

Induction Support of Teachers Across South Carolina

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Education leaders have long been concerned with challenges of retaining public school teachers. Research shows that increasing induction teacher turnover is problematic for school success (Bowsher, Sparks, & Hoyer, 2018; Gray & Taie, 2015). Teacher attrition negatively impacts student learning, decreases teacher moral, and costs districts billions (SREB, 2018). Historically, the teaching profession in the United States has a relatively high turnover rate compared to many other traditional, licensed professions including nurses, engineers, and attorneys (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Perda, 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

In addition, teacher attrition is almost twice as high as similar high-achieving nations including Finland, Singapore, and Canada (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research overwhelmingly shows that between 40 and 50 percent of early career educators leave the profession within their first five years (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987, 1997; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers who receive early career support as they transition into the profession are less likely to exit the profession early.

In South Carolina, induction teacher attrition has transformed from a problem to a state-wide crisis over the last decade. During the 2017-2018 school year, 25% of first-year teachers left the classroom. This paper discusses the challenges associated with teacher attrition and the need for induction support, reviews promising practices of induction support programs from both school district and university initiatives in South Carolina, and shares conclusions and recommendations.

To address the state's teacher attrition crisis, many South Carolina school districts have developed innovative induction efforts to address differing early career educator needs. Berkeley County School District, Lexington One School District, Lexington Two School District, and Pickens County School District offer a wide range of induction efforts and are highlighted as promising practices in SC.

In addition to district innovations, three South Carolina universities have reached beyond educating their currently enrolled students, to help school districts support and retain their alumni and early career educators across the state. Clemson University, Newberry College, and the University of South Carolina have taken three varied approaches.

+ SOUTH CAROLINA

Twenty years ago (CERRA, 2019b), the SC State Legislature mandated Section 59-26-30 of the Code of Laws, directing the SCDE to develop guidelines for a teacher induction program by July 1, 2000, to include long-term coaching and assistance. The mandate also stated that the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) should do the following:

- disseminate best practices in teacher induction programs to school districts;
- adopt criteria for the selection and induction teacher training for mentor teachers; and
- promulgate regulations to be used by local school districts for providing formalized induction programs for teachers.

Additional state mandates require districts to provide induction teachers with comprehensive guidance, assistance, and written feedback throughout the school year on their strengths and weaknesses relative to state standards for teaching effectiveness.

These first critical steps taken by state policymakers in 2000 laid a path for SC's school districts to better support and meet the needs of its induction teachers. This also spurred further collaboration among school districts, college and university teacher education programs, the SCDE's Division of Educator Quality and Leadership, and CERRA (SCDE, 2006).

CERRA's 2018-2019 SC Annual Educator Supply and Demand Report includes information on rates of public school teachers both entering and leaving the profession. During the 2017-2018 school year, CERRA (2019a) found that there were 1,642 completers of SC teacher educator programs, and 2,596.1 teachers left SC public schools. In addition, 34% of first-year teachers did not return to the same position for the 2018-2019 school year and 25% no longer teach in any SC public school. Attrition percentages have climbed yearly over the last five years while completers of teacher educator programs have declined.

State data clearly show there is a growing disparity between those entering and leaving the teaching profession. South Carolina is graduating 32% fewer teachers since 2012-2013. At the same time, there has been a 73% increase in educators leaving the profession since the 2011-2012 school year (CERRA, 2019b). Of those leaving the profession, early career educators make up more than half. These data show an immediate need to provide more comprehensive support and mentoring to better attract, cultivate, and keep induction teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- District leaders of smaller and/or rural districts should look to the Midlands Educator Effectiveness Roundtable (MEER), the Olde English Consortium, the Pee Dee Consortium, and the Western Piedmont Education Consortium, and others, as models to develop and lead unified teacher induction and mentoring programs by pooling resources.
- To support district leaders as they prepare and implement teacher induction and mentoring plans, OEELD, CERRA, or another SC agency should look at publishing exemplar district teacher induction and mentoring plans. While most districts list their expanded ADEPT plans on their district websites, this would alleviate district leadership reading through more than 80 plans for ideas to improve their teacher induction and mentoring plans.
- While policymakers and state education leaders have taken many steps to prioritize teacher induction and mentoring by adopting and funding a formal induction and mentoring program, the state has not perfected its teacher induction and mentoring policies to ensure the provision of a high impact, multi-year induction support for all early career educators (Goldrick, 2016). As state and district leaders seek to keep early career professional educators in the classroom, research shows more action is needed to support three years of non-evaluative, personalized, induction support and mentoring for all early career educators to support their individual professional growth.
- There are homegrown promising practices taking place in communities surrounding and being led by multiple South Carolina universities who embrace the idea that they have a hand, not only in preparing teachers, but also in helping to further develop and retain them. These universities showcase that South Carolina colleges and universities are positioned to grow their innovative, non-evaluative programs which follow their graduates into the classroom and provide substantive support to the state's induction teachers with support from state policy and education leaders.



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