



Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators

Section 2

*Teacher Induction and Mentoring: Fund
Robust Teacher Induction and Mentorship
Programs That Align With Best Practices*



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The Teacher Induction and Mentoring Team

Lesly Gámez is a peer assistant and review educator in Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Teaching and Learning. She holds a B.A. in English and in Spanish from St. Olaf College and an M.A. in English from the University of St. Thomas. She earned her elementary education licensure through the Master's in Teaching Program at Hamline University. Lesly's teaching experience is in Spanish immersion education. Her current work in coaching has provided her with the skills and opportunities to support the development, recruitment, and retention of highly-qualified educators. As a bilingual, biracial, and multicultural Latina educator, Lesly is passionate about creating opportunities for and sustaining the careers of teachers of color, and closing the achievement gap through an earnest engagement with equity in education. Lesly enjoys spending time with her family and friends, engaging in community events, reading and writing, traveling, and recently picked up her family's passion for Mexican folklore dance.



Roberta A. Hernandez is currently an academic interventionist at Central Park Elementary in Roseville Area Schools District 623. She also facilitates "special projects" in racial justice work in the school and district. Roberta holds a B.A. from Northern Illinois University in elementary education and is pursuing a M.A. in educational leadership at Bethel University. She is a recipient of the 2018 Education Minnesota IMPACT Grant partnering with the Minnesota Humanities Center to develop staff knowledge and skills incorporating absent narratives in their curriculum. She is currently developing affinity/ethnic studies groups for Latinx students and supports the African-American Girls of Excellence group in her school. Roberta serves in leadership with the district affinity group for teachers of color and indigenous teachers, FOCUS, and she is a culturally responsive competency trainer in the district. She works beyond the Roseville district as an Education Minnesota Racial Equity Advocate.



Cara Iselin is an elementary special education resource teacher in Robbinsdale Area Schools. She holds a B.S. in human development from Virginia Tech and a M. Ed in special education from Marymount University. She previously taught four years in the state of Virginia before moving to Minnesota in 2018. She was nominated by her peers for the Outstanding New Teacher award. In Virginia, she served on her school's Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee for four years. She is passionate about building positive relationships with her students. In her free time, she loves watching sports, completing puzzles, and spending time with family.



Ryan Siegle is a 5th grade teacher for Independent School District 318 in Grand Rapids. He holds a B.A. in elementary education from Concordia College and a M.A. in curriculum and instruction from St. Catherine University. Currently, he is pursuing an educational doctorate in K-12 administration at Bethel University. Siegle's research interests focus on school culture, leadership, and teacher retention. Ryan is passionate about building on the unique strengths of students and teachers as a way to transform classrooms and schools. He enjoys spending time with his family at the cabin, playing Legos with his son, and reading with his daughter.



Jennifer Thorpe-Wasmund is a Q-Comp peer coach in Bloomington Public Schools. She earned a B.A. from Bethel University in elementary education and a M.A. in educational leadership from Saint Mary's University. Currently, she is pursuing an educational specialist degree in educational leadership and administration from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Jennifer worked as an elementary classroom teacher for 18 years before becoming a peer coach. In her free time, she loves being with her family and friends, baking, and cheering her kids on at swim meets.



Verna Wong is a high school teacher of English learners for Anoka-Hennepin School District. She holds a B.A. from the University of Northwestern in English as a second language education and a M.A. from Hamline University in literacy education. Verna is also founding member of the Anoka-Hennepin Teachers of Color Coalition (AHTOCC), a grassroots network of teachers of color in her district working toward addressing needs of teacher retention and sustainability. Verna enjoys spending time with her family, reading, and being outdoors.



Amy E. Wicklund is a high school social studies teacher at Denfeld High School with Duluth Minnesota ISD 709. She holds a B.A. in social work from the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN and has her graduate teaching license from the College of St. Scholastica as well. Amy comes into teaching with 10 years of business and management experience and over 15 years experience working with nonprofits focusing specifically on women, youth, and people of color. She has received several accolades including Volunteer of the Year and the Shining Star Award. In her free time, Amy enjoys the outdoors, cheering loudly at her son's football games, and relaxing with her two rescue dogs Princess Leia and Ahsoka Tano.



Introduction

The teaching profession has one of the worst attrition rates of any like profession. In Minnesota, roughly one out of every three teachers leaves within the first five years. There is a lot of talk about the Minnesota teacher shortage, but too often, attrition is left out of the conversation, which leaves us with short-sighted conversations, policies, and laws focused on recruitment, as if just getting more people into the field will solve the problem. And while it is true that districts have a harder and harder time finding prepared and fully licensed teachers to fill vacant positions, it is not true that Minnesota has an overall teacher shortage. Instead, teacher shortages vary based on teaching positions, geographic locations, and school types.

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What Minnesota really has is a shortage of teachers who are willing to stay in the profession, given what we have done to the profession. A failure to invest in supporting new teachers is one of the mistakes we have made, but it is also something Minnesota can fix. One of the most immediate ways to address our teacher attrition problem is to invest in robust mentoring and induction for teachers new to the profession and new to a specific district. Fully funding Minnesota's Teacher Development and Evaluation Law, as well as Quality Compensation, or Q-Comp, would provide important support for early career, and all, educators. This would cost between \$162-320 million.

One of the most immediate ways to address our teacher attrition problem is to invest in robust mentoring and induction for teachers new to the profession and new to a specific district. Fully funding Minnesota's Teacher Development and Evaluation Law, as well as Quality Compensation, or Q-Comp, would provide important support for early career, and all, educators.

It takes roughly 63,000 licensed educators to fully staff Minnesota's public and charter schools. If we had a real teacher shortage, one might expect that we have fewer than 63,000 licensed teachers. But, in fact we have more than twice that number of already licensed teachers in the state right now. According to the most recent *Teacher Supply and Demand Report*, there are currently 133,945 people with active Minnesota teaching licenses (Wilder Research, 2019, p. 3). That number does not include people who only have a short

call substitute license. Because Minnesota once issued something called a lifetime license, it is important to also pay attention to the age of those 133,945 license holders. If we subtract from that number everyone over the age of 60 and roughly 10,000 people for whom no birthdate data is available, we get to 91,500. That is, there are over 91,000 people under the age of 60 who have active Minnesota teaching licenses in at least one specific licensure field.

Minnesota’s shortage of teachers of color is one of the worst in the nation.

Minnesota’s shortage of teachers of color is one of the worst in the nation. Though our student population is made up of 33.5% students of color (identified as American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial), only 4.3% of our teaching workforce is made up of teachers of color (Wilder, 2019, p. 4). The percentage of students of color has been increasing steadily over time. The percentage of teachers of color has not.

Minnesota needs to get serious about increasing the numbers of teachers of color in our teaching workforce, which will mean looking honestly at the structural racism inherent in our current school systems, and it needs to get serious about the teacher attrition problem overall, which is wreaking havoc on our districts and leaving too many students without teachers trained to meet their educational needs.

Ingersoll and May (2011) outlined three reasons often cited for why the mismatch between teachers of color and students of color is detrimental. These include: **1) Demographic parity.** This argument holds that “minority teachers are important as role models for both minority and White students.” **2) Cultural synchronicity.** This argument “holds that minority students benefit from being taught by minority teachers because minority teachers are more likely to have ‘insider knowledge’ due to similar life experiences and cultural backgrounds.” **3) Candidates of color.** “This argument holds that candidates of color are more likely than non-minority candidates to seek employment in schools serving predominantly minority student populations, often in low-income, urban school districts,” which are the schools that suffer disproportionately from teacher shortages (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 11). Achinstein et al. (2010) cited the increasingly large body of research showing that teachers of color “can produce more favorable academic results on standardized test scores, attendance, retention, advanced-level course enrollment, and college-going rates for students of color

than White colleagues” (Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 7). Many other scholars “contend that this demographic gap creates a teaching-learning disconnect that contributes to the too-often dismal academic performance, high dropout rates, and low graduation rates of diverse urban students” (Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012, p. 16).

Burciaga and Kohli (2018), explained further what teachers of color bring to students. They bring “knowledge and skills cultivated by communities of color to resist and survive racism” (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6). Minnesota needs to get serious about increasing the numbers of teachers of color in our teaching workforce, which will mean looking honestly at the structural racism inherent in our current school systems, and it needs to get serious about the teacher attrition problem overall, which is wreaking havoc on our districts and leaving too many students without teachers trained to meet their educational needs.

One of the most powerful things Minnesota can do to increase teacher retention and promote best practices in the classroom is fund robust induction and mentoring programs. Induction refers to a process of early-career development for teachers as they navigate their first few years in the classroom or district. Mentoring is just one component of induction.

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Minnesota Statute 122A.70 encourages districts “to develop teacher mentoring programs for teachers new to the profession or district, including teaching residents, teachers of color, teachers with special needs, or experienced teachers in need of peer coaching” (Minn. Stat. § 122A.70). In addition, the new tiered licensing law requires all Tier 1 and Tier 2 teachers to participate in a mentorship program. However, the requirements for a mentorship program as defined in rule are well below anything in line with best practices, chiefly because there is no money to fund programs that do what we know they need to do. A Minnesota teacher’s chances of landing in a district with a robust mentoring program that aligns with research-based best practices are slim, and his or her chances of landing in a Minnesota school with a robust induction program that aligns with such practices are even slimmer. We can do a much better job of supporting all teachers in their first several years in the classroom and thereby significantly increase both their effectiveness and the likelihood that they will stay in the profession. We will also need to be intentional in our efforts to retain greater numbers of teachers of color, as oftentimes, their needs are unique.

Minnesota is not lacking in a vision of what successful induction for educators looks like. Academic research and education stakeholders at both the national and state levels have offered very similar recommendations for Minnesota schools, and the steps to building these programs are not overly complex.

In 2009, a coalition of education stakeholders in Minnesota worked to develop the *Minnesota Educator Induction Guidelines* (Teacher Support Partnership, 2009). The Teacher Support Partnership was made up of representatives from the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota, Education Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Education, and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Their recommendations about how to build strong induction programs for Minnesota’s educators remain timely today, and we discuss them in detail below.

Since then, other important voices have added to the ongoing conversation about the importance of educator induction in the greater landscape of education equity and teacher retention. The New Teacher Center is a national nonprofit organization committed to helping states, districts, and schools better support their teachers in the early years of their careers. The New Teacher Center’s recommendations for strong educator induction programs are quite similar to the recommendations of the Teacher Support Partnership (The New Teacher Center, 2016). Numerous academic studies and literature reviews on the characteristics of effective education induction also help point the way toward a better system for Minnesota’s teachers, and, ultimately, our students.

Districts are starved for the necessary funds to provide some of the most fundamental elements of effective induction programs.

While most Minnesota school districts report having some type of induction program, few have the resources needed to make those programs as effective as they could easily be if they were funded and if MDE provided some basic resources. One out of every three teachers in Minnesota leaves within the first five years of starting, and many of them cite lack of support as one of the primary reasons they leave (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016). In a survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers of more than 30,000 teachers nationwide, 89% of the respondents reported being enthusiastic about their profession at the start of their careers. Only 15% sustained that enthusiasm as their careers progressed (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016, p. 12). This should not be a surprise. Districts are starved for the necessary funds to provide some of the most fundamental elements of effective induction programs.

Minnesota pays dearly for failing to support new teachers. The money saved by districts when they are not having to constantly recruit, hire, and train new teachers after relatively new teachers leave is no small matter. And the consequences of such high teacher attrition rates for students include a disruption of academic and extracurricular programming from year to year, and, for students living with high levels of toxic stress due to trauma, the consequences of schools that have a revolving door of teachers leaving and new teachers coming can be devastating.

Minnesota Needs Robust Teacher Induction Systems

As mentioned above, induction is broader than the mentor-mentee relationship. Induction should be a coherent, intentional, and sustained process, and support for this process needs to be owned by the entire school community, including administrators, “the teaching faculty, licensed school professionals who provide pupil services, and support personnel” (Teacher Support Partnership, 2009, p. 10).

The elements of a comprehensive induction system include administrative support, multiple and varied opportunities for professional learning, and mentoring. Though every extant induction program is distinct, research leads to an overwhelmingly common conclusion: induction programs that lead to ongoing, collaborative relationships make a difference. Induction programs that fail to reach this standard do not make any measurable difference in teacher attrition rates.

PROVIDE THE RESOURCES SO EDUCATORS CAN BUILD A SCHOOL CULTURE BASED ON COLLABORATION

Building an induction program that leads to ongoing, collaborative relationships should, therefore, be one of the primary goals that districts and educators keep in mind as they develop their programs, and such a goal should be at the center of state-level policy and/or statute on the issue. School culture has a lot to do with how easily induction programs can reach this standard, as some schools are deeply entrenched in an individual, isolated teacher model, while others have long since moved away from that more traditional structure and are already more collaborative professional spaces wherein ideas, best practices, mistakes, learnings, and new projects are readily shared and supported.

Cara Iselin, a teacher in Robbinsdale, explained that the best mentoring and induction programs are housed within schools that develop and nurture a schoolwide culture of mentoring, wherein collaboration and growth are not only possible, but are expected for all faculty.

Offer release time, especially for newer teachers and mentors, but also for newer teachers to meet with each other, to consult with related service providers, to consult across special education/general education boundaries.

Another of the most fundamental obstacles to creating induction programs that reach the standard of creating ongoing, collaborative relationships has to do with funding. When mentors don't have time to meet with mentees, don't have access to training, don't have

time to observe mentees, and when newer teachers don't have time to observe mentors and other teachers, don't have time to have consultation meetings with school counselors, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, school social workers, don't have time to meet with one another, don't have access to training, and when districts have no money to make such time available, and when general education teachers don't have time to sit down and consult with special education teachers and vice versa, it becomes very difficult to ensure that any of these relationships—between mentor and mentees, among newer teachers, and among teaching and support faculty at large—will be truly collaborative. The Teacher Support Partnership offers the following examples of collaboration built into induction programs:

- Regional education centers for specialized programming
- Networks of teachers within and across districts (face-to-face and/or online)
- Professional development school partnerships with teacher preparation programs
- Content area specialist collaborations
- Cohorts of educators in graduate courses in higher education
- Institutes and conferences with professional organizations (staff development organizations, subject area professional organizations)
- Online induction systems that stretch across several school districts

“State policy should encourage programs to provide release time for teacher mentors and dedicated mentor-new teacher contact time.”

The New Teacher Center, whose mission is to “accelerate teacher effectiveness,” outlined nine criteria for robust and effective induction programs. One of those recommendations is that “state policy should encourage programs to provide release time for teacher mentors and dedicated mentor-new teacher contact time” (The New Teacher Center, 2016).

Teachers of color, who represent only 4.3% of Minnesota’s teaching force, often cite a lack of autonomy, a lack of administrative support, and a lack of any significant role in decision making in discussing their reasons for leaving the profession or considering leaving the profession.

When we talk about the importance of collaboration in the context of a school’s induction program, it should be noted that this means the sharing of ideas is a two-way street. In the most collaborative schools, new teachers feel they have a place at the table, that their

ideas are respected and desired, and mentors and administrators report feeling as if their relationship with new teachers is furthering their own professional development. Teachers of color, who represent only 4.3% of Minnesota's teaching force, often cite a lack of autonomy, a lack of administrative support, and a lack of any significant role in decision making in discussing their reasons for leaving the profession or considering leaving the profession (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016, p. 43).

When new teachers come to schools fresh from training in teacher preparation programs and armed with new ideas and a motivation to make a difference in the lives of students, and find themselves in schools with no interest in those ideas or in changing old practices to better align with best practices, new teacher enthusiasm drops dramatically, as does the school's teacher retention rate. This is true for all teachers, but it is especially true for teachers of color (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016, p. 43).

PROVIDE SUPPORTS FOR REGULARLY OCCURRING MEETING TIME FOR NEW TEACHERS

Often, teachers in their first five years in the profession or their first few years in a new district say that time to meet with other similarly situated teachers provides tremendous value. One way to accomplish this within the existing framework in Minnesota schools is to offer newer teachers the opportunity to participate in a professional learning community, or PLC, that is specifically designated for them and which is tasked with identifying needs, offering mutual collaboration and support, and learning from one another.

RECOGNIZE THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATORS IN INDUCTION

Principals and other administrators play an important role in effective induction programs. First, principals and other administrators have a great deal of control over whether a school culture is collaborative or not. In schools where teachers are afraid to make mistakes, take risks, or ask questions, of course, collaboration is never going to flourish. As McCormack and Thomas (2003) pointed out, "the satisfaction levels for induction programs expressed by beginning teachers demonstrated that strong leadership from the principal, a whole school approach to learning and teaching with clear goals and expectations, small class sizes, and the opportunity for professional growth were among the factors that contributed to this sense of satisfaction. In addition, the relationship between principals and new teachers is also important for the success of any school's induction program" (McCormack & Thomas, 2003, p. 15).

Furthermore, first-year teachers reported a greater sense of feeling supported by administration when their interactions with principals are focused on student learning: "First-year teachers, who were in schools where the socialization by, and interactions with, the principal, focused on student learning, teaching practice, and fostering relationships" encountered fewer problems and increased teacher retention. Conversely, "more problems were encountered by first-year teachers in schools where socialization focused on administrative elements, school routines, and requirements" (Tillman, 2005). Teachers often

cite a lack of support from administration both as a reason for leaving particular schools and as a reason for leaving teaching altogether (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016, p. 29).

Teachers of color often cite racial isolation as among the top reasons for leaving or considering leaving the profession.

CREATE AND SUPPORT AFFINITY GROUPS FOR TEACHERS OF COLOR, EVEN IF THIS MEANS CROSSING DISTRICT LINES

Minnesota employs so few teachers of color, that in some parts of the state, there are only one or two teachers of color in a district, or even in an entire region. Teachers of color often cite racial isolation as among the top reasons for leaving or considering leaving the profession. When teachers of color talk about racial isolation, they are talking about a problem that prevents them from developing collaborative relationships and that prevents them from being able to contribute meaningfully to districtwide decisions regarding issues as critical as curriculum design and student behavior. Achinstein et al. (2010) explained:

The empathy of teachers of color for students of color, which was reported to be rooted in a common experience, resulted in teachers feeling isolated, having few colleagues with whom they shared the same orientation toward students, and being excluded from certain professional and social encounters that could foster a sense of belonging, help their teaching, and affect organizational decision making. (Achinstein et al., 2010)

“True community can go a long way toward making it easier for teachers of color to stay. It can be hard to be the only person of color in the room.”

Teachers of color “are often silenced, pedagogically questioned, not chosen for leadership opportunities, and viewed as less competent than their White peers, even in schools service majority student of color populations” (Kohli, 2016). Education Minnesota’s Teachers of Color Recruitment and Retention Survey (2015) also confirmed these findings. More than 69% of members who completed the survey indicated that racial isolation is either very important or important to their consideration of leaving the classroom (Education Minnesota, 2015). One respondent wrote, “having a support group for teachers of color is what made me come back this year after a terrible year.” Another wrote, “true community can go a long way toward making it easier for teachers of color to stay. It can be hard to be the only person of color in the room” (Education Minnesota, 2015).

Minnesota Needs Teacher Mentoring Systems Rooted in Best Practices

One of the most critical components of a successful induction program is the mentor-mentee relationship. In Minnesota, rule requires mentoring for Tier 1 and Tier 2 teachers, and, as mentioned above, statute “encourages” districts to develop mentoring programs. The state provides no money to districts to do any of it, much less develop programs aligned with best practice. It is time to make best practice the norm in Minnesota.

DEVELOP PROCESSES TO PROPERLY MATCH MENTORS AND MENTEES

Almost all of the academic and policy organization recommendations on building effective mentoring programs point to the importance of taking care in making the mentor-mentee match. The New Teacher Center recommended that “state policy should require a rigorous mentor selection process” (The New Teacher Center, 2016). Piggot-Irvine et al. (2009) concluded that making a good match is a critical component of the respected induction programs they studied, and that in the best programs, administrators considered teaching areas, personalities, mentor experience, teaching context, proximity, and (in some cases) the wishes of the beginning teacher (Long, et al., 2012, February, p. 11). One study showed that making sure the mentor-mentee match reflected the same grade level was actually predictive of teacher retention results (Parker, 2009, p. 11).

The Minnesota Educator Induction Guidelines recommend the following criteria for mentor selection:

Instructional Skills

- Completed five or more years of successful teaching
- Demonstrates solid content knowledge
- Considers diverse student needs to personalize and differentiate instruction to promote achievement for all students
- Creates and manages a productive classroom learning environment
- Demonstrates a broad repertoire of instructional practices
- Assesses student learning and modifies instruction to meet student needs

Mentoring Knowledge and Skills

- Understands beginning teacher development and adult learning theory
- Knows how to analyze instruction based on criteria of professional teaching standards
- Understands the reciprocal relationships among educational theory, research, and practice
- Uses an inquiry approach for problem solving
- Uses a continuous improvement, professional growth model

Personal and Professional Dispositions

- Communicates openly, honestly, and sensitively with students, staff, and parents
- Encourages and nurtures an appreciation of diversity
- Is friendly, approachable, and accessible
- Is enthusiastic and optimistic
- Is dependable and trustworthy
- Demonstrates a patient, helpful, and caring attitude
- Models reflective practices
- Demonstrates commitment to own professional growth and learning
- Fund release time for mentors and mentees (Teacher Support Partnership, 2009, pp. 34-35)

As mentioned above, ideal mentoring relationships are based on mutual collaboration and growth. The best mentors approach the role and the relationship with a desire to learn, to gain new perspectives, and to develop their own teaching. Curiosity and humility are important characteristics for a successful mentor.

PROVIDE FUNDING FOR DISTRICTS TO ALLOW FOR RELEASE TIME FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES

Long, et al. (2012) reviewed extant academic literature on teacher induction and mentoring, and they pointed out what our own teachers and administrators tell us whenever they are asked about why their mentoring programs are not more robust:

One difficulty around [induction] is time. Both mentors and mentees felt limited and frustrated by the lack of time for meeting, discussion, and relationship development (Long, et al., 2012, February, p. 12)

The findings Long et al. refer to can be found in Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009 and Piggot-Irvine et al., 2009. The New Teacher Center recommended that state policy “should encourage programs to provide release time for teacher mentors and dedicated mentor-new teacher contact time” (The New Teacher Center, 2016).

The importance of time for a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship should not be surprising, especially when we examine what successful mentoring relationships entail. Minnesota rules for the mentoring programs required for Tier 1 and Tier 2 teachers require: 1) a year-long collaborative relationship; 2) a mentor who has access to training or resources and who develops common expectations for the mentorship experience and encourages the mentee to select areas for growth over the course of the year; and 3) no less than one meeting per month. Furthermore, those meetings must include discussion of effective strategies to engage students, classroom management strategies that reflect an understanding of the stages of childhood development, the educational rights of students and their diverse needs and experiences, school policies and practices, and using student data to improve teaching and learning (PELSB, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Creative and careful matching between mentors and mentees should be based at least in part on the needs of the new teacher.

That list alone is a lot to accomplish in any meaningful way in nine one-hour meetings. But we know from academic research that effective mentoring relationships for new teachers do far more than what is currently required in Minnesota rule. The New Teacher Center recommended that state policy require regular observation of new teachers by mentors, the provision of instructional feedback based on those observations, and opportunities for new teachers to observe experienced teacher's classrooms" (The New Teacher Center, 2016). Without release time for mentors and mentees, classroom observations become impossible.

In Minnesota, because our teachers of color are so few and therefore so isolated, taking the time to find mentor-mentee relationships between new and experienced teachers of color can make a tremendous difference, even if this means finding ways to cross district lines (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016). Creative and careful matching between mentors and mentees should be based at least in part on the needs of the new teacher.

An effective mentor is collaborative, both teaching and learning along with the mentee, and that mentor provides instruction, emotional, social, and psychological support to his or her mentee.

A review of academic literature paints an even more robust picture for what funding can do to create more helpful, long-lasting relationships that will both improve instructional practice and improve teacher retention. Long et al., pointed to a deep well of research that concludes that an effective mentor is more than just an instructor on a finite number of topics. Rather,

an effective mentor is collaborative, both teaching and learning along with the mentee, and that mentor provides instruction, emotional, social, and psychological support to his or her mentee (Long, et al., 2012, February, p. 11). Young and Cates (2010) found in their study that having a mentor trained in empathetic listening helped beginning teachers manage tension (Young & Cates, 2010, p. 10).

According to the Learning Policy Institute, the average cost to a school that has to hire a new teacher is \$20,000 (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). Given that one out of every three new teachers in Minnesota leaves the classroom in the first five years, Minnesota districts are spending millions of dollars on the problem of high teacher turnover.

The costs of investing in high-quality induction and mentoring programs are dwarfed by the amount of money Minnesota districts are already spending on the constant process of recruiting and hiring new teachers as current teachers continue to leave at such alarming rates. According to the Learning Policy Institute, the average cost to a school that has to hire a new teacher is \$20,000 (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). Given that one out of every three new teachers in Minnesota leaves the classroom in the first five years, Minnesota districts are spending millions of dollars on the problem of high teacher turnover. In the 2017-18 school year, 2,392 teachers were new graduates of teacher preparation programs, both from Minnesota and from other states. If one third of those teachers leave in their first five years, Minnesota districts will be looking to refill 789 positions. At an estimated cost of \$20,000 per new hire, that's \$15,787,200 spent on teacher turnover in just five years. And that figure doesn't take into account hiring behind retirees or hiring behind people who left at any other point during their careers.

And the costs are not merely financial. There are also instructional and academic costs to high levels of teacher turnover. High levels of teacher turnover "in a particular school may have adverse impacts on outcomes for the school's students. Student outcomes will be adversely affected, for example, if turnover leads to a lower quality mix of teachers, loss of coherence within the school's educational program, or the inability of the school to replace all the teachers who leave" (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018, p. 1). A recent study that looked closely at how schools respond to teacher turnover exposes part of what is at stake:

A school may respond to the loss of teachers in a particular year or subject by increasing class sizes, either as a chosen strategy or because of its inability to hire replacement teachers, either from within the school or outside the school. If the replacement teachers are more qualified than the ones they replace either in terms of instructional effectiveness or their ability to work with others toward the institutional mission of the school or both, the change could be beneficial for students. In contrast, if the replacement teachers are

less qualified than the ones they replace along either or both dimensions, the change will be detrimental to student outcomes and to the smooth operation of the school. (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018, p. 3)

Sorensen and Ladd explained further:

We consistently find that the loss of math or ELA teachers at the school level leads to larger shares of such teachers with limited experience or who are lateral entrants or have provisional licenses. We find suggestive evidence that turnover also leads to higher shares of teachers that are not certified in the specified subject, and of teachers with lower average licensure test scores. All four of these characteristics typically signify less effectiveness in the classroom, and may signify a lower ability to contribute to the coherence of the school's mission. Greater shares of the teachers with these characteristics may also contribute to higher future turnover rates, given that departure rates for members of these categories of teachers tend to be high. Moreover, we find that the adverse effects of turnover rise linearly with the rate of turnover and are higher in high poverty schools and higher in period of student enrollment growth. (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018, pp. 3-4)

Overall, high rates of teacher turnover are costly in terms of their impacts on instruction and academic achievement, in addition to the financial burden they impose on the system.

Lastly, the costs of failing to address both the low number of teachers of color in the workforce and the high rate at which they leave the profession costs our state dearly, in that teachers of color have the greatest potential to recognize and address education inequities.

Clearly, there is much work to do if Minnesota is serious about inducting teachers into the profession in ways that are designed to promote student achievement and increase teacher retention.

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