

EXPERIENCE OF EARLY EDUCATORS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN THE
NORTH COAST TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM:
A CASE STUDY

By

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Abstract

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The teacher induction program is a 2-year program designed to support new teachers in their first two years of teaching. The program was created to provide job-embedded support to set teaching goals, attend professional learning to increase understanding of the California standards for the Teaching Profession, and provide teacher mentor support. In more recent years with the decline in enrollment of teacher preparation programs, teachers leaving the profession, and teachers retiring, there has been a great need for training and retaining highly qualified teachers. Higher turnover among underprepared teachers in California, are seeing close to 40% of new teachers hired on permits or waivers leaving teaching altogether by the end of their third year. While teacher candidates are entering the classrooms underprepared, programs have been created to support teachers, and are required for all teachers to receive a clear teaching credential. This case study aims to explore the experience of early educators currently enrolled in the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP) and will showcase the importance of the role of their mentor teacher. The findings of this case study indicate the role of a mentor teacher during the first few years of teaching is not only integral but an essential component of the induction program.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Appendices	vii
Introduction.....	1
Positionality Statement and My Experience with the Induction Program.....	4
Theoretical Framework: Caring as Ethical Relationship.....	7
Literature review	12
Historical Background	13
The North Coast School of Education (NCTIP) Program	16
Mentoring and The Importance of Peer Learning	18
Methods.....	21
Data Analysis	25
Findings.....	26
Figures	27
Questions related to their mentor teacher.	28
Review of themes that are useful and important in the NCTIP Program.	29
Review of themes that are not useful in the NCTIP Program	31
Conclusions.....	32
Discussion	35
Limitations/Recommendations:	36

References.....	37
Appendices.....	40

List of Figures

Figure 1: The age of the participants.	27
Figure 2: The number of years the respondents have been teaching.	27
Figure 3. Indicates respondents' sexual orientation.	28
Figure 4: Respondents answers related to their gender.	28

List of Appendices

Appendix A: The survey tool in its entirety	41
Appendix B: Raw Data	50

Introduction

Teaching and learning should drive creativity and be a positive experience for all students. Many of us have had at least one teacher who had a positive impact on our lives and without that person, many of us may not be where we are today. New teachers are innovators and the glue that motivates and supports students to become their best selves, but many are leaving the profession after a few short years. Demand for new teachers continues to be high throughout California and the rest of the United States. In a 2001 report, the supply of credentialed teachers from 2000 to 2001 in California increased by 8%, from 22,122 to 23,926 (Bond, 2011). In a 2005 report, researchers noted that California will need to replace at least 100,000 teachers over the next 10 years (Fitch & Birch, 2011). Today, news headlines continue to broadcast the trend of teacher shortages from all over the United States, from Nevada to Oklahoma as well as California. Some states are even resorting to putting underprepared teachers into classrooms. For example, teacher shortages seem to be affecting every state, and the supply to fill these positions appears to be declining. Between 2009 and 2014, teacher preparation programs saw a 35% decline in enrollment. Darling-Hammond & Thomas-Carver (2019) used data from national databases to indicate a shortage of 64,000 teachers in the 2015-16 school year with an annual shortage of 112,000 teachers in the 2017-2018 school year (p. 4). In a 2016-2017 survey sent out by the American Association for Employment in Education to a sample of higher education institutions and districts across the country, more than two-thirds reported not having enough teachers to fill open positions. Noting that this rate has

more than doubled from the 2013-2014 survey data (Darling-Hammond & Thomas-Carver, 2019).

One potential solution to this compound issue of teacher shortages is intentional induction programs that support early career teachers through focused professional development services and mentorship support. In California, receiving a teaching credential is a two-step process. The first step requires teachers to complete a bachelor's degree in addition to a 5th year teaching credential program. Upon completion of those requirements, the candidate receives a preliminary teaching credential. After receiving a preliminary credential, the teacher must accept a teaching position, and enroll in a teacher induction program (NCOSE, 2023).

In this thesis, I will be focusing on a particular induction program, the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP). In California, the Teacher Induction Program Preconditions and Program Standards Handbook, revised in June 2017, outlines the 6 steps that an induction program should include, but school districts may vary in the way they operate their induction programs. The NCTIP is a two-year, state-accredited induction program created to support new teachers with preliminary credentials to obtain a clear teaching credential (NCOSE, 2023). The NCTIP program is designed to provide individual, one-on-one support from a mentor teacher to help guide new teachers through the various parts of the program. New teachers work with mentor teachers to complete individual learning plans (ILPs), set goals, and attend professional development to increase their understanding of the California standards for the Teaching Profession, as well as help them become comfortable and effective teachers in the classroom. The

NCTIP program offers monthly group meetings with other teachers enrolled in the program, along with weekly meetings with their mentor teacher. After the completion of the program, the teacher receives a clear teaching credential. Having a clear teaching credential means that all requirements have been met and allows the teacher to stay in the classroom long-term, as opposed to a preliminary credential which is only temporarily issued and expires. If a teacher fails to complete an induction program within 5 years of receiving a preliminary credential the preliminary credential expires and the teacher is no longer able to teach. They must contact the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to apply for an extension and discuss the next steps to teach in the classroom.

The research discussed here is a case study focused on documenting and analyzing the experiences of a group of new teachers enrolled in the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP) run through The North Coast School of Education, based in Sonoma County, CA. The teachers are a mixture of year 1 and year 2 candidates all with less than 5 years of teaching experience. This case study aims to capture a first-hand look at the NCTIP program to gain insight from early educators on the induction program and better understand the importance of the role of their mentor teacher.

All the teachers in this case study work in Humboldt County, CA. Humboldt County is a small rural county located 5 hours north of the San Francisco Bay Area, with a total population of 135,000 and according to Ed-Data in 2018-2019 there were approximately 1,000 employed full-time K-12 teachers. In the 2023-2024 school year, a total of 95 new teachers enrolled in the Humboldt County NCTIP program. All 95 new

teachers were sent a survey asking questions about their experience in the program, including open-ended questions about their mentor teachers. The survey is designed to provide a better understanding of the role their mentor teacher plays, as well as what is working and not working in the induction program.

My interest in the induction program began a few years ago. I spent 6 years working as an Administrative Assistant in the Educational Services Department of one of the larger school districts in Humboldt County. Even though I have left that position, my career in education continues to evolve. The induction program became an important part of my life for two reasons: first, working with the induction program was the catalyst for developing deep relationships. I got the privilege of meeting new teachers as well as working with mentor teachers each year, growing, and deepening those relationships that continue to this day; second, it left me wondering about the great need for teachers, and why so many continued to enter the program each year. As I began a new education journey for myself in the master's program, my interest in teacher induction became the focus of my research.

Positionality Statement and My Experience with the Induction Program

To better understand my research, I explored my relationship with education. I am a white cisgender female who has been working in the field of education for the last 10 years. My educational journey has not been easy, from an early age I struggled academically even dropping out of college on my first try. Even though I struggled there were many teachers along the way that supported and encouraged me. As I graduated college and began working in education, I have been fortunate enough to have some

amazing people enter my life, many of whom I consider mentors. Their support has propelled me to where I am today, and I am forever grateful.

My interest in this case study came from the very first task I was asked to tackle when I began my job. As stated above, I was hired as an Administrative Assistant in the Educational Services department at a local school district. New teachers were being hired and I needed to make sure that the NCTIP program was up and running. To receive a clear teaching credential, new teachers holding preliminary credentials were required to enroll in the NCTIP program within the first 30 days of accepting their first teaching job. The number of teachers entering the program ranged anywhere from 20-30 or sometimes more each fall. New teachers enrolled in the program had varied experiences, the majority of whom had only the student teaching experience they received in the credential program. A small number of enrolled teachers came from other districts and needed to finish their second year of the program.

Each August I worked with the Human Resources department to gather basic information about all the new teachers, like their names and site information. I took the information and began scanning a hand-me-down list of more experienced teachers who volunteered to be a mentor for new teachers. That list became my mentor pairing list, and I began the task of pairing each new teacher with a mentor teacher. As I completed the task and monitored the progress of the candidates throughout the year, I paid little attention to the nuances of the program. The end of the year would roll around, teachers would leave, and the beginning of the year would require the process to begin all over again. After my second year of working with the program, I began to be more interested

in the induction program as a whole and the role I played in it. I started establishing relationships with the more experienced (mentor) teachers on my list, as well as becoming more aware of all the teachers in the district. Rather than just taking a hand-me-down volunteer list of teachers, I began to send out proactive communication to teachers on that list as well as other teachers who I thought would be good mentors. Emails like, “Be on the lookout for my email in early August, as I will be asking you to pair with a new teacher in the upcoming year”.

As my relationship with the mentor teachers grew, I began to learn more about the program, my role, and the role mentorship played in the success of early career educators. I realized I needed to stop viewing this as a task. I needed to start talking and listening to the individuals whom I was asking to be mentors, as well as new teachers entering the program. Utilizing Nel Noddings’ theory of caring, helped me realize that I needed to start understanding more about the mentor teachers and the new teachers, spending time with them as people to get to know them. I became more invested in my relationships to gain a deeper, more individual understanding of who they were. It was about listening, modeling, and the practice of caring not about completing a task (Smith, 2020). It became clear that the NCTIP program was designed to provide support to new teachers by assigning them a mentor teacher to create deeper connections. I began to think about pairing each mentor and new teacher with greater intentionality. I created a new approach to the pairing process. I started by collecting more information about the new teachers as well as the mentor teachers to find commonalities. I know from personal experience that when I am around people with common interests, it’s easier to have conversations and

form connections. I met with Human Resources to gather information on our mentor teachers and updated my hand-me-down list to include more information about potential mentor teachers, including their area of expertise in teaching, the grade level and subjects they taught, their site, and I even started noting a few hobbies. I did the same with our incoming new teachers. I began to understand that pairing a new teacher with a mentor teacher seemed important and that using commonalities could be an important part of the matching process. The task of pairing began to switch from a quick and easy task to a more thoughtful process of connecting people, like puzzle pieces. Pairing someone for 2 years felt important and establishing mentor/mentee pairings that had something in common could kick-start the process of creating a caring relationship. Over the years of pairing mentors and teachers, it became clear that if there wasn't some connection between the mentor and teacher the relationship could be strained, and the success of the teacher was impacted. For example, one year a new teacher came to me asking if they could postpone their induction program because they were not connecting with their mentor. After a few conversations, I paired them with a different mentor, and they completed the program on time without postponing. That was a turning point for me, I became more invested in the relational part of the program. Realizing that relationships matter, making a personal connection is important, and creating an environment of caring became a top priority.

Theoretical Framework: Caring as Ethical Relationship

With the realization that mentor pairing was an essential part of the program, I began creating more opportunities to build relationships, as Nel Noddings' would say, I

engaged in the act of natural caring, creating relationships because I wanted to, and not because I had to (Smith, 2020; Noddings 2005). I made a few changes in how I approached the program that in hindsight became an integral part of the program, it was more about caring for and about the mentor teachers and new teachers (Smith, 2020; Noddings 2005). Those changes allowed me to form some very important bonds with new teachers and mentors and many are still my friends today.

One of the more important changes that I made was setting up meetings with new teachers right away by asking the Human Resources department to send all the new teachers down to my office after they came in to sign their contracts. This quick meeting changed many things about the “task” that needed to be completed. Not only did I meet the new teachers I got to put a name to a face. The new teachers now saw me as a person who would be sending periodic emails, a person who they could come to if they had questions about almost anything. After all, these were new teachers entering a new district and had so much to navigate and learn. This meeting gave me the opportunity to get to know each of them and allowed me to begin creating relationships with every one of them. I got to hear stories of where they had been, and I always felt their excitement about landing a job and beginning their teaching career. After this quick initial meeting, I invited them back so that I could spend some quality one-on-one time with each of them to find out more about them as individuals. I asked basic questions, like which of the 8 schools in the district they were placed in and what subject and/or grade level they were teaching. I also asked questions to get to know more about their interests and hobbies.

Through these meetings, it became very clear to me that building relationships with each of them not only provided them with someone that they could turn to for support but also created a sense of belonging, and that someone in the district cared for them. Meeting with each of the new teachers also helped me to gain a better understanding of who they were, which in turn helped me to pair them with a mentor teacher who I thought would best meet their needs. I spent one-on-one time with the new teachers, I also began to cultivate and grow strong caring, and trusting relationships with the mentor teachers. Creating these relationships allowed me to get to know more about each of them, which provided me with invaluable information when pairing them together. In education, we tend to focus on an outcome or attaining knowledge, and sometimes forget about the act of caring for and about others.

I created a portfolio for each mentor teacher adding in things like their strengths, hobbies and interests, and teaching styles, all of which I could do because I worked hard to continue to form close working relationships with each of the mentor teachers. As my time at the district office grew so did my vested interest in seeing these teachers succeed, finish the program, and land their first permanent teaching job, always hoping to keep them in the district. I began to put more effort into getting to know everyone involved, the new teachers and the mentor teachers, realizing that getting to know someone over 2 years creates a sense of community and caring. As Noddings says (2005), “The most basic idea of relational caring is to respond to each individual in such a way that we establish and maintain caring relationships” (p. xviii). Not only did I start cultivating relationships, but through these relationships, other opportunities were created, like

stepping inside some of the new teacher's classrooms. In my role at the district, I also supported state assessments. I was trained to help administer interim assessments as well as statewide assessments. I provided group training to teachers on how to administer interim and state assessments. I was also lucky enough to provide support to new teachers in their classrooms by going into their classrooms to help administer these assessments. I provided tips and tricks for classroom management, but most importantly I got the opportunity to see these teachers in action with their students. The excitement, commitment, and caring that each of them showed was always inspiring.

As the years went on, I became more involved and invested in the program and the success of the teachers. I made some great friends along the way. I was always happy to hear when one of the teachers in the program was asked to stay in our district. Not only did that feel like a success, but I knew in a few years that I would be asking them to be a mentor teacher for our new teachers. It was a bummer to hear that a teacher was leaving, some were asked not to return, some left the district to teach somewhere else, and others moved to different jobs besides teaching. I got to see firsthand the struggles that our district faced each year trying to get enough qualified teachers in classrooms to teach our students. Each year our classrooms were filled with brilliant, enthusiastic teachers, and by the next August when school began again a set of brand-new teachers entered the program and the classrooms. Not only was I working with a set of brand-new teachers yearly I was personally experiencing the effects of the influx of new teachers into our schools each year. I have two children who were navigating their way through the public school system in a different district. Their district was also struggling to keep teachers in

their classrooms. Over a 2-year period, my child had multiple teachers come and go in the middle of the year. I saw firsthand that my child's teachers were unfamiliar with the school site and culture. They were new and trying to learn the curriculum, and how to manage a classroom, all while navigating all the other things a new teacher has to navigate.

I left my position at the district, but continued to work in education, and when given the opportunity to work on a thesis topic in the Master's program I naturally picked the induction program. Nel Noddings' theory of care states, that caring involves a connection between the carer and the cared-for and a degree of reciprocity to encourage a successful relationship (Smith, 2020; Nodding, 2005). The induction program is a requirement, the role the mentor teacher plays is an integral and essential part in the program.

To better understand the relationship between induction programs, teacher retention, and the role of mentor teacher, I designed a case study focused on the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP). This case study involves survey data from a group of early educators enrolled in the NCTIP program for the 2023-2024 school year. This case study is designed to provide me with a better understanding of the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP), the importance of the role of the mentor teacher, and what is working and not working in the program. In turn, this case study research may have implications for others interested in addressing the issue of new teacher retention in rural districts in California and beyond.

Literature review

Using Noddings' theory of care as a theoretical framework, building relationships seemed to be an important part of the success of teachers in the induction program. Finishing the program is an obligation, but being able to create an environment of caring to finish the obligation with a sense of belonging and caring was important. I begin to explore the complex history of education reform, focusing on the induction program, noting that human relationships can sometimes become lost in the policies of education. Education often feels overpowered by achievement and accomplishment and much less about relationships. Providing new teachers with someone that they could turn to support them, someone with common interests and goals can create a sense of ethical caring, a sense of wanting to care, instead of a forced sense of caring (Noddings, 2005)

Across the state, we are seeing an increased need for teachers. California's teacher shortages were severe and worsening before COVID-19 due to increased rates of retirement and resignation. In the decades before the pandemic began, enrollment in California teacher preparation programs was showing a sharp decline, having dropped by more than 75% between 2001–02 and 2013–14. There was a modest uptick in enrollments in teacher preparation programs between 2014–15 and 2019–20, but reports have estimated that it would take at least another 17 years to return to 2001 enrollment levels (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022, pp. 5-6). Since the pandemic started, the crisis has deepened, with district leaders feeling the burden of teacher shortages (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022). During the last forty years, there has been a discernible shift in the educator labor market as fewer individuals have elected to pursue careers as classroom teachers

(Mitchell et al., 2022; Zarra, 2019). According to Sutcher et al. (2016), their report states that California is experiencing a need for teachers, with teacher retirement at an all-time high, low numbers of students entering into teaching programs, and new teachers leaving after a couple of years (p. 48-52). In 2017-2018, California experienced an annual shortage of 112,000 teachers; across the United States, upwards of 200,000 new teachers are needed to fulfill demand over the next few years (Mitchell et al., 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

It is important to note that education and education reform have been topics of discussion by many policymakers for more than 50 years. Throughout history, one thing remains constant: the question of how to support new teachers, and ensure they can meet the needs of California's students. This literature review will include a brief description of the complex history of policies dictating how teachers receive their preliminary and clear teaching credential, including an important pilot project that changed the requirements for receiving a teaching credential, as well as a brief description of the successes of induction programs, like the NCTIP program that emphasizes mentor support for new teachers in their first years of teaching.

Historical Background

Since 1970, the process of teacher credentialing and accreditation and support programs has been an ever-changing, dynamic, and complex process (Fitch & Birch, 2011). On July 30, 1970, Governor Reagan signed AB 122 into law, as the Teacher Preparation and Licensing Law of 1970—later known as the “Ryan Act” (Inglis, 2011).

The Ryan Act changed the way teachers could receive teaching credentials and allowed teachers to receive a single or multiple-subject teaching credential (Inglis, 2011).

Policymakers supporting the Ryan Act were concerned with the rise in the student population and the need for high-quality teachers (Brott, 2011). With a generalized fear that the United States would lag behind the world in technology, basic and applied research, and economic productivity, policymakers grew concerned with the relationship between the preparation of teachers and global competition (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). With the changing landscape and a need for more teachers, The Commission and State Department partnered in 1988 to launch a pilot program known as California New Teacher Project (CNTP) (Lovo et al., 2006). The CNTP project was funded from 1988-1992 to study the lives of beginning teachers. With a focus on teacher preparation, the CNTP would bring to light, through research, what teachers should know or be able to do to teach the students of California, especially as California shifted from a more industrial to a more technological economy (Fitch & Tierney, 2011).

A final report of the CNTP was presented in 1992 to The Commission. The report included a comprehensive review of the process of becoming a teacher, looking at current regulations, pre-service requirements, and preparation for teachers (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). After the CNTP report was completed, policymakers created the SB 1422 Advisory Panel, which included a more comprehensive look at teacher preparation programs and induction programs for the requirements of receiving a clear teaching credential (Fitch & Tierney, 2011).

The SB 1422 Advisory Panel held meetings from September 1995 to June 1997. The informational meetings were organized around key issues and questions regarding the CNTP report. Many questions were raised including, should all beginning teachers participate in an induction program? The pilot study (CNTP) demonstrated the value of an induction program that supported teachers in the first two years of teaching. The Advisory Panel completed its work in June of 1997 and made its final report to the Commission in August 1997. There were 16 recommendations in the report, one included adding induction programs into teacher preparation programs to provide teachers with support for their first two years (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). The SB 1422 Advisory Panel review of the report argued that learning to teach in a state as diverse and complex as California could not be completed entirely in any pre-service program but needed to be extended into the early years of teaching (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). The review also stated that teachers who received support were better prepared to meet the needs of students and would stay teaching. The CNTP pilot project was designed to study new teachers and after the final report of the CNTP and The SB 1422 review the pilot project led to the implementation of the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA).

Hearing the successes of the CNTP and needing to address teacher shortages, the California Legislation signed a new program in 1992 called the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA). The funded (BTSA) grant was a 2-year induction program designed to support new teachers in their first two years of teaching (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). The program provided or assigned mentor teachers to pair up with new teachers, to provide support to new teachers, and help with the transition from student to

teacher (Lovo et al., 2006). By 1998, BTSA funding had increased to a total of 75 million dollars, which increased the number of programs in the state, and by 2000, the program was expanded statewide to support almost all new teachers in California. With large amounts of funding, an early evaluation of the program suggested that teachers enrolled in the BTSA program were increasing teacher retention rates (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). Because of the apparent success of the BTSA program and an increase in teacher retention, SB 2042 in 1998, made an induction program a requirement for receiving/earning a clear teaching credential (Bond, 2011). Not only did the BTSA program appear to be reducing teacher turnover in public schools, but the program gave teachers highly useful feedback on their teaching that resulted in improved practices that, in turn, increased student learning (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). With an increase in teacher retention and increase in teacher quality, The Commission began to create standards for teachers and implemented those standards in the induction programs. The Professional Induction Program Standards were adopted in October 2001 (Bond, 2011).

The North Coast School of Education (NCTIP) Program

In 1992, the California Legislature created the BTSA program. The model of the program was to assign an experienced, trained mentor teacher to support new teachers, and programs began popping up all over the state. The North Coast School of Education began its induction program in 1994. The North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP) provides support for new teachers by partnering with the local university, Cal Poly Humboldt. The NCTIP program continues to grow and expand as requirements change throughout the state. As an example, The NCTIP program has evolved from the

BTSA program due to changes in funding and new state standards that were approved in December 2015 to the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP). The North Coast School of Education website describes its induction program as a two-year, state-accredited program designed for preliminary credential holders. It is designed as a job-embedded system of mentoring, support, and professional learning that begins in the teacher's first year of teaching. The new teacher candidate is matched with a mentor teacher to provide mentoring to each candidate to help them meet the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*. The program has 8 standards designed to support new teachers; one standard requires candidates to create individual learning plans (ILPs). ILPs will be discussed later in the findings. Mentor teachers provide support in creating and implementing ILPs, along with ongoing support, portfolio review, and professional development opportunities (Sonoma County Office of Education, 2022). Mentor teachers are also offered training, with professional coaching and mentor series development (Sonoma County Office of Education, 2022). A 2021 report found higher turnover among underprepared teachers in California, with 40% of new teachers hired on permits or waivers leaving teaching altogether by the end of their third year (Carver et al., 2022). While teacher candidates are entering the classrooms underprepared, programs have been created to support teachers and in California are required to receive a clear teaching credential. In California, student needs are constantly changing which requires changes in the way teachers are prepared to work together in supporting student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1995). The induction program continues to be a robust system to support new

teachers; more than half of all states in the United States require some form of induction for new teachers (Ronfeld & McQueen, 2017; Goldrick et al, 2012).

Mentoring and The Importance of Peer Learning

With the growing demands of well-prepared teachers to enter the classroom, mentorship programs like the NCTIP program are imperative to keeping and supporting new teachers. An important aspect of the program is to provide support in the form of mentoring to new teachers and providing them with opportunities for professional growth and development that will encourage them to stay in teaching. California can help ensure new teachers have access to strong mentorship by supporting the development of teacher mentors and mentor programs (Carver-Thomas, et al., 2022). As Noddings' states, no one is told how to care or given a book to read about caring, we demonstrate our caring in our relationships (Smith, 2020, Noddings, 1998). Programs like NCTIP with teacher mentor support have been created to help teachers enter classrooms prepared. Mentor teachers in the NCTIP program play an important role in building relationships with the new teacher candidates as well as providing direct "just in time" support to their mentees. The NCTIP program provides mentors with training that is grounded in providing support to meet the CA teaching standards, as well as providing opportunities for conversations and reflections on teaching practices, including being a sounding board for new teachers in a safe, confidential, and judgment-free space (Sonoma County Office of Education, 2022). New teachers can sometimes feel isolated without collaboration among peers, especially in rural schools where they may not have any colleagues teaching similar grade levels (Wold et al., 2023). Mentoring is an integral part of the program but finding the right

mentor can be challenging. As I learned working in the district office, pairing a mentor with a new teacher is an important factor that can affect teacher efficacy and the feeling of being supported as a teacher. Some of the factors of pairing successfully can include, pairing in the same grade level or subject area, and location of mentor, for example, being at the same school site allows for more collaboration and helps navigate the school culture and expectations from leadership (Wold et al., 2020). However, there are also other important factors to consider when pairing. In a study conducted by Wold et al., (2020) mentors stated two important factors in being paired with a new teacher, these factors included similar content area and personality as being of higher importance over other factors like being at the same school site or location. Mentoring relationships should mutually benefit both the mentor and mentee and allow for open communication, trust, and confidentiality (Kearney, 2019). Some aspects of mentorship can include coaching, classroom management, navigating state testing, understanding the school mission, vision, values, and culture, and understanding the curriculum. Most importantly a mentor can be an invaluable asset when trying to navigate through the induction program. Some research indicates that new teachers who have a mentor, are staying in teaching which can only have a positive impact on students. Supporting new teachers through mentoring is one of the most important things we can do as schools continue to navigate out of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Wold et al., 2023). The art of teaching, one could argue, is a form of mentoring. Creating an environment where mentoring is continued and encouraged and is seen in a positive light can lead to an environment of caring and can encourage the success of a teacher enrolled in the program and encourage

staying in the classroom. Being and feeling cared for allows vulnerability, and compassion and can push someone to strive for their best. The role of the mentor teacher in the NCTIP program is to promote an ethically caring and natural environment that promotes support and encourages new teachers (Noddings, xxi).

Methods

There has been and continues to be a lot of discussion around teacher retention. Discussions on how to get people into teacher training programs and how to keep teachers in the classroom beyond just a couple of years. This case study was designed to gain a better understanding of the North Coast Teacher Induction Program (NCTIP) from a group of early educators enrolled in the program for the 2023-2024 school year. The purpose of the NCTIP program is to support new teachers as they transition from being students to being effective teachers in the classroom. What are some key ways in which the mentor teacher contributes to the success of new teachers in the NCTIP program? The primary mode of data collection I used in this case study was a survey. The survey was designed to understand the importance mentor teachers play as they support new teachers through a 2-year learning process. The survey was sent out in the winter of 2023. I chose to use a survey because it allowed me to gain perspectives from all candidates and provided time for them to answer the questions at their convenience. All the teachers surveyed work in Humboldt County, CA. Humboldt County is a small rural county located 270 miles north of the San Francisco Bay Area, with a total population of 135,000, with approximately 1,000 full-time K-12 teachers. Humboldt County is just under 4,000 square miles and in 2022-2023 had about 17,500 students enrolled in 31 districts.

The district I worked in was one of the larger school districts in the county with a total enrollment of 3,500 students and 8 school sites. The district is one of the largest in the county, meaning it usually had the highest number of teachers entering the NCTIP

program each year. My employment with the district, and my role in matching new teachers with mentors, allowed me to build a close working relationship with the program coordinator of the NCTIP program. Since leaving that position, I have been able to maintain a relationship with them. I felt like this was the perfect opportunity to reach out to see if they could help me gather data for this case study. After an initial email asking for a meeting to discuss the project, I met with the program coordinator of NCTIP, as well as the Director of North Coast School of Education (NCSOE). Our initial meeting was successful, and they agreed to help me recruit participants for this study. The NCTIP program oversees both Humboldt and Del Norte County. For the sake of keeping this case study local to Humboldt County candidates, I did not include candidates from Del Norte County in the data collection.

Over the next several weeks I began thinking about my project and working to create a Google Forms Survey. A couple of things were really important to me as I began creating the survey. I wanted to create questions that gave me an inside perspective on what is working and not working because I haven't experienced an induction program myself. I also wanted to know more about how they felt about their mentor teachers. Finally, it also felt important for me to remember that this survey was being sent to year 1 and year 2 teachers who were brand-new to teaching. I aimed to make the survey short enough to entice people to answer. I crafted questions and sent them to my advisors, the NCTIP program coordinator, and the director of the NCTIP program. I asked for feedback and clarification of understanding, as well as if they had any questions they would like to add. I also sent the survey to two of my colleagues who had completed an

induction program within the past 3 years. Using all the feedback I received I created a survey.

With the completion of the survey, I crafted an email explaining who I was, and a little bit about my project, and asked for participation. I also offered my contact information to anyone if they had further questions. Since I still live and work in this community and my kids attend public schools locally it was important to me that I did not have access to anyone's name or email. I wanted the candidates receiving the survey to answer the questions with honesty and candor, so I didn't want the survey to come directly from me. To help ensure anonymity I asked the program coordinator to send the email and survey link out to all the candidates on my behalf.

In Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, the survey was sent out to a total of 95 teachers, including 50 year 1 candidates, and 45 year 2 candidates. The survey was sent out twice in October 2023 and once in December 2023. While observing and reviewing the results as they came in, I noticed an interesting pattern with the data. Knowing the survey had been sent out 3 times I noticed that only year 2 candidates had provided answers. In December 2023 I reached out to the program coordinator to make sure that all potential participants had received the survey. After some discussion, we realized there was a small mix-up and only year 2 candidates received the first 3 requests for participation. In January 2024 year 1 candidates received the email and survey link, ultimately providing a total of 28 responses.

The survey is broken into 4 sections (see Appendix A to review the survey tool in its entirety):

- The first section provides a summary of the research aims and a request to answer the questions with honesty and candor. It also states that the survey is voluntary, and the data will be kept confidential. The participants are allowed to skip questions they were not comfortable answering and the ability to discontinue participation at any time was offered. Question 1, then asked if they would like to continue or not.
- The second section includes demographic questions. Questions about their age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as sexual orientation. Additional questions about the grade level they are currently teaching, how long they have been teaching, as well as if they are supporting any dependents.
- Section three is broken into 8 multiple-choice type questions, 2 Likert Scale questions, using a five-point scale, and 2 open-ended questions focused on specifics about their mentor teacher, including how well-matched they feel they are with their mentor teacher, how long their mentor teacher has been teaching, and what kind of support they receive from their mentor teacher.
- The fourth section is broken into 2 multiple-choice questions and 7 open-ended questions. Section four questions focus on aspects of the program that they find useful or not useful, whether or not they plan to stay in teaching, and what they feel are the most effective or relevant aspects of the induction program.

Data Analysis

Using a Google Forms survey allowed for an easy way to download the data into a Google Sheets to review and sort the data. I calculated all responses to Likert scale questions and broke them out by number of participants. I calculated all responses to multiple-choice questions and broke them out by number of participants. After reviewing open-ended questions, I discovered a need to start lumping and clumping the data together. Using specific open-ended questions, I began identifying emergent themes to group participant responses. The answers were pulled into separate tabs in Google Sheets and sorted into themes based on common language or words used. For example, any answer containing the word mentor was lumped into a theme labeled mentor and color-coded (Appendix B, see attached to review the raw data).

Findings

In this section, an overview of the demographic data will be presented, followed by an exploration of the Likert Scale, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions with themes.

Of the 95 candidates that received the survey 28 responses were received. Figures 1- 4 on the following page provide a summary of participant demographics. Overall, the demographics of this sample are similar to the teaching force in Humboldt County in general, indicating this case study may have implications for other small districts in Humboldt County and beyond. Figure 1, shows the age of all responses. Of these respondents, 39.3% (n=11) are between the ages of 20-29, 35.7% (n=10) are between the ages of 30-39, 21.4% (n=6) are between the ages of 40-49, and 3.6% (n=1) are over 40. Figure 2, shows the number of years each of the respondents have been teaching. None of the 28 respondents have more than 5 years of teaching experience. 42.9% (n=12) are teachers in their first year, and 57.1% (n=16) are teachers in their second year. 92.9% (n=26) of the respondents reported between 0-3 years of teaching experience, and 7.1% (n=2) indicated 3-5 years of teaching. Figure 3, shows respondents' sexual orientation with the majority of the respondents responding that they are Heterosexual, noting that a minority stated non-binary or choose not to state sexual orientation. Figure 4, shows the respondents answer to their gender with the majority of respondents stating they are women. In 2018-2019 Humboldt County had a total of 65.3% women teachers vs 34.7% male teachers.

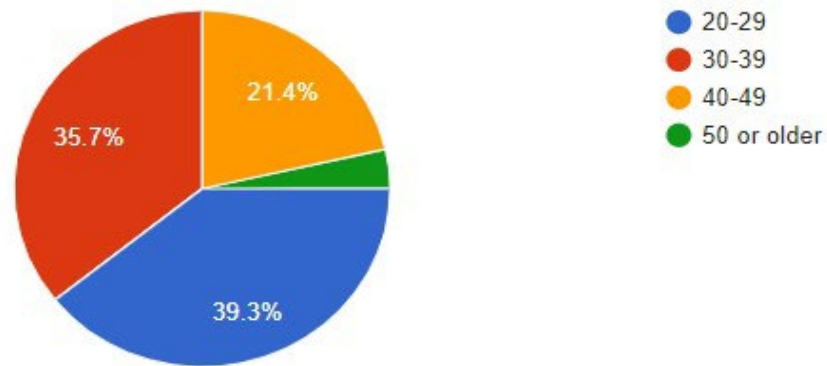
Figures

Figure 1: The age of the participants.

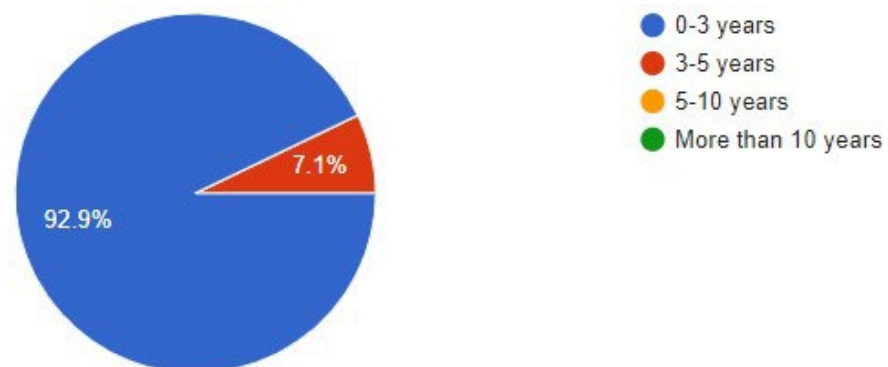


Figure 2: The number of years the respondents have been teaching.

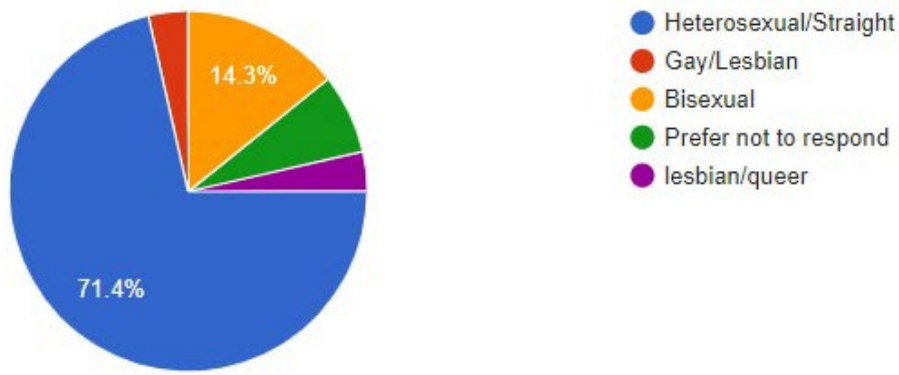


Figure 3. Indicates respondents' sexual orientation.

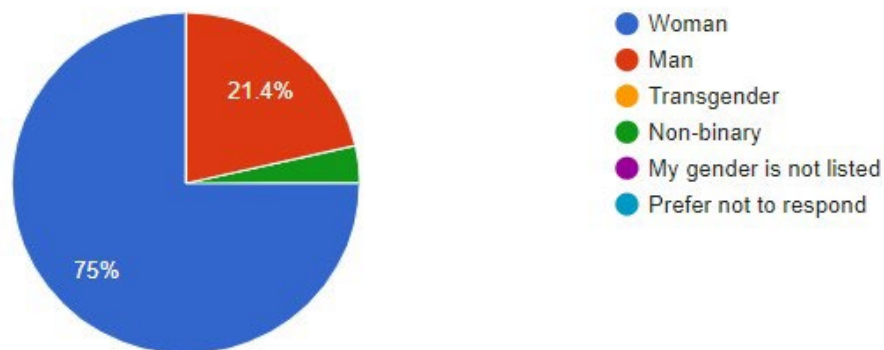


Figure 4: Respondents answers related to their gender.

Questions related to their mentor teacher.

When asked questions using a 5-point Likert scale about their mentor teacher, the results show that 96.4% (n=27) said they were very well-matched or somewhat matched with their mentor teacher, and 3.6% (n=1) responded that they were not well-matched.

When asked how important their mentor teacher is to the program, 92.9% (n=26) responded very important to somewhat important, and 7.1% (n=2) answered not important.

A multiple-choice question, allowing respondents to check all options that apply, asked in what way they felt they were matched with their mentor teacher; 82.1% (n=23) responded with personality, disposition, and/or working style and familiarity with site resources, expectations, policies, and procedures. 64.3% (n=18) selected the same school site, 64.3% (n=18) selected teaching philosophy and/or style, and 64.3% (n=18) selected being located at the same school site.

Upon review of an open-ended survey question, asking the participants to share any additional information regarding their mentor teacher experience that they would like to share, the importance of mentor teachers was mentioned by multiple people. One person stated, "Having a great mentor teacher was more valuable to my teaching practice". While another stated, "My mentor teacher is great". And another stated, "My mentor is amazing".

Review of themes that are useful and important in the NCTIP Program.

In this section, I present a review of the themes that emerged as a result of exploring answers to open-ended questions. In reviewing answers to the question, "Are there specific aspects of induction you find useful?" All 28 new teachers who answered reported their mentor teacher as being a useful and relevant part of the program. I used common language or words to lump the answers into themes, and I grouped answers based on the most common words used. For example, the words "mentor", "observation",

and “improvement” were common responses. I identified three main themes: working with and being assigned a mentor teacher; observations; and working on improvement. Upon further review of the themes, it is clear from the responses that the three themes listed above could be lumped into one theme under the umbrella of mentoring and mentor support. When asked what aspects have been most useful in the program, 39.3% (n=11) gave responses related to the value of working with a mentor. All 11 of these respondents indicated that either being assigned a mentor teacher, working with the mentor teacher to help navigate, and/or having constant meetings with their mentor teacher was most useful. 21 of the 28 answers indicate some level of mentor support, including being assigned a mentor, having their mentor observe their classroom and offer feedback, the opportunity for self-reflection, and suggestions for improvement. Answers included “Being assigned a mentor”, “I enjoy working with my mentor”, “Having an assigned person to help you navigate, and “Meeting with my mentor has been very useful”. Observation emerged with one respondent stating, “Being observed is helpful”, noting that being observed by their mentor teaching was useful in providing them with feedback. While another offered that, “Going to observe classrooms/peers”, was useful. 17.9% (n=5) stated that the program allowed them to improve their teaching strategies by using self-reflection and direct feedback from their mentor, including one respondent who stated, “Self-reflection on my teaching, with direct support and feedback on areas I can improve upon” as useful. It is worth noting that 21.4% (n=6) of responses indicate that there are no useful aspects of the induction program. However, one of those respondents added that “they would meet with a mentor teacher even without the induction program”.

Indicating that mentorship is an essential part of teaching and support regardless of the induction program.

Review of themes that are not useful in the NCTIP Program

Survey results indicate that all 28 new teachers who answered open-ended questions about aspects of the program that are not useful indicate paperwork and the time-consuming nature of the program as top answers. I further grouped these answers into themes based on common language or words used. The themes I identified overall: were paperwork and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs); the difficulty with the program; time-consuming; hoop-jumping; and not feeling supported. 3.6% (n=1) responded there is nothing useful about the program. 42.9% (n=12) mentioned paperwork and ILPs as not useful. One respondent stated, “The paperwork felt tedious” and another stated, “ILPs feeling like a repeat of the CalTPA,” or the teacher performance assessment currently required for teacher candidates to earn their initial license. 25% (n=7) stated that the program was time-consuming, redundant, and unnecessary, and 3.6% (n=1) stated they would seek guidance from a mentor teacher regardless of the program. Again, this indicates that mentorship is an essential part of teaching and support regardless of the induction program.

Conclusions

The Induction program is a state requirement to receive a clear teaching credential in California, the purpose of this case study was to see if the role of the mentor teacher was an integral and essential part of the program. Here, the data from the surveys offers a clear pattern of responses: not only having a mentor teacher, but being paired with a mentor is an integral part of the program, especially for new teachers just entering the profession. Some stated that even though they felt induction was a waste of time they would seek out a mentor regardless of the program. Survey results indicate that 96.4% (n=27) answered that their mentor teacher is a somewhat to very important part of the program and that 96.4% (n=27) of participants feel they are somewhat to very well matched with their mentor teaching stating that personality, disposition, and or working style as a top answer.

Reviewing my data, one comment particularly struck me, it stated, “that they didn’t find the induction program useful because their mentor teacher didn’t hold up their end of the relationship”. The words they use are interesting, they could have said that their mentor didn’t meet with them, their mentor wasn’t available or knowledgeable, or just plain didn’t help in any way but they chose to use the word relationship. This was a powerful statement, reflecting on the program and what I know about it has me wondering if the mentor teacher understands their expectations. Part of the NCTIP program is providing a mentor to help new teachers navigate the first years of teaching and to start building trusting caring relationships. The relationship is created to help navigate the program and to set new teachers up for success to launch into a teaching

career. Unfortunately, this person hasn't been given the opportunity to experience a connection with a mentor teacher and receive the support they may need.

New teachers stepping into the classroom right out of the credential program with little experience entering their first job may be likely to feel overwhelmed and isolated if they do not feel supported. Going from being a student to a teacher can be challenging. The NCTIP is a great example of Noddings' theory of caring and reciprocal relationships. Not only are new teachers receiving support from mentor teachers, but the mentor teachers are also receiving the benefit of learning from a new teacher, creating long-lasting caring relationships. A quote from my data states, "The work with a mentor teacher is highly valuable. Collaboration with veteran teachers, as well as the ability to observe and be observed by them, is hugely beneficial to a new teacher." Suggesting that support for new teachers is not only important but having a mentor teacher is integral to the success of new teachers.

Working with the NCTIP program allowed me to cultivate and grow relationships with mentor teachers and new teachers. It opened up conversations that allowed me to explore their personalities, likes, and dislikes and pair mentors and new teachers based on what I knew about each of them. In my experience when a mentor teacher and a new teacher had similar personalities and dispositions, they became partners in the work, making the conversations and requirements easier and more comfortable allowing for vulnerability and a feedback loop that encouraged and allowed for improvement. The NCTIP program has been designed to enhance and support new teachers, but to some, they experienced induction as another hoop to jump through and a waste of time. With

the right focus and support from a mentor teacher and a reciprocal caring relationship, both will gain and learn from the experience.

In my research, mentorship and relationships are the heart of teachers succeeding in the classroom. An increase in high-quality teachers in the classroom will lead to an increase in student achievement. It was clear in reviewing the data that new teachers may seek out mentorship even beyond the induction program. With one stating, “I would meet with my mentor teacher even without the induction program.” With the continued need for new teachers, it is important to review the teacher induction program and design to ensure it meets our teachers' needs. The NCTIP program has a robust mentorship component to their program. Having a mentor teacher is an integral part of the program and essential to supporting new teachers. A well-developed mentoring program well beyond the first two years of teaching can strengthen the qualities of a new teacher and provide them with the support they need to stay in the classroom.

Discussion

The analysis of this data indicates that mentor teachers appear to be one of the most important aspects of the induction program and to some, the only useful component. Further, respondents provided additional details about the factors that influenced a successful mentor experience. These responses are also supported by a study conducted by Wold et al., (2020) mentors stated two important factors in being paired with a new teacher, these factors included similar content area and personality as being of higher importance over other factors like being at the same school site or location. This study provides further evidence that even mentor teachers indicate that pairing is a critical component of an induction program.

The value of mentorship for new teachers is supported by the data in this study, as well as my experience at the district office working with mentors and new teachers. It is also evident that the importance of mentors continues to be emphasized in professional conferences, including one I recently attended. This conference designed to support small school district leaders in California had a couple of sessions emphasizing the topic of mentoring and mentorship as a way to help new teachers stay in the classroom. Many are facing high turnover rates over the last few years in their small rural districts. Although my data did not speak to the lasting importance of mentors for teacher retention, it is clear that mentorship is an integral piece of the puzzle. When it comes to supporting our early educators, mentorship can lead to long-lasting relationships that are essential to keeping teachers in the classroom.

Limitations/Recommendations:

Some limitations of my survey include a small sample size of data collected. The survey was designed for new teachers and didn't include questions for mentor teachers to gain their perspective on the program. This study could have incorporated other aspects of the program, as well as other factors that are affecting teacher retention. To protect the anonymity of this project I was not responsible for direct recruiting of candidates. This led to some miscommunication and may have decreased the completion rates of the survey. I also did not review or retrieve teacher retention data from Humboldt County or the NCTIP program.

Recommendations for future research can be made, following this cohort of teachers over the next 3-5 years to reflect on their experience in the NCTIP program. Early career educators may not always have a sense of the importance or value of certain induction topics in their first few years of teaching. Reviewing teacher retention data of the NCTIP program, as well as other districts in California with induction programs to see if they are also using mentorship programs. Future research and review of induction programs to discover successes and recommend a set of state standards to use commonalities for all induction programs. A review of the NCTIP program more in-depth to see if individual needs are being met and differentiation is being offered in the program to support specific grade levels including Special Education. Education can be hyper-focused on accountability and meeting standards. I also recommend adding more learning about practicing relational and caring relationships in a well-developed mentorship program.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The survey tool in its entirety

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Thank you for taking this survey and providing valuable feedback that I will be using to complete my Masters in Education. My thesis will be focusing on relevant and impactful aspects of the teacher induction program to currently enrolled teachers. I appreciate your honesty and candor in answering these questions.

* Indicates required question

1. This is a voluntary survey that is being sent to everyone currently enrolled in the induction program. This data will be kept CONFIDENTIAL and will be non indefinable. You may skip any question(s) you are not comfortable answering and may discontinue participation at any time. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes, I would like to continue
- ☐ No, you may stop here and not answer any additional question.

Thank you for continuing.

2. Are you currently in the teacher induction program? *
- If so, please select from the following.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1st year
- ☐ 2nd year

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

3. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 20-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50 or older

4. What is your gender? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ My gender is not listed
- ☐ Prefer not to respond

5. What is your sexual orientation? *

Please note under Assembly Bill 677 (Chap. 744, Stats. 2017).....sexual orientation and gender identity information must be collected in the course of regular collection of demographic data.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Heterosexual/Straight
- ☐ Gay/Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Prefer not to respond
- ☐ Other: _____

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

6. What is your Ethnicity? Check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Hawaiian
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Hmong
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Laotian
- ☐ Vietnamese
- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ Multiple Ethnicity
- ☐ Other: _____

7. Do you have another job besides teaching?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. If teaching is your only job, do you feel like your income can support you (and your family if applicable)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

9. Do you have dependents that you support? *
- If yes, please list how many.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0-1
- ☐ 2-3
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ More than 4

10. What grade level are you currently teaching? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ PK-5
- ☐ 6-8
- ☐ 9-12
- ☐ Other: _____

11. How long have you been teaching? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

The next few questions are related to your Mentor Teacher.

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

12. Have you been assigned a Mentor Teacher? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

13. Has your Mentor Teacher received specific training on the Mentor Teacher role? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Is your Mentor Teacher at your school site? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. How long has your Mentor Teacher been teaching? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ 0-2 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

16. What type of support(s) do you get from your Mentor Teacher? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Classroom management
- ☐ Access to available resources
- ☐ Analysis of student data
- ☐ Strategies for creating and maintaining a safe and positive classroom environment
- ☐ Strategies to support English/Multilingual Learners
- ☐ Strategies to support students with disabilities
- ☐ Observing lessons and providing feedback
- ☐ Case management, IEP process, collaboration, behavior interventions etc
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other: _____

17. On a scale of 1-5 how well matched are you with your Mentor Teacher?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very well matched

18. In what ways are you well matched with your Mentor Teacher? Check all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Same grade level
- ☐ Same school site
- ☐ Same content area
- ☐ Familiarity with site resources, expectations, policies, and procedures
- ☐ Teaching philosophy and/or style
- ☐ Personality, disposition, and/or working style
- ☐ None of the above

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

19. How often do you meet with your Mentor Teacher?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Less than 1 hour a week
☐ 1 hour a week
☐ More than 1 hour a week
☐ Other: _____

20. On a scale of 1-5 has your Mentor Teacher been an important part of the program? *

Mark only one oval.

- 1 2 3 4 5
Not ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very important

21. Have you experience significant issues with your Mentor Teacher? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

22. Does your school site or district have a mentorship program beyond the induction program? *

If yes, please explain the program design.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Nle79zG-uelzTWzYXIOHo-0-07HQ4CU-xvnCf5nK4XM/edit>

7/10

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

23. Please add any additional information regarding your Mentor Teacher experience that you would like to share.

You are almost done only a few more. Thank you for continuing.

Please note if you wish not to answer the questions below just write N/A. Thank you!

24. Does your district pay your induction fees? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

25. How did/does your school explain the purpose of the induction program to you? *

26. Are there specific aspects of the induction you find useful? *

27. Are there specific aspects of the induction you find NOT useful? *

4/12/24, 12:40 PM

Survey Questions

28. Do you plan on staying in teaching? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

29. If you are not planning on staying in teaching, please explain why. *

30. In your opinion what are the most effective or relevant aspect of the induction program? Please be as specific as possible. *

31. If you had a magic wand, how would you change the induction program? Please be as specific as possible. *

Appendix B: Raw Data-see attachment