
A REDESIGN OF THE SOUTH
CAROLINA MENTOR TRAINING

AUGUST 2016

CENTER FOR EDUCATOR RECRUITMENT,
RETENTION, & ADVANCEMENT (CERRA)

Introduction

Like many states in the country, South Carolina faces an acute issue with teacher retention. According to the *2013, 2014, and 2015 Supply and Demand Survey Reports* produced by the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA), between 3,900 and 4,100 teachers have left their public school teaching positions each year. Of even greater concern is the number of these departing teachers who are in the early stages of their careers. More than 1,300 teachers who left their position each year had five or fewer years of experience in the classroom. Between 440 and 580 teachers who left their positions each of those three years had one year or less of classroom experience. These statistics are troubling for many reasons, including the fact that nearly 20% of the beginning teachers who were hired in the 2014-15 school year did not return the following year. That is roughly 1 in 5 new teachers who left during or at the end of their first year in the classroom. As noted above, this occurrence is not unique to one school year. It is a multi-year trend, and the number of teachers who leave continues to grow.

CERRA's *Supply and Demand Survey Reports* also indicate that many of these early-career teachers leave their positions for understandable reasons, such as relocating with a spouse or staying home with young children. Other departures are due to an involuntary dismissal. But, far too many teachers left for reasons related to frustration, a perceived lack of support, classroom management difficulties, and numerous other reasons. These teachers reportedly feel so isolated and unsupported that they end up leaving their classrooms, and in many cases, the profession altogether. This attrition not only impacts the learning environment and the school, but it is also costly for schools and districts to recruit, hire, and induct new teachers every year. A 2005 report written by the Alliance for Excellent Education concluded that replacing public school teachers costs the nation \$4.9 billion each year, and South Carolina accounts for more than \$74.5 million. Now, more than a decade later, these figures are likely to be much higher due to inflation and the increased number of teachers leaving South Carolina classrooms each year.

Adding to this growing attrition problem is the declining number of graduates who complete a South Carolina teacher education program. According to the Commission on Higher Education, 2,447 students graduated with a Bachelor's degree eligible for teacher certification in South Carolina during the 2012-13 school year. This number fell to 2,219 in 2013-14 and 1,954 in 2014-15. When these numbers are compared to the numbers of teachers leaving their classrooms each year, the importance of teacher retention becomes even more evident in our state.

Why Mentoring?

Many of these occurrences of attrition among early-career teachers could be prevented with meaningful mentoring and induction programs. These support programs are designed to assist beginning teachers with their professional growth and assimilation resulting in improved performance and increased student achievement. Today more than half of all states require that new teachers participate in some form of induction or mentoring program. South Carolina mandates both – a formal induction process that includes a mentoring component. Each district in this state is required to provide beginning teachers with comprehensive guidance and assistance throughout the school year. While the structure of these programs can vary across districts, every program must include trained mentors assigned to work with beginning teachers. Mentors receive explicit instruction during a multi-day training on how to support a beginning teacher effectively.

Research and experience tell us that novice teachers benefit from mentor support early in their careers. This type of support is critical to beginning teachers as they are learning to navigate their profession. Mentoring has been proven to positively impact teacher satisfaction, retention, and performance. In a 2015 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, it was determined that teachers who had first-year mentors were more likely to still be in the classroom. Results from a 2009 report concluded that the pace of new teacher learning increases when they are paired with highly trained mentors. A recent examination of 15 empirical studies conducted since the mid-1980s about the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teachers revealed the following results:

- Beginning teachers who participated in some kind of induction with a mentoring component had higher satisfaction, commitment, or retention.
- Beginning teachers who participated in some kind of induction with a mentoring component performed better at certain aspects of teaching (i.e., keeping students on task, developing workable lesson plans, using effective questioning practices with students, providing differentiated instruction to meet students' needs and interests, demonstrating successful classroom management, etc.).
- Students of beginning teachers who participated in some kind of induction with a mentoring component had higher scores or gains on academic achievement tests.

There is no shortage of evidence to prove that mentoring, if carried out appropriately, can lead to many positive gains. Depending on the size of a district and the comprehensiveness of its induction program, however, effective support of new teachers can be expensive. Many of the public school districts in this state experience budget constraints every year and are forced to limit spending in certain areas. With the growing number of teachers leaving early in their careers and a dwindling number of new teachers graduating from South Carolina institutions of higher education each year, public school districts need to do whatever they can to retain teachers who have the potential to be successful. This is the reason the South Carolina Mentor Training is so important.

History of Mentoring in South Carolina

South Carolina has a history of training mentors on topics associated with and the skills necessary for supporting the development of beginning teachers. In 2006, the State Board of Education adopted State Mentoring and Induction Guidelines and charged CERRA and the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) to develop and provide mentor training for experienced teachers and administrators in the public school districts. As a result of this charge, CERRA, in collaboration with the SCDE and the individual South Carolina school districts, previously developed and offered a three-day Initial Mentor Training. This training provided new mentors with instruction on beginning teacher needs, mentor language, and other topics. Trained mentors would then provide assistance and support to beginning teachers as they strive to grow into effective, quality teachers.

Surveys

In April 2013 CERRA administered a survey to more than 500 certified mentors and induction teachers in nine South Carolina public school districts to collect feedback on this three-day Initial

Mentor Training. Mentors were asked to provide specific information about the tools and resources presented in the training and how helpful/unhelpful they were in facilitating the mentor's work with a beginning teacher. Surveys sent to beginning teachers included questions about the level of support they received from their assigned mentors who had previously completed the three-day training. Although mentors and beginning teachers were asked different sets of questions, both groups of respondents provided answers with similar themes.

Most mentors indicated that the training was effective in helping them develop the skills needed to provide tailored support and assistance to their beginning teacher. However, when asked to identify ways they may have felt unprepared to effectively support and assist new teachers, mentors reported several difficulties including mentoring teachers in different grade levels and content areas, conducting observations, and providing formative feedback. When asked about the support provided by their mentors, some first-year induction teachers reported that their mentors were often not in the same grade levels or content areas and, therefore, could not provide effective feedback. The alignment of responses from both groups helped identify specific areas of improvement for the mentor training.

Dissertation

As these surveys were being administered, a doctoral dissertation was being written about the impact of the Initial Mentor Training. The study was to include results from the surveys administered to trained mentors, as well as information from interviews conducted with some of the mentors who responded to the survey and agreed to participate in follow-up discussions. Data collected from the interviews supported the conclusions that were drawn from the survey results. These conclusions led to an important decision to redesign the three-day mentor training. Based on the survey and dissertation results, it was evident that the new training should include instruction for mentors on how to conduct classroom observations, analyze data collected during observations, and provide effective feedback based on the observation data.

Another topic to be enhanced in the training is the importance of aligning a mentor's role to the beginning teacher's needs. As previously stated, mentors and beginning teachers reported that they were often not in the same grade levels and content areas as one another. This mismatch resulted in mentors who were not prepared to provide adequate support to the beginning teachers. Although district policies on the pairing of mentors and beginning teachers is not addressed in the training, it is necessary for mentors to understand the many different roles they may have to assume when they teach a subject that is very different from the subject taught by their mentee. To make certain that the new training would include the most relevant, valuable information for a mentor, an extensive literature review was conducted in search of best practices in the mentoring and induction of beginning teachers. The knowledge gained during this review, combined with the survey and interview data and anecdotal evidence collected over the years, was used to develop a framework for the new training curriculum.

Revision Team

To facilitate the redesign process, CERRA and the SCDE brought together a group of diverse educators who provided their expertise and leadership on mentoring and induction in South Carolina. The group consisted of mentors, mentoring and induction coordinators, school-level administrators, successful, early-year teachers, and others. The primary purpose of this group was to begin developing the content of the new training based on the framework provided to them. After more than a year of writing, revising, and editing, the end result is the current two-day South

Carolina Mentor Training. In September, 2015, the first pilot training was offered in Columbia, SC. Many members of the work group who assisted in the training development were in attendance and offered feedback as required. A few minor revisions were made before more trainings were offered throughout the state.

Current Mentor Training

The South Carolina Mentor Training is now a two-day training that consists of nine modules, each with one to four sections that contain in-depth information about mentoring beginning teachers and activities that allow participants to apply their new learning. Day 1 consists of four modules that contain fundamental concepts about mentoring. Module 1 covers introductions, training norms and outcomes, and the importance of mentoring. Relevant data supporting the importance of and need for mentoring also are shared in this module. Module 2 addresses needs of beginning teachers, roles of mentors, and effective mentoring relationships. Because every beginning teacher is unique and his/her needs will vary throughout the year, the roles of a mentor must constantly shift to stay in alignment with these changing needs. In this module, needs of beginning teachers are introduced using three categories: social/emotional, physical, and instructional. Thus, to ensure that the mentor provides the appropriate type of support, mentor roles are divided into these same three categories.

Also presented in Module 2 are the various pathways that lead to teacher certification in South Carolina. Familiarity with these paths will help the mentor to better understand his/her mentee's individual needs. A mentor who can offer this level of differentiated support, regardless of the beginning teacher's fluctuating needs or chosen certification path, is vital to any effective mentoring relationship.

Module 3 is solely dedicated to the Expanded ADEPT Support and Evaluation System and Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). This module is scripted for trainers as the information comes directly from the SCDE and is subject to change as adjustments are made to the state's evaluation system. Module 4, the final module of Day 1, provides an introduction to the newly developed four-step mentoring cycle: 1) pre-observation conference, 2) observation, 3) post-observation conference, and 4) Beginning Teacher Learning Opportunities (TLOs). This cycle is presented in a graphic referred to as the GPS – Guide to Professional Success. The GPS is used throughout the training as a visual aid to help provide a detailed explanation of the mentoring cycle, to reemphasize the importance of differentiated mentoring, and to portray the ultimate goal of any successful mentoring relationship. This goal involves the mentor providing differentiated support in a way that enables the beginning teacher to build efficacy and improve his/her practice. Trainers conclude Day 1 by reviewing information from previous modules and previewing content to be learned on Day 2 of the training.

Day 2 dissects the mentoring cycle and presents each of the four steps in a separate module. Module 5 introduces the Coaching Dialogue Protocol, which promotes professional communication within the mentoring relationship. It is designed to guide the conversation between a mentor and a beginning teacher, encouraging the mentor to use a variety of techniques and language stems to fully assess and identify the needs of the teacher. The Coaching Dialogue Protocol is used throughout the mentoring cycle and serves as a mechanism to encourage reflection, collaboration, and growth during the school year. Also included in Module 5 is information about the pre-observation conference, which is the first step of the mentoring cycle.

Its primary purpose is to provide an opportunity for the mentor and mentee to work together to identify and agree upon a particular focus for the upcoming classroom observation.

Module 6 focuses on behaviors and protocols for mentors conducting classroom observations, as well as four evidence-gathering strategies to use during the observation: scripting, counting, charting, and diagramming. Training participants are exposed to each observation technique and given opportunities to practice using them during a simulated observation. The observation is the second step of the mentoring cycle. Module 7 addresses what happens after the mentor observes the beginning teacher providing classroom instruction. Specifically included in this module are the protocols for analyzing data collected during the observation and information needed to facilitate the post-observation conference, which is the third step of the mentoring cycle. To prepare training participants for the post-observation conference, they are given instruction on providing effective feedback to beginning teachers based on data collected during the observation and guiding teachers successfully through the goal-setting process.

Module 8 covers the fourth and final step of the mentoring cycle, which is referred to as Beginning Teacher Learning Opportunities (TLOs). The primary purpose of the TLO is to assist the beginning teacher in improving his/her professional practice. A TLO can arise from the mentor identifying a need or potential area of growth and the steps required to provide the beginning teacher with the necessary learning opportunities. Occasionally a beginning teacher may identify his/her own TLO, but more frequently, it is the mentor's responsibility. While TLOs are described as the final step of the mentoring cycle, the training instructs mentors to recognize them at any point within or even outside the cycle. Module 9, the final training module, brings together all new learning and gives participants an opportunity to practice the full mentoring cycle. Once the practice activities are completed, the training is brought to a close by allowing participants to process their learning and share with their peers.

A substantial amount of pertinent information is covered during the two days of training that have just been described. It is unrealistic to assume that participants will leave the training ready to be fully effective mentors to beginning teachers. However, with practice using the knowledge and resources provided during the training, it is reasonable to expect them to develop into this role over time. Therefore, a successful mentor training is signified by participants who can, with practice, effectively fulfill their roles as mentors to beginning teachers. Specifically, they are able to:

- Identify the needs of beginning teachers
- Compare and contrast the needs of beginning teachers based on their pathways to certification
- Determine the roles and responsibilities of mentors in response to beginning teacher needs
- Recognize attributes of effective mentoring practices
- Understand the components of the four-step mentoring cycle
- Understand the specific skills necessary to carry out each step of the mentoring cycle effectively
- Apply new learning as they mentor beginning teachers

Current Mentor Trainer Training

The other piece to the new South Carolina Mentor Training is the Mentor Trainer Training. This training is intended for already-trained mentors who are interested in facilitating mentor trainings in their schools and districts. During the trainer training, content and information are shared using four different approaches including training simulations led by trainers, training simulations led by participants, trainer summaries, and think tanks. Each approach serves as a different learning experience for participants. Using the new training curriculum described throughout this report, the Mentor Trainer Training prepares mentors to:

- Effectively conduct the South Carolina Mentor Training, using the appropriate resources
- Understand best practices for professional presentations and co-presentations
- Teach each step of the mentoring cycle as it relates to supporting new teachers.

Conclusion

The redesign of South Carolina's Mentor Training, and subsequently, the Mentor Trainer Training, was a very comprehensive, research-driven, and collaborative process. From start to finish, it took more than two-and-a-half years to roll out the first pilot Mentor Training and several more months after that to introduce the Mentor Trainer Training. The development of this statewide curriculum involved many talented, experienced educators who believe that effective mentoring programs can lead to numerous benefits for schools and districts.

Building on the new Mentor Training and Mentor Trainer Training, CERRA and the SCDE will continue to develop additional training opportunities for various groups of educators in South Carolina. It is anticipated that the following trainings will be developed during the 2016-17 school year: an online upgrade training for mentors trained under the previous system; a training for school administrators that will include best practices for supporting mentors; and a training for higher education faculty who support pre-service teachers. In an effort to provide districts with consistent information related to changes in mentoring and induction programs, a revision of the Mentoring and Induction Guidelines also will occur during the 2016-17 school year.

Research shows that successful mentoring practices involving a trained mentor paired with a beginning teacher can result in higher retention rates and job satisfaction and improved performance among beginning teachers. Gains in student achievement also have been linked to beginning teachers who participated in some kind of induction with a mentoring component. Regardless of a district's policies and procedures related to inducting new teachers, mentoring is and must continue to be an essential piece of the overall induction process. For states like South Carolina that are experiencing teacher shortages due to high teacher turnover, particularly among early-career teachers, mentoring programs can have a significant impact on its teachers, students, and the quality of its public education system.

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