

CHAPTER 5. SUPPORTING BEGINNING TEACHERS THROUGH THE CRITICAL FIRST YEARS

STATE POLICY

What is the state doing to support new teachers?

- California has a comprehensive policy to support new teachers. It requires that teachers go through a formal induction experience to receive a clear credential, has created standards to guide such programs and provides funds to support them, has supported model induction programs throughout the state, and has brought together the lessons from many of those models in the CFASST system.

DISTRICT SUPPORT

How do districts support new teachers?

- District induction programs traditionally have ranged from quick orientation workshops to full-time support providers working with new teachers throughout the school year.
- With the growth of state support for teacher induction, local programs are in a period of flux as they scale up, become more formalized, and begin requiring participation.
- A core issue for local programs is whether to build teams of full-time support providers for new teachers or to use a revolving group of veteran teachers who maintain their own classrooms.

NATURE AND QUALITY OF INDUCTION SUPPORT

What does induction support look like, and does it help teachers?

- Most beginning teachers (92%) receive some kind of induction support; the most common support involves attendance at workshops.
- For many teachers (50% to 68%), induction support includes opportunities to observe, be observed, and collaborate with their peers and mentors. Yet such experiences are infrequent, typically not taking place on a regular basis.
- Teachers who have opportunities for peer observation, who are formally assigned mentors, and who engage with mentors in frequent support activities are uniformly more likely to report those experiences as effective.

CHALLENGES OF BTSA SCALE-UP

- What districts can do to support new teachers depends largely on the proportion of new teachers in the local workforce.
- Few districts and no large urban districts we studied have the capacity, in terms of support providers or of professionals to help the support providers, to take the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) to scale.
- Districts have yet to determine how BTSA, and especially the CFASST system, fits into other efforts to foster adult learning in their schools.

Supporting teachers as they first enter the profession is a core strategy for building and retaining a high-quality teaching workforce. It is during teachers' first years in the profession that they learn to meld their schooled knowledge with the everyday practice of teaching. In doing so, they develop instructional strategies and management approaches that form the basis of their practice through the remainder of their careers. It is also during this induction period that teachers make the decision whether or not to continue to pursue teaching as a career. Many teachers choose not to continue. Attrition rates among new teachers in California are extremely high. It is estimated that 30% of new teachers leave the profession within their first 3 years of service; figures go as high as 50% in certain parts of the state.¹

Careful attention and support given to teachers during their first years of teaching can reduce attrition rates and enhance teachers' performance. Formal induction programs that provide systematic and sustained assistance in the form of guidance from experienced teachers, additional training, and individualized feedback can produce the long-term benefits of reducing frustration, isolation, burnout, and ultimately attrition.² With regular support from more-expert mentor teachers that focuses on classroom practice, beginning teachers are more likely to transition from a focus on discipline and classroom management concerns to concerns about teaching and learning.³

In this chapter, we begin our examination of teacher learning opportunities in California with four questions: What is the state doing to support new teachers during the crucial first year? What do districts do to support new teachers? What kind and how much support do new teachers receive? What is the quality and impact of that support? We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the issues involved in scaling up induction support to all new teachers in the state.

State Policy in Support of New Teachers

Policy-makers in California have long recognized the need to support beginning teachers. For more than a decade, the state has funded efforts to help teachers through the induction period. The state's initial effort was an extensive pilot study known as the California New Teacher Project (CNTTP). The CNTTP tested alternative models of providing support for beginning teachers by funding local pilot projects throughout the state. Findings from the CNTTP indicated that effective induction programs could reduce attrition among first- and second-year teachers by two-thirds. One leading site in Santa Cruz has found that close to 90% of its participants are still in teaching 7 years later.⁴ The CNTTP also found that retention rates improved for minority teachers and teachers working in urban and rural areas. Moreover, new

teachers who participated in induction programs reportedly developed skills to plan complex and challenging instructional activities.⁵

On the basis of findings from the CNTP, guidelines for supporting beginning teachers were developed, and the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) was authorized by SB 1422 in 1992. SB 1422 called for “the gradual phase-in of support and assessment for all beginning teachers in California.”⁶ The state has been working toward this goal: following 4 years of slow growth, the BTSA budget was nearly quadrupled in 1998-99 to bring the program “to scale,” that is, to provide sufficient resources for all new teachers to receive support (Table 5-1). In addition, SB 2042 (1998) requires that teachers beginning their employment in school year 1999-2000 go through some formal induction experience to receive a clear credential.

**Table 5-1
BTSA Funding and Participant History**

Year	Funding	Number of Programs	Estimated Number of New Teachers Supported
1992-93	\$4.9 million	15	1,100
1993-94	\$4.8 million	30	2,300
1994-95	\$5.5 million	30	1,900
1995-96	\$5.5 million	29	1,900
1996-97	\$7.5 million	32	2,000
1997-98	\$17.5 million	73	5,500
1998-99	\$67.8 million	83	12,410
1999-00*	\$72.0 million	150	23,500

Sources: Mitchell et al. (1997); Bartell and Ownby (1994); Governor's Office of Child Development and Education (May 1998); Wright (1998).⁷

*Figures for 1999-2000 are estimates.

Standards and Assessment in Support of New Teachers

BTSA has been an integral part of the development of standards to guide both the teaching profession and programs that support new teachers. The bill that established BTSA, SB 1422, also called for the creation of standards for beginning teachers' knowledge and professional skills, and the establishment of standards for programs that support new teachers. The resulting documents are the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)* and *Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Programs* (or BTSA

Program Standards). Interestingly, what were originally intended to be standards for beginning teachers evolved into standards that are descriptive of *all* exemplary teachers. AB 1266 (1997) requires that BTSA grants go to local programs that foster the skills called for in the CSTP.

AB 1266 also requires that BTSA devise a way to assess beginning teachers that is aligned with the standards set out in the CSTP. The legislation states that BTSA must “establish an effective, coherent system of performance assessments that are based on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession...” In response to this directive, the BTSA Interagency Task Force formed a design team that developed the California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST). This comprehensive assessment process integrates the use of formative assessment tools with new teacher support and training for support providers. Local BTSA programs are supposed to use CFASST unless they have a comparable local assessment instrument. Finally, the state has sponsored a *Handbook for BTSA Formal Program Review* that is meant to be used as a tool in both self-reviews and external reviews of BTSA programs.

The Evolving Mentor Teacher Program

As BTSA has grown, a key source of support providers for novice teachers has been the ranks of the California Mentor Teacher Program (CMTP). The CMTP was established by the Hughes-Hart Educational Reform Act of 1983 (SB 813) with the primary purpose of encouraging exemplary teachers to stay in the classroom by providing them additional compensation (\$4,000 per year), as well as additional professional opportunities.⁸

Historically, the CMTP was funded at a much higher level than BTSA, rising from \$67 million in 1990-91 to \$80 million in 1998-99. Although no statewide figures exist, it is widely reported that many of the 11,000 CMTP teachers have served as support providers to teachers in BTSA.⁹ In many districts, the two programs are coordinated to ensure a higher level of service for novice teachers.

In the 1999 special session of the legislature, AB1X 1 essentially eliminated the California Mentor Teacher Program—making it inoperative in July 2001 and repealing it as of January 2002. The legislation replaces the CMTP with the California Peer Assistance and Review Program for Teachers (PAR)—a peer review and assistance program for veteran teachers. The law does clearly state, however, that the primary function of a mentor is to provide “guidance and assistance to new teachers” and makes funds available under the statute (which includes those funds previously allocated to the CMTP) to be used in support of BTSA. Although PAR is not yet in place in districts, the legislative language, combined with additional funds allocated for

PAR, makes it likely that the new law will not result in the diversion of mentor teachers away from supporting novice teachers.

Issues in Understanding State Induction Support

Taken together, these various initiatives create the potential for a coherent system of support for novice teachers. California requires that teachers go through a formal induction experience to receive a clear credential, has created standards to guide such programs and provides funds to support them, has supported model induction programs throughout the state, and has brought together the lessons from many of those models in the CFASST system. Justifiably, California's support for induction is held up nationally as a systemic approach to supporting new teachers.¹⁰

Yet it is too soon to tell exactly how these recent policy changes will interact at the district and school levels. Full funding for induction has been in place for only one school year, the requirement that all new teachers participate is being phased in, and the future impact of PAR is unknown. Data from both the statewide teacher survey and the case studies of local systems of teacher development provide a portrait of a system in flux. Our data were collected during the period of BTSA scale-up: survey data generally refer to teachers' experiences in school year 1997-98, whereas the case study data come from school year 1998-99. Although the induction landscape continues to evolve, our findings provide insights into issues associated with the expansion of BTSA. We turn to these findings next.

District Induction Support

Given the rapid growth in state support for new teachers, district induction programs are evolving, growing, and becoming more formalized. At this point, the statewide picture is one of wide variation across districts in the degree and nature of support. This variation reflects in part the state tradition, from the very beginning of the California New Teacher Project, to encourage locally designed programs. As a result, early induction efforts, whether funded by the state or not, varied widely in how—and in how much—beginning teachers were supported. Local programs varied from quick orientation workshops to full-time support providers working with new teachers throughout the school year. In many districts, of course, induction also included informal relationships among individual teachers at the school site. The composition of the support cadre varied across districts, as well, with some opting for full-time support providers and others for part-time mentors.

The typical district induction program, pre-BTSA scale-up, combined some kind of formal district orientation, formal mentor support for a limited number of beginning teachers, and informal and ad hoc support for other teachers through the school year. For example, Selma Unified has long held a new teacher workshop for a few days at the beginning of each school year, which introduces new teachers to the profession and then gives them some pointers on classroom management.

Santa Monica similarly has had a district orientation. Since 1997-98, the district also has assigned formal mentors to most school buildings. District funds are used to hire substitutes so teachers can observe others' classrooms and mentors can observe new teachers in action. New teachers are also welcome to participate in teacher inquiry groups, Santa Monica's primary professional development vehicle. Although the inquiry groups do not necessarily provide specific teaching ideas or materials, which beginning teachers commonly say they need, new teachers find participation in the groups valuable because it involves them in "the life of the *whole* school." In the case of both Selma and Santa Monica, strong networks of informal support augment the district-sponsored efforts.

The Beginning Educators Support Team (BEST) Center in Elk Grove, which predates BTSA expansion by more than 5 years, provides another example of a balance between the many purposes of induction.

Elk Grove's BEST Center

The BEST Center in Elk Grove runs two simultaneous programs, one for elementary teachers and one for secondary teachers. Its programming is designed to provide an overview of district-specific standards, curriculum frameworks, and rules and regulations targeted at the balance of newly credentialed and experienced teachers who comprise EGUSD's new hires each year. Two master teachers lead each grade-level group at the elementary level. Two and a half introductory days for elementary teachers include a half day of orientation to the district, 1 day of reading and language and instruction, and 1 day of classroom management. These are followed up with eight monthly meetings: five meetings are 3 hours long and feature a presentation, usually by a district-level administrator, and grade-level discussion groups focused on the topic of the presentation; the other three meetings focus on classroom issues and are held at a master teacher's classroom (students are not present). Explained the elementary master teacher coordinator, "The new teachers spend 85% of their time on reading, language arts, and math [in the classroom]. In addition to classroom management and effective teaching, they are the main things to focus on: taking the [content] standards and benchmarks and resources and figuring out how do you start with that and where go from there. The main concern is that classroom management is in place so that they can teach. That's why we have 3 hours focusing on classroom management, and everything after that returns/alludes to that." A host of other topics are touched on, including parent communication and involvement, English language development, test administration, evaluation, clear credential application, and formulating a personal growth plan.

Through participation in BTSA, both Selma and Elk Grove augmented their traditional programs with more formal efforts reaching out to a greater number of first- and second-year teachers, with each new teacher formally assigned a mentor who works with him or her throughout the school year, following the materials for the California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers.

Both Elk Grove and Selma use veteran classroom teachers as support providers who take on this role in addition to their regular classroom duties. An alternative induction program model relies on full-time support providers who have been released temporarily from their regular teaching duties. For example, LAUSD has approximately 10 full-time BTSA support providers, whose primary responsibilities are to support new teachers in schools that do not have adequate numbers of mentor teachers.

The decision to release teachers full-time or to compensate full-time teachers for extra duty has implications for the ways in which new teachers experience induction support. Support providers whose primary responsibility is teaching their own students often do not have the

opportunity to work with new teachers in the classroom. Even when mentor teachers are given release time during the day *and* their mentees work at the same school, making it is possible for the mentor teacher to go to another classroom, mentor teachers typically do not want to leave their own students. Thus, new teachers have fewer opportunities to receive direct feedback on their instruction, and conferencing between support providers and new teachers most often occurs at the end of a full day of teaching.

In contrast, full-time released teachers, whose main responsibility is the development of new teachers' techniques and knowledge, have more flexibility in working directly in the classroom with novices. Below we describe how full-time support providers in LAUSD support new teachers.

Activities of LAUSD's Full-time Support Providers

Full-time LAUSD support providers assist new teachers one-on-one in the classroom, typically once every week for 2 months at a school before moving to another school lacking sufficient mentors. Support providers do classroom observations using the CSTP standards for classroom environment, recording what they see and hear, and then holding a dialogue with the teacher based on the script. They model teaching for the new teacher or take over one of the small groups. Explained one BTSA Advisor, "Frequently, you take over a small group, having discussed the lesson beforehand with the teacher, then you debrief about what happened. Other things usually come up, and you can explain the way you stand back and be a facilitator, the language you use, how to show respect to students. But also I've walked in more than once when somebody is dying up there. Sometimes it's not their fault; for example, they're in an auditorium and all they have is a blackboard and pointer, so I've taken over and used some old tried and true strategies that they don't know. So you throw them a life preserver. We recognize that teachers are developmental."

The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, which we did not study directly as part of this work, also uses full-time support providers, who themselves receive a significant amount of professional development and who in turn focus solely on building the skills of new teachers. This kind of support is virtually impossible for a full-time classroom teacher to provide as a mentor teacher because he/she typically does not have enough release time.

Extent and Nature of Induction

Given the different—and evolving—approaches to induction across California districts, what kind of support do new teachers receive? Overall, support for novice teachers in California is widespread—and was so even before the scale-up of BTSA. In the 1998-99 statewide survey, 94% of teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience report having received some form

of assistance during their first 2 years of teaching (Table 5-2). About half of the new teachers report receiving such support through a formal program; about half of these—or 28% of the total pool of new teachers—report participating in BTSA. We know from the case study data and from statewide figures that the number of teachers receiving support through BTSA expanded during the 1998-99 school year—more than doubling, according to state figures (see Table 5-1).

Table 5-2
Type of Support Offered New Teachers

Type of Support for New Teachers	Percent of All Beginning Teachers
Any support	94
Support through a formal state or district program	52
BTSA	28
Other formal program	24

Source: SRI statewide teacher survey. Data refer to school year 1997-98.

Characteristics of Induction Programs

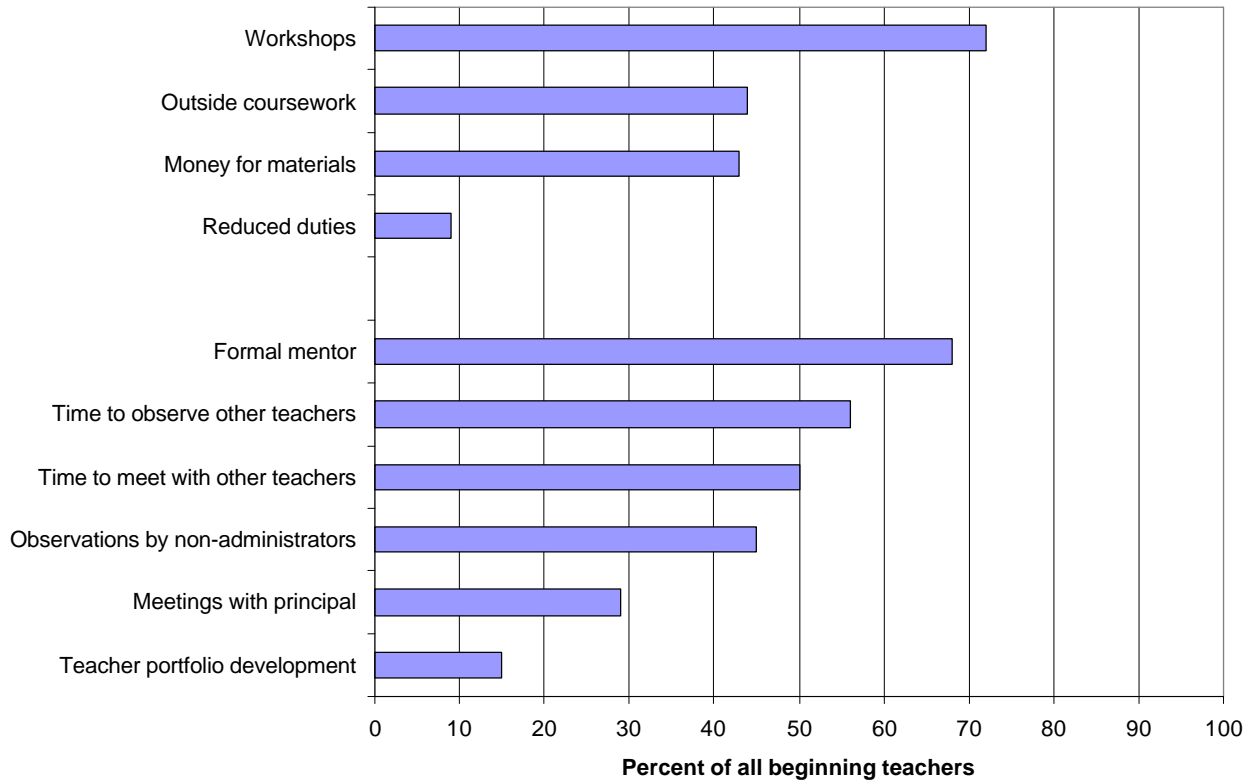
By far the most common type of support provided new teachers is the opportunity to attend workshops specific to them—more than 7 out of 10 new teachers report attending such activities (see Figure 5-1). From our case studies, we know that such workshops—especially toward the beginning of the school year—are typically focused on district policies and procedures, as well as on issues regarding classroom management.

Support for new teachers—importantly—also involves assignment to a mentor (68%) and providing time for new teachers to observe other teachers (55%) and to meet with other teachers (50%). Such opportunities are crucial because much of what teachers learn about their craft is “learned on the job,” and it is through their interaction with others that they can become self-critical practitioners.¹¹ Time to meet with others can also serve to break down the traditional barriers created among teachers by classroom walls and bell schedules.

Novice teachers are bombarded with new responsibilities and, in some systems, are likely to get the most challenging assignments. We find that induction programs, whether funded through BTSA or not, rarely provide reduced duties (9% overall). In some instances, school principals and department chairs work to ensure that a new teacher’s assignment is not overly burdensome, but none of the case study sites addressed the negotiated right of more senior teachers to request specific assignments, often leaving the most challenging to teachers new to

the district. We note that these findings are consistent with national patterns, where “reduced workloads for inductees are all but nonexistent.”¹²

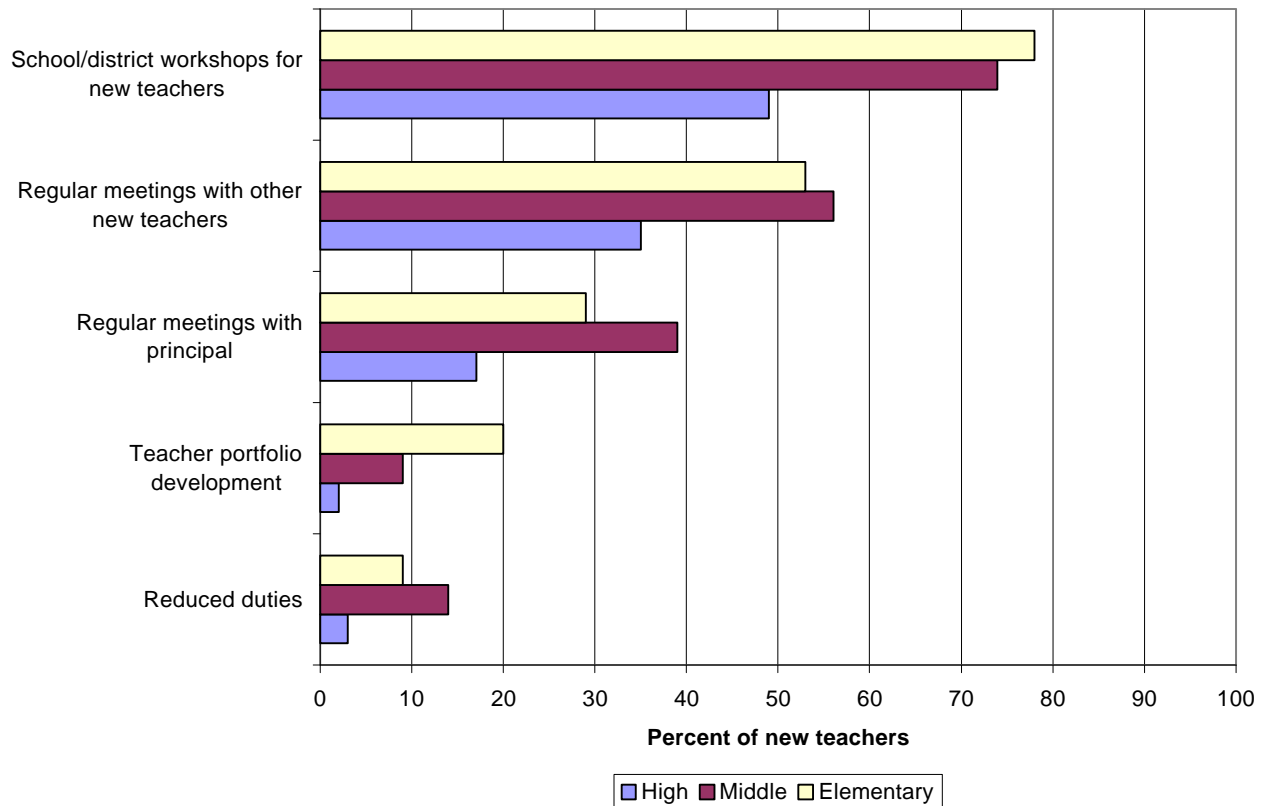
**Figure 5-1
Induction Support Activities Offered to Beginning Teachers**



Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

High school teachers are much less likely than either their middle or elementary school peers to report any type of induction support (Figure 5-2). We should stress that individual school culture, grade-level culture, and department culture can be important determinants of the quality of the informal modes of support for new teachers. At the same time, these discrepancies across school levels point to the fact that many formal district support programs for new teachers do not reach into the high schools.

Figure 5-2
Significant Differences in Induction Support, by School Level

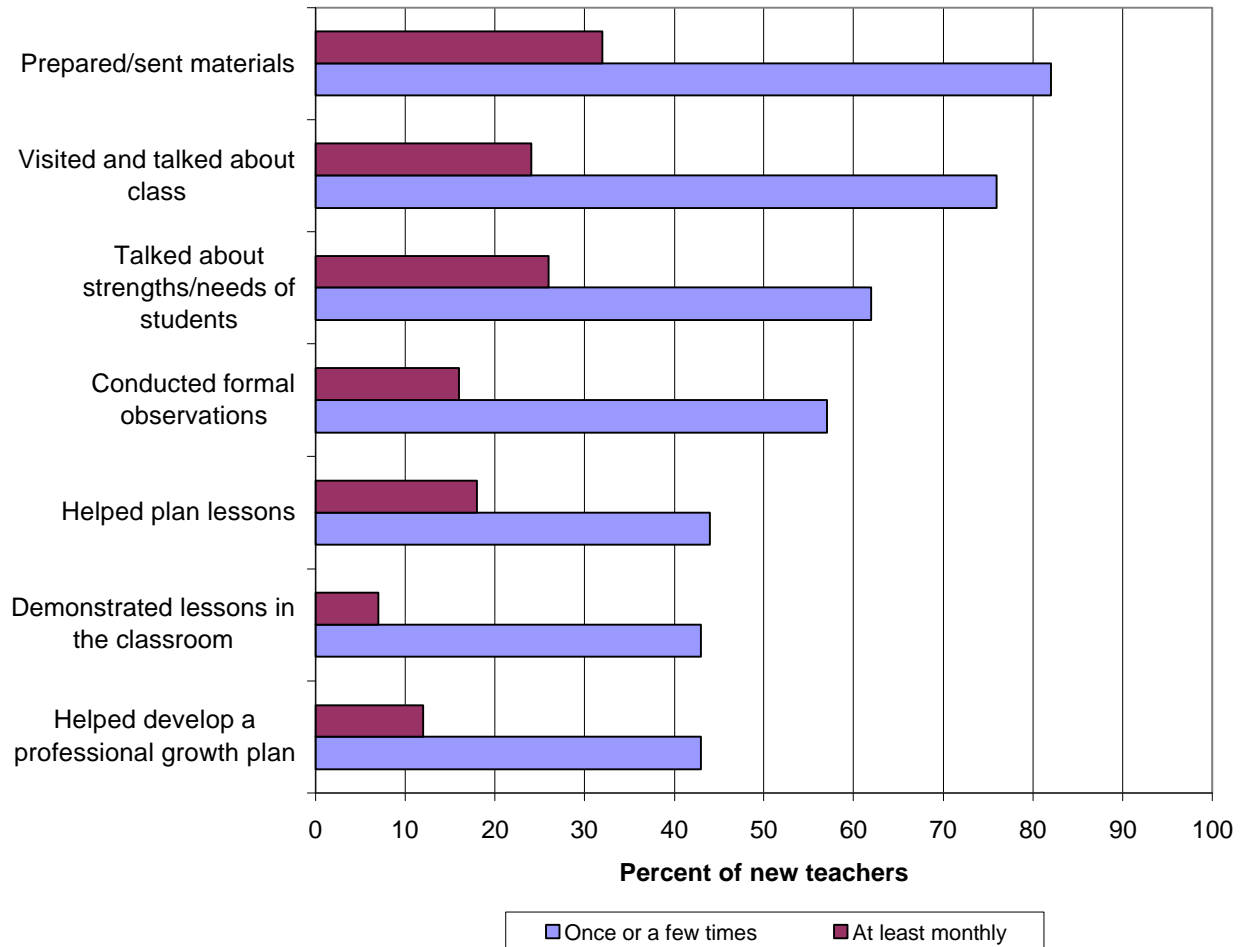


Note: Chi-square tests between school levels significant at $p \leq 0.05$ for activities shown.
 Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

Intensity of Induction

It is encouraging that a large percentage of novice teachers receive some type of induction support and that for a majority of these, such support offers opportunities for collaboration with other teachers. But how often do teachers engage in these activities? In Figure 5-3, we show teachers' reports of the frequency of various actions by their mentors or support providers. The general pattern is that mentors and support providers interact with their beginning teachers infrequently. For example, close to 60% of beginning teachers report that their mentors observed their classrooms—but only 16% report that such observations occurred at least monthly. Similarly, whereas 43% of beginning teachers report that their mentors demonstrated lessons, only 7% report that such demonstrations took place at least monthly.

Figure 5-3
Mentor Support Activities for Beginning Teachers, by Frequency of Activity

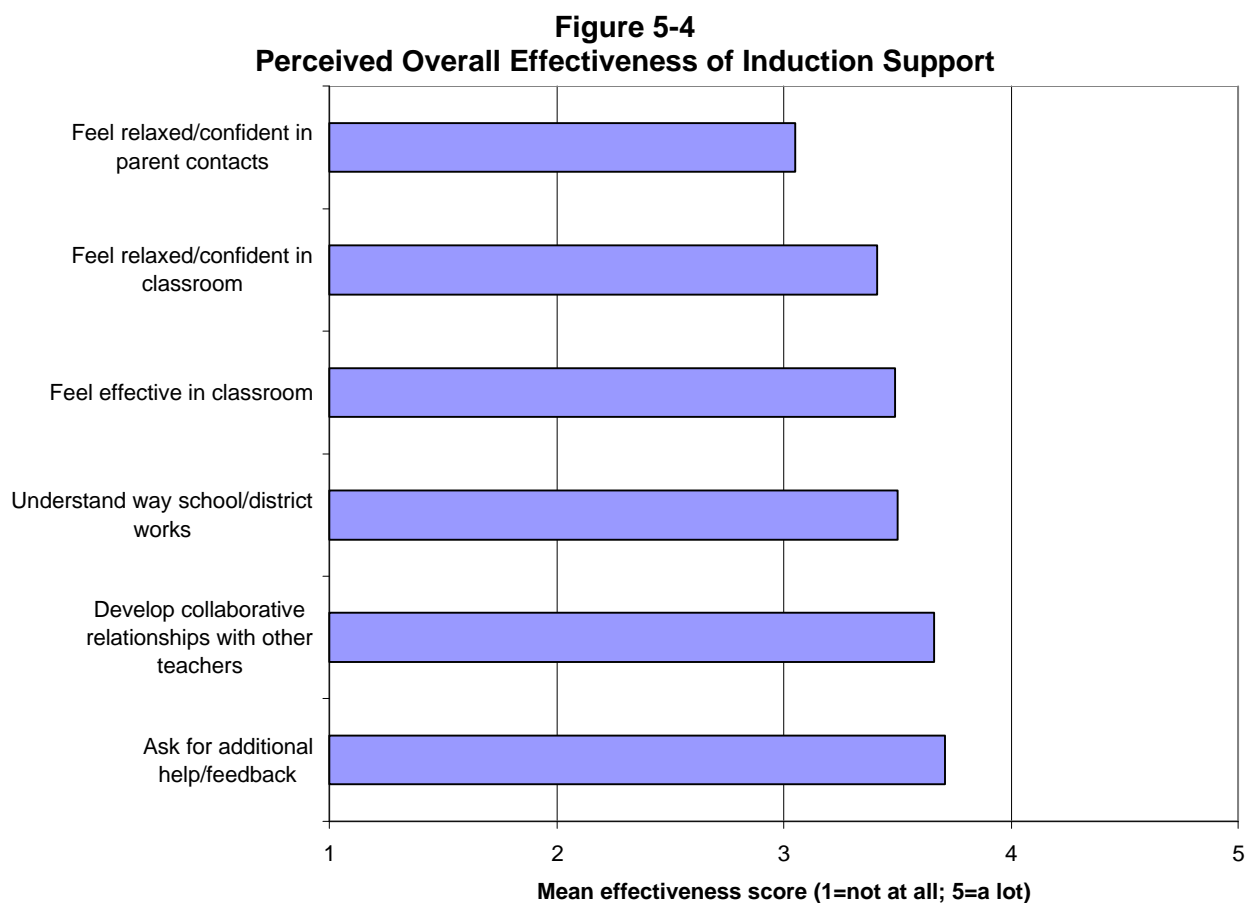


Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

The infrequency of such support activities is not surprising. From our case studies, we know that most mentors and support providers are stretched thin. In many induction programs, support providers are practicing teachers who are helping beginning teachers in addition to carrying a full teaching load. Observing a mentee’s class then requires that the mentor find someone to cover his or her class. In addition, matching beginning teachers with available mentors in the same field and the same grade level is often difficult—especially in the same school. When teachers are paired across schools, the travel burden further reduces their interaction.

Quality of Induction

The primary goals of induction support are to increase the quality of teaching and to retain teachers in the profession. We would expect a high-quality program to have impacts in both of these areas. Although we did not research teacher retention in this study, we did ask teachers to report on the impact of their induction experiences on their teaching skills and other professional competencies. In general, teachers report moderate impacts (Figure 5-4). Not surprisingly, high school teachers, who get less formal induction support, also see less impact of induction on their professional lives in every category of effectiveness that was asked in the survey.

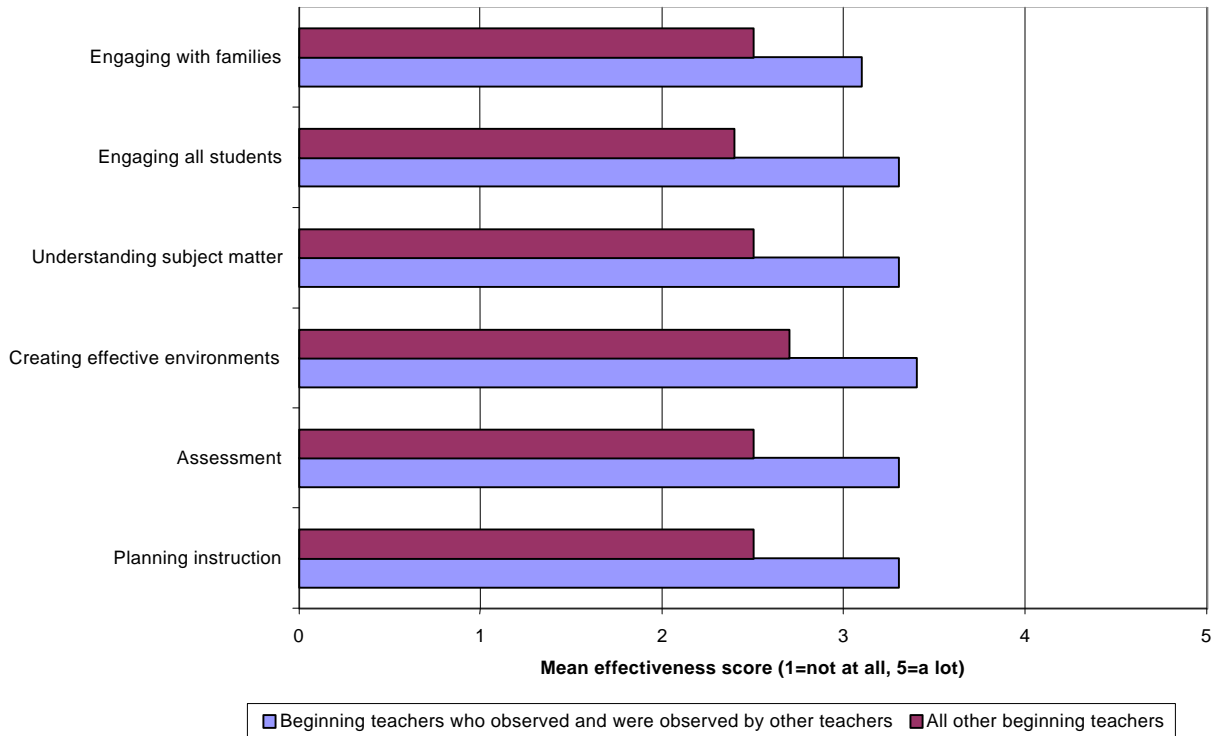


Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their induction experiences differ, depending on the nature of those experiences. Beginning teachers whose induction supports include opportunities to observe and be observed by peers rate their overall induction experience as more

effective than do those who don't have such opportunities. As shown in Figure 5-5, beginning teachers who engaged in observation activities rated their induction experience as more effective in helping them increase their ability to master skills described in the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*.

Figure 5-5
Perceived Effectiveness of Induction Support, by
Participation in Observation Activities



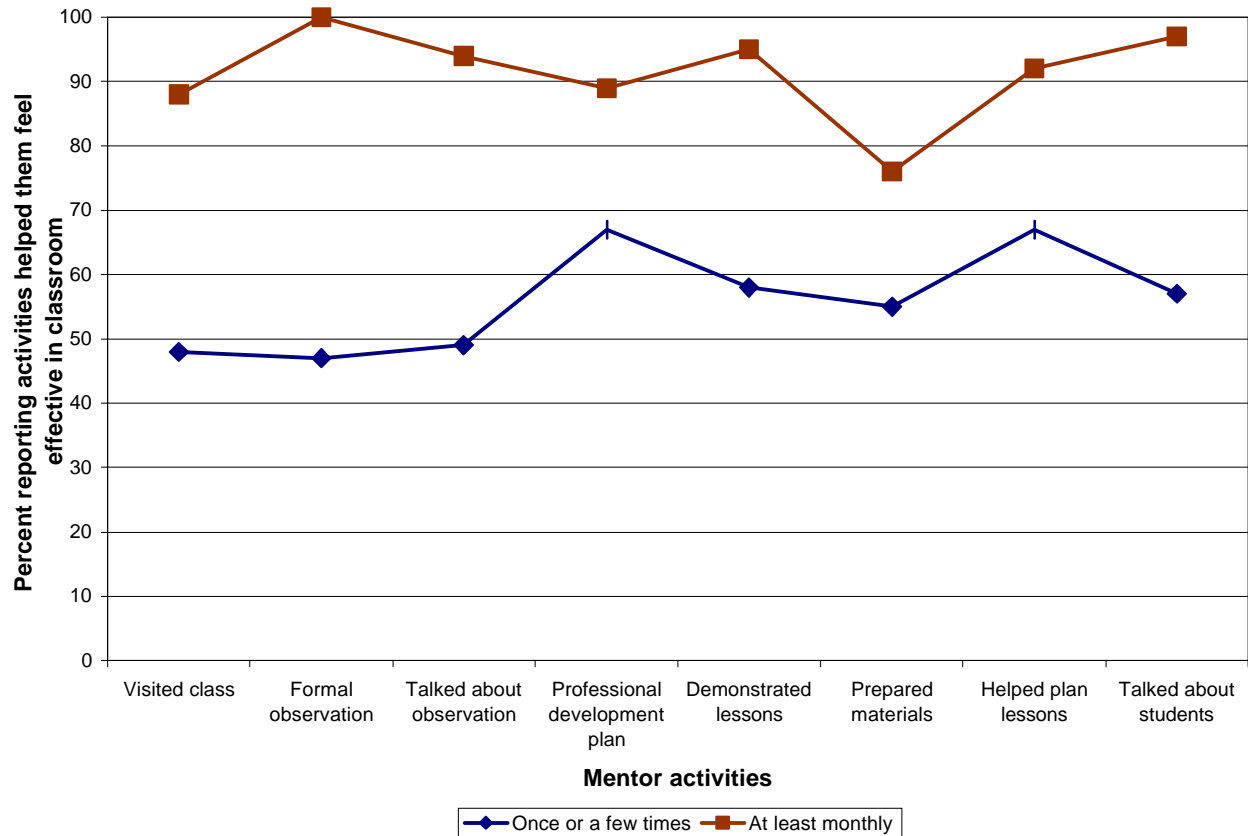
Note: Chi-square tests between beginning teachers who observed and were observed by other teachers, and all other beginning teachers, are significant at $p \leq 0.05$.

Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

Similarly, those beginning teachers who were formally assigned a mentor are more likely to rate their overall induction experience as more effective than their peers who were not. Additionally, the more frequent the mentor support, the more effective beginning teachers find it. In Figure 5-6, we examine teachers' reported effectiveness of various types of mentor support, contrasting those teachers who received the support regularly (at least once a month) with those who received that type of support once or a few times. In each case, teachers who received mentor support frequently and regularly found it more effective than teachers who received the support infrequently. For example, whereas fewer than half of the teachers who were seldom

observed by their mentors or support providers found the support “very effective,” 100% of those teachers who were observed at least monthly did so.

Figure 5-6
Percent of Beginning Teachers Reporting Mentor Support Activities as Helping Them Feel Effective in Classroom, by Frequency of Activity



Note: Chi-square tests significant at $p \leq 0.02$ for all mentor activities except demonstrated lessons ($p=0.06$) and prepared materials ($p=0.07$).

Source: SRI statewide teacher survey.

The general pattern from the survey and case study data is clear: the vast majority of beginning teachers receive some kind of induction support. Although the type of support reported by the greatest number of teachers involves attendance at workshops, induction support for many teachers includes opportunities to observe, be observed, and collaborate with their peers and mentors. Yet such experiences are infrequent, typically not taking place on a regular basis. Teachers who have opportunities for peer observation, who are formally assigned mentors, and who engage with mentors in frequent support activities are uniformly more likely to report those experiences as effective.

The Changing Landscape: The Expansion of BTSA

As California districts and schools are now faced with the availability of much more money to support induction efforts and the requirement that all their new teachers soon go through an induction program, we find them building on these previous efforts to formalize their programs and take them to scale. We visited schools and districts during the first year of the BTSA scale-up and observed very uneven and stuttering efforts to structure support for all new teachers. In this section, we highlight how induction programs are evolving in districts with the expansion of BTSA. We discuss the issues involved in reaching larger numbers of novice teachers, formalizing what had been an informal process in many districts, finding a sufficient number of support providers, and integrating the growing BTSA programs into ongoing reform efforts in the district.

Scaling Up BTSA

Regardless of how districts supported new teachers in the past, they are all changing—or planning to change—their approach, given the infusion of dollars into BTSA and the requirement that all new teachers soon go through a formal induction process. Districts begin the scaling-up process on different trajectories based in part on the supports they provided to their new teachers in the past. In some cases, typically where the needs are the lowest (fewer new teachers, strong informal supports in place), districts are still in the planning stage. El Centro and Santa Monica had not begun a BTSA program at all, though they had just received or were in the process of applying for BTSA grants. Few teachers in Eureka participate in the BTSA program housed in Del Norte County. In these cases, new dollars are welcome, but there is not a sense of urgency to implement a formal program. In other sites, however, big changes are under way. In general, these changes are taking two forms: increasing the number of teachers served and formalizing previously informal arrangements.

BTSA dollars and new credentialing requirements have pushed districts to serve more teachers. Again, in districts with few new teachers, the scale-up is rather straightforward. Selma quickly designed a program and is serving all its 40 new teachers—as well as a few from surrounding districts that have not yet put together a program. But in other districts, the numbers are daunting. San Diego's BTSA program has traditionally served 70 to 90 teachers. In 1998-99, that number was increased to 500, with the goal of reaching 1,100 in school year 1999-2000. But the district has 1,700 first- and second-year teachers, so the program still has a way to go. San Francisco increased its participants from 50 to 180 teachers in 1998-99, but it has close to 1,000 first- and second-year teachers. Elk Grove served 53 teachers in 1998-99, its second year

of BTSA implementation, but this again is only a fraction of the hundreds of first- and second-year teachers in the district.

Formalization of the BTSA Process

The receipt of BTSA dollars and/or the scale-up of previous induction efforts has also resulted in the formalization of what was in many districts a relatively informal process. First, there is slow movement toward mandating participation in the district's induction program. Among our case study sites, only Selma has taken this step so far—but, of course, that is the only site with a BTSA program that has the capacity to serve all its new teachers. In the other sites, administrators are struggling with how to transform what was traditionally a volunteer program and make it part of a new teacher's required duties. For example, San Francisco's BTSA program has a number of strong components, including a series of required full-day Saturday workshops. Among the volunteer participants, the workshops are highly valued; as one participant described, "The first Saturday workshop was on the physical environment of the classroom. It was great. Outside consultants gave the workshops. We looked at slides of other people's classrooms, what they looked like, the math area, the reading area. How to get everything organized." But will it be feasible to hold—and require—such workshops for nearly 1,000 teachers?

As they reach larger numbers of beginning teachers, local induction efforts also struggle with formalizing what often were informal ways of supporting new teachers. As Santa Monica plans for a BTSA grant, it is considering how to adapt its current support structure, which relies on individual school-based mentors who provide varying degrees of support to teachers, depending on the mentor's perception of need, to create a more formal one with district oversight and a formal assessment component, as required by BTSA.

As noted earlier, both Elk Grove and Selma have already begun participation in BTSA. In both places, one support provider, who is a full-time teacher, ideally serves two beginning teachers. Beginning teachers are expected to meet with their support providers weekly to complete the CFASST portfolio. Support providers meet monthly to voice their concerns and reflect on their roles as mentors. Meeting times are generally arranged by each mentor/mentee pair on their own schedule, although Selma reserves one early release day per month for BTSA meetings, and Elk Grove designates five to six meetings throughout the school year for participating beginning teachers and support providers to work together.

Reactions from new teachers participating in these well-structured programs are mixed. Teachers generally like the communication with their mentor. One participant noted:

“The best thing about BTSA is the one-on-one mentor. If you’re fortunate, you have someone who really listens. [My mentor] is a very good teacher. We e-mail back and forth. We’re supposed to meet once each week, but we teach on different tracks....”

Yet some teachers report that the CFASST process turns into a paperwork burden—and at times can become an end in itself. “I get tired of filling out those forms every time I see my mentor,” noted one teacher. A number of teachers note that they would have preferred to have an informal mentor at the school site and “forget all the paperwork.”

The formalization of the induction process certainly facilitates the definition and communication of these activities to large numbers of beginning teachers and support providers. The paradox that faces districts, however, is that as districts recruit more and more beginning teachers into BTSA, the range of teachers’ needs increases, and this variation in needs is increasingly met with a highly standardized, though well-developed, program that may not sufficiently reflect individual needs and concerns.

Capacity Issues

The number of teachers participating in BTSA will increase tenfold from school year 1996-97 to school year 1999-2000, and it will have to nearly double again to reach all new first- and second-year teachers. A scale-up of this magnitude necessarily strains the capacity of the system—in terms of both quantity of support providers and the quality of their work. Because the distribution of new teachers is uneven, the challenge of the scale-up is much greater in some districts than in others.

In San Diego, the district had used full-time resource teachers to provide direct support to the most needy new teachers, while full-time classroom teachers served as traditional support providers to other new teachers. As the program grew, the full-time teachers were given three new teachers to work with instead of two. The results were quite poor: overworked support providers and unsupported teachers. As the district scales the program up further, it is going to use its full-time resource teachers to help the support providers, who, in turn, will be assigned only two beginning teachers each. The problem with this strategy is that it requires close to 900 support providers, nearly one out of six veteran teachers in the district.

The magnitude of the challenge facing local districts depends on how many new teachers they have relative to veterans and on how “new” those new teachers are—whether they are new to the profession or just new to the district. For example, El Centro in the Imperial Valley hired approximately 24 teachers in 1998, but most of them had a few years of experience in surrounding districts. Similarly, Eureka hires only a dozen new teachers a year and is able to

pick and choose among the best of hundreds of applicants. In contrast, Elk Grove, in the suburbs of Sacramento, hired approximately 500 in 1998-99—a full quarter of its teaching force. But because of its strong recruitment program, only 35% of these were teachers new to the profession. In San Diego, the story is mixed. Most schools have low turnover and few new teachers; some hard-to-staff inner-city schools are forced to hire proportionally more teachers and to use more interns and emergency-permit teachers. LAUSD hired almost 4,000 new employees in 1998. As we have detailed earlier in the report, 75% of these are on emergency permits, waivers, or internship credentials. Only 9% of the new hires are newly credentialed teachers; the remaining 16% are credentialed reentrants.

Districts with disproportionately few new hires or with new hires who are predominantly experienced teachers face much less of a challenge. They have few teachers to serve, the teachers already know how to teach and so have fewer needs, and there are more veteran teachers to provide support. Consequently, in districts like Santa Monica, El Centro, and Selma—where these conditions hold—induction has traditionally been a more informal arrangement. Support has been provided through principals and school teams, augmented by orientation sessions from the district.

Faced with large numbers of new teachers or high proportions of teachers new to the profession, districts traditionally have been forced to create more formal structures for induction support. In Elk Grove, the BEST Center is a centralized effort to uniformly support all new hires each year. In LAUSD, the sheer number of new hires throughout the year and the predominance of emergency permit holders require that the district run its Teacher Academy for new teachers every week without break, except Thanksgiving. Nine or 10 sessions run concurrently during the peak summer months.

Integrating BTSA into Ongoing District Reforms

A final issue facing districts is how to fit BTSA, especially the CFASST system, into other efforts to foster adult learning in the district schools. Every district in our study had its own reform thrust and its own strategy for supporting teachers to improve their practice, as we discuss in the next chapter. Santa Monica has established inquiry groups for teachers, and these groups set the agenda for professional development. As new teachers are integrated into these supportive groups, it is not clear where CFASST will fit in.

San Diego has launched a district-wide literacy initiative. At the core of the initiative is the role of the principal as the key provider of professional development for teachers in the building. Principals are supposed to spend a good portion of their day in classrooms, and they are going

through extensive professional development themselves. Principals also retain the central role of evaluating teachers, and that evaluation is supposed to take place in relation to specified district priorities. The BTSA system, which seeks to have support providers assess teachers relative to standards other than those in use in San Diego and which excludes the principal from that assessment process, may clash with the district initiative.

None of these issues—formalization of BTSA, capacity, or integration of reforms—should stop districts from moving forward with induction programs for new teachers. But as they advance, it is important to keep in mind the kinds of challenges they will face. Just as importantly, the state needs to consider these issues in terms of the kinds of support local districts need and the kinds of regulations that might be difficult to follow.

Endnotes

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