Work	28.7	54.5	16.7
Aligning My Lesson Planning With the State Curriculum and Local Curriculum	28.6	52.6	18.8
Reviewing Results of Students' Assessments	27.7	57.1	15.2
Developing Lesson Plans	26.1	51.3	22.6
Being Observed Teaching by My Mentor	24.8	65.3	9.9
Reflecting on the Effectiveness of My Teaching Together	14.7	60.7	24.6
Addressing Student or Classroom Behavioral Issues	11.5	63.0	25.6

* The "sometimes" category includes responses ranging from "less than once per month" to "several times per month."

Furthermore, even the beginning teachers who were fortunate enough to be assigned a mentor and meet with them, often experienced variable quality in support (Table 3)

- Only about half of supported beginning teachers report their mentor was effective in providing emotional support (54 percent).
- About four out of 10 new teachers acknowledged the support they received addressing instructional strategies (43 percent) and classroom management strategies (41 percent) strongly influenced their practice.
- About one-third of new teachers indicate the support they received in complying with policies (37 percent), collaborative work (35 percent), and creating a supportive, equitable classroom (35 percent) was helpful.

Many of the areas where beginning teachers indicate that the support they receive is not effective are also areas they report needing additional support.

- While less than one third of new teachers agree that the support they receive in the area of differentiating instruction strongly influences their practice, almost seven out of 10 (70 percent) report a need for additional professional development in this area.

- Three out of 10 (31 percent) new teachers report that mentors were supportive in using data, and more than half (53 percent) indicate that they need further professional development opportunities in this area.

Despite these limitations in mentoring delivery and effectiveness, beginning teachers are generally positive about their overall mentoring support, in large part because they are in such need for support. More than three-quarters of beginning teachers (79 percent) who received a mentor report that the support they received improved their instructional practice. Eight out of 10 (80 percent) agree that the support their mentor provides has helped them to impact their students' learning. More than two-thirds of beginning teachers (69 percent) report that the additional support they receive as a beginning teacher has been important in their decision to continue teaching at their school.

Impact of Mentoring

The support received by new teachers, be it mentoring or other assistance such as an orientation, common planning time, seminars specifically for new teachers, etc., appear to have an impact on new teachers' employment plans (Table 4). New teachers who want to remain working in their current school are significantly more likely to have received support than those who want to remain teaching, but move to another school.

TABLE 3. PERCENT OF BEGINNING TEACHERS INDICATING THAT MENTOR SUPPORT HELPED "QUITE A BIT" OR "A GREAT DEAL"

Mentor Provided Support	<i>Quite a Bit/A great Deal</i>
Providing emotional support	53.6
Instructional strategies	43.1
Classroom management strategies	41.0
Complying with policies and procedures	37.3
Working collaboratively with other teachers at my school	35.4
Creating a supportive, equitable classroom where differences are valued	34.5
Differentiating instruction based upon individual student needs and characteristics	34.4
Completing administrative paperwork	33.2
Subject matter I teach	32.6
Using data to identify student needs	31.2
Connecting with key resource professionals (e.g., coaches, counselors, etc.)	30.2
Enlisting the help of family members, parents and/or guardians	22.0

TABLE 4. NEW TEACHER SUPPORT BY IMMEDIATE FUTURE EMPLOYMENT PLANS

New Teacher Support Offered	Percent Indicating They Received Support	
	<i>Stayers</i>	<i>Movers</i>
Orientation for new teachers	88.8	81.3
Regular communication with principals, other administrator or department chair	82.1	50.9
Formally assigned mentor	80.3	71.2
Seminars specifically designed for new teachers	76.4	59.2
Access to professional learning communities where I could discuss concerns with other teacher(s)	73.1	51.8
Common planning time with other teachers	69.5	56.9
Release time to observe other teachers	55.0	37.9
Formal time to meet with mentor during school hours	48.6	30.2
Other	47.7	28.3
Reduced workload	15.7	7.8

- Teachers wanting to stay in their current position are much more likely to report that they are in regular communication with their principal or other administrators (82 percent versus 51 percent) and have access to professional learning communities (73 percent versus 52 percent) than those who want to remain teaching but move to another school.
- Three-quarters of stayers (76 percent) were provided seminars specifically designed for new teachers compared to a little over half of movers (59 percent).
- Only 10 percent of new teachers wanting to stay in their current position received no additional support, versus 24 percent of movers.

Conclusion

Colorado has much to be proud of regarding the support of its beginning teachers. More than eight out of 10 (80 percent) beginning teachers in their first three years of

teaching who participated in this survey indicate that they want to remain teaching at their school in the immediate future. A comparison of beginning teacher survey results with their veteran teacher colleagues shows that beginning teachers are more positive about teaching conditions in their school and more likely to report that school leadership is making efforts to support them than experienced teachers.

An examination of induction across Colorado shows that many new teachers are not mentored, and those who are receive infrequent and often ineffective support. With more than one out of five beginning teachers not assigned a mentor, many issues that are critical to beginning teacher development and support are being left to chance. Efforts to systemically improve the quality of and access to mentoring support can help to enhance and expedite the mastery of pedagogical skill in Colorado's newest teachers. Providing high quality supports gives beginning teachers the opportunity to produce their best work and gives students the best chance to succeed.

About the New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center is a national organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. NTC strengthens school communities through proven mentoring and professional development programs, online learning environments, policy advocacy, and research. Since 1998, the NTC has served over 49,000 teachers, 5,000 mentors, and touched millions of students across America.



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