

# NTC Executive Summary

NEW TEACHER CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

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## Lessons Learned in New York City:

### Understanding New York City's \$36 Million Induction Initiative

*Policy Implications for Local, State and  
National Educational Leaders*

#### Launching the Mentoring Program

There is a growing recognition that recurring teacher shortages and recruitment problems in public schools are largely a function of teacher retention issues. With nearly half of new teachers leaving within their first few years on the job, public schools, especially in large urban settings, have had difficulty in providing and maintaining high quality teachers for every child. New York City is one of the first large urban school districts to address this issue through large-scale systemic reform of new teacher supports. Using many of the primary components of the model developed by the New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of California, Santa Cruz, the NYC Department of Education (DoE) and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) have partnered to design and implement a rigorous, instruction-based mentoring program that substantively changes the way new teachers are supported, and builds on the strengths and knowledge of some of the system's most talented educators. This report provides the first evidence-based insights into the successes and challenges of program implementation and articulates policy implications for local, state, and national induction policy efforts.

**Draft** *(Do not distribute or quote)*

## Background: NYC’s Decision to Invest \$36 Million in Teacher Mentoring

In 2004, the State of New York Board of Regents made a modification to the teacher certification requirement that would change the landscape of education in the State. The new regulations stipulated that before receiving their full teaching credential, all new teachers with less than one year’s teaching experience in New York State must receive a quality mentoring experience in their first year of teaching. The State emphasized the need to move away from historical buddy systems to new *high quality*<sup>1</sup> programs using best practice in supporting new teacher development. These regulations—although not accompanied with new funding—have had a tremendous impact on induction programs throughout the State, with record numbers of districts committing new local dollars to sophisticated programs incorporating best practice in mentoring. However, New York City has recently taken center stage in terms of developing an ambitious, and in many ways exceptional, mentoring program.

The new State regulations encouraged NYC DoE leaders to take a closer look at the attrition rates of their new teachers. Upon this review, they discovered that not only was the City losing a significant chunk of their new teacher cohort every year, but that the fiscal costs related to attrition were draining the human resources budget, with potentially millions of dollars lost each year in recruitment costs alone. Add on the emerging research showing the devastating impact that persistent teacher turnover has on often the most vulnerable students and DoE leaders were prepared to take action. Building on

the evidence that shows *high quality* mentoring programs are effective in reducing attrition and raising the quality of teaching in the first few years, the DoE decided to partner with the NTC to invest in one of the most rigorous, comprehensive induction models available.

With a \$36 million price tag<sup>2</sup>, NYC leadership at the city and school level needed to build the political will within and outside the system to enable funds to be reallocated toward the program. In an unprecedented collaborative effort between the Mayor of New York City, the Chancellor of the NYC public schools and the powerful NYC teachers union (United Federation of Teachers), the parties came together to educate the public and the media on the urgency of the problem around new teacher attrition, and the critical link between early development of our teachers and achievement of our most vulnerable students. With top political leadership engaged, (and some additional financial support from the State and the City) the NYC DoE was able to achieve their goal, embarking on possibly the largest, most aggressive overhaul of new teacher support systems in education today.

<sup>1</sup> The difference between *high quality*, instructionally rigorous programs and traditional buddy systems must be strongly emphasized. A description of *high quality* mentoring program components (relative to traditional/poor quality mentoring programs) can be found in Appendix A on page 6.

<sup>2</sup> Salaries for fully released teachers constitute the bulk of program expenditures.

# Policy Implications for Local/District, State and National Education Leaders

## *Lessons from the NYC Mentoring Initiative*

Research is beginning to emerge on the effects of induction on educator development and systems change. While new induction policies at the state and local level are being enacted all over the country, there is still a dearth of information on how to execute induction programs in ways that ensure success at the ground level, especially in large urban

settings. The following lessons learned from NYC's implementation effort should create one framework by which policy makers, district leaders, and school change advocates can better inform their own understanding of how to design, develop, and implement effective mentoring programs, from policy to the classroom.

### **Lesson 1: Build political will for reform of induction systems.**

Efforts to change support for new teachers in meaningful ways require backing from state, local, and top-level district leaders. When exploring policies and programs around induction, consider strategies that will help policy makers and educational leaders build the political will for reform:

- Require districts to review new teacher attrition rates and to use research-based methods to assess costs associated with teacher turnover.
- Disseminate research and information to policy makers and district leaders about the benefits of *high quality* induction programs in terms of teacher retention gains, impact on student achievement, and actual cost savings to districts.
- Explore credentialing processes and policies (incorporating support from state and city funding streams) that ensure all new teachers have access to a *high quality* mentoring experience.

### **Lesson 2: Ensure all mentoring programs develop and maintain a *high quality* selection process.**

The most critical aspect of any successful mentoring program is ensuring that the mentors selected to participate in the program are of exceptional quality. It is imperative that districts implement a rigorous and thorough selection process, along with structures to support that process. NYC leaders developed, or are developing, a series of structures which enable only 'cream of the crop' mentors to be selected. Some of these structures include:

- Rigorous selection criteria with accompanying rubrics
- Selection committee comprised of experienced instructional leaders
- Aggressive mentor recruitment campaign
- Collaboration with the teachers union
- Triangulation of data sources on candidate backgrounds
- Sufficient time for thorough candidate follow-up
- Communication with principals on the need for and benefits of recommending their most talented educators

### Lesson 3: Identify and support successful program standards.

While there are many high quality mentoring programs in the country, the evidence cited in this report suggests that certain program elements are crucial to success. Policy makers and district leaders, especially in other large urban settings, may want to build on the following design elements (most of which are currently incorporated in, or are being considered for, NYC's program):

- Allow mentors to be released full-time from their regular teaching duties.
- Deploy mentors strategically across multiple school sites, not to exceed a maximum of four schools.
- Ensure an interaction time between mentors and teachers of 1.25 to 2.5 hours per week. This can be accomplished through low teacher-mentor ratios and/or creative scheduling<sup>3</sup>.
- Include at least two years of induction for beginning teachers<sup>4</sup>.
- Support the adoption/integration of uniform, research-based teaching standards and other teacher development tools across the educational community.

### Lesson 4: Align mentoring program and general induction activities with district and regional programs related to teacher development.

Every school district across the nation has numerous initiatives, projects, and activities happening simultaneously. It is critical to ensure that the mentoring program is connected to all major instructional programs and aligned with all facets of the system. Because of its size (approx. 1.2 million children and 80,000 teachers), New York City represents a challenging case study in developing alignment across the entire school community. The following suggestions based on NYC's experience may therefore be helpful in ensuring alignment in other educational communities.

Early on, develop strategies with strong multi-stakeholder support (teachers, mentors, principals, program directors, central staff, central leadership, etc.) that result in:

- Opportunities that enable all staff working with new teachers (i.e. mentors, coaches, specialists, department heads, administrators, etc.) to share information, learn from one another, and align resources (without breaching confidentiality with the new teacher) so that support strategies complement, and do not conflict with, one another.
- Regular, ongoing conversations with university-based schools of education and alternative certification programs that move towards integrating a common set of *high quality* teaching standards to help to bridge the gap between what is learned in pre-service and the classroom.
- A systemic communications plan that articulates the goals, structures and benefits of the mentoring program to administrators at the school, regional, and district level.

<sup>3</sup> NTC strongly recommends a ratio of no more than 15 teachers per mentor.

<sup>4</sup> One research study conducted by the NTC (M. Strong et al, 2005) shows that maintaining a ratio of no more than 15:1 in both years may significantly improve teacher ability to foster student gains.

## Lesson 5: Address systemic and infrastructure issues that impact new teachers.

New York City public schools experience a number of educational challenges that mirror those of almost any large urban district. One of the most common and yet daunting of these challenges involves poor infrastructure supports, such as disconnected and insufficient data systems. Other systemic issues, such as new teacher workload and suburban flight, speak to more subtle practices within most educational settings that need to be addressed to realize the full impact of *high quality* mentoring. Policy and district leaders should therefore be encouraged to:

- a. Ensure that sufficient data/systems and infrastructure supports are developed and consistent across state and local sources.
  - Develop a consensus on the definition of new teachers who are eligible for mentoring prior to program implementation and communicate that definition across all levels of the education community.
  - Ensure that data systems can identify new teachers based on the criteria and definitions articulated.
  - Begin the process of aligning state and local teacher databases to enable sophisticated levels of cross-referencing.
- b. Initiate dialogue with multiple stakeholders to begin addressing regular school practices that thwart new teacher success in urban settings.
  - Identify state and private resources to update district databases and allow for more comprehensive collection of teacher retention data.
  - Identify incentives that will slow the practice of ‘new teacher hazing,’<sup>5</sup> while not infringing upon veteran teacher rights and expectations.
  - Explore avenues (i.e. creative scheduling or new funding streams) to decrease first year teacher workloads.
  - Restructure timelines for early teacher hiring and placement, and ensure teachers in shortage areas are the first to be placed.
  - Address resource inequities between suburban and urban school systems<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> New teacher hazing describes the practice of giving new teachers classrooms with the most challenging students, the least resources, and other assigned duties that are typically avoided by more senior educators.

<sup>6</sup> A recent lawsuit (*CFE versus State of New York*) has established that the funding formulas in NY State are inequitable, and has mandated that significant dollars be allocated to NYC to compensate for the inequity. The case is currently under appeal.

## Lesson 6: Leverage systems change by building on mentor skills, knowledge, and experience.

Many DoE and mentoring program leaders are viewing mentors not only as supports for new teachers, but as assets to the DoE's interest in reshaping education in New York City. The DoE is capitalizing on mentors' instructional expertise, training in new teacher development, and experience in establishing collaborative norms within schools to explore ways to facilitate positive systems change. Policy makers and other district leaders may benefit from a few of New York City's emerging ideas in this area, which include:

- Sharing mentor best practice in identifying and developing *high quality* instruction with other members of the school and district community.
- Encouraging mentors to participate in professional development initiatives to establish quality, consistency and alignment across all in-service (and, where possible, pre-service) strategies.
- Creating structures that support career pathways for mentors into school and district leadership roles.
- Empowering mentors to advocate for new teachers and share best practices in meeting new teacher needs.



## APPENDIX A

# Mentor Quality Checklist

What <i>high quality</i> mentoring IS	What <i>high quality</i> mentoring is NOT
<p><b>Rigorous mentor selection based on qualities of an effective mentor</b> Qualities may include: evidence of outstanding teaching practice; strong intrapersonal skills; experience with adult learners; respect of peers; current knowledge of professional development; etc.</p>	<p><b>Choosing mentors based on seniority or ‘who is available’</b> Without rigorous selection, mentors may not have the capacity to engage in meaningful interactions with new teachers, or may perpetuate mediocre or poor teaching practice.</p>
<p><b>Sanctioned time for mentor-teacher interactions</b> NTC recommends releasing teachers full time so they can focus entirely on new teacher development. Mentors and new teachers should have at least 1.25 to 2.5 hours per week for interactions. That time should be protected by teachers and administrators.</p>	<p><b>Meetings happen occasionally or ‘whenever the mentor and teacher are available’</b> Often both parties are so busy that meeting time gets relegated down the list of priorities. The brief meetings that do occur are typically insufficient for fostering real growth.</p>
<p><b>Intensive and specific guidance moving teaching practice forward, while also providing elements of emotional/logistical support</b> Focusing on specific areas for instructional growth help teachers know concretely how to improve. Example: <i>“Let’s talk about what strategies will help you address the concern you had about reaching your struggling English Language Learner students.”</i></p>	<p><b>Non-specific, emotional/logistical support alone</b> Emotional support is nice, but alone does little to improve teacher practice. Without specific instructional feedback, ‘feel good’ mentoring often prevails. Example: <i>“You’re doing a great job, Jane. Keep it up!”</i></p>
<p><b>Ongoing professional development for mentors</b> Effective teachers don’t automatically know what it is about their teaching that is effective. Many mentors are also surprised to find that conveying knowledge to students is not the same as conveying knowledge to adults. <i>High quality</i> and ongoing training is needed to help mentors develop the skills to identify and translate the elements of effective teaching to new teachers.</p>	<p><b>No training for mentors</b> Mentors sometimes think their job is to clone themselves. Without training, these mentors will default to the ‘watch me and learn’ strategy that too often fails to develop the skills or confidence teachers need to succeed. Effective mentoring provides collaborative guidance that helps new teachers ask the right questions and begin to take responsibility for finding answers.</p>
<p><b>Documentation and evidence of teacher progress</b> Just like student learning, new teacher learning should be data-driven. To be effective, feedback to new teachers must be grounded in evidence about their practice. Tools to collect data about various components of their classroom practice, and documentation of all mentoring conversations ensures a structure for focusing on instructional and continual growth.</p>	<p><b>Informal/non-evidenced based feedback</b> Program rigor may be compromised when interactions are based on informal conversation and ‘off-the-cuff’ remarks. Without structure and evidence around new teacher practice, interactions may lead to ‘feel-good’ mentoring that does not result in improved teaching practice.</p>
<p><b>Multi-year mentoring</b> Mentoring should be intensive and ongoing (for at least two years) to move teacher practice forward in ways that help all students thrive. NTC and others<sup>6</sup> suggest that most deep learning about instruction (through mentoring) happens in teachers’ second and third year in the classroom.</p>	<p><b>Mentoring for first year teachers only</b> One year mentoring programs are great at providing the support first year teachers need to survive, but they are not sufficient to help teachers reach their optimum level of effectiveness.</p>



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