

Accelerating teacher effectiveness: the power of partnerships

Jodi Eirich

*Department of Educational Professions, Frostburg State University,
Frostburg, Maryland, USA, and*

Jane Wildesen

Garrett County Public Schools, Oakland, Maryland, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe a thriving partnership between Frostburg State University and the Garrett County Public Schools that aims to improve teacher effectiveness and retention through the implementation of a robust induction program. The initiative includes sustained, strategic mentoring; extensive professional development; and validated, competency-based microcredentials aligned to high-leverage practices.

Design/methodology/approach – The study included surveys and structured interviews with teaching fellows and their instructional coaches.

Findings – Having ample support and mentoring can make a significant difference for novice teachers. Partnerships between universities and local school districts can provide this critical support.

Research limitations/implications – A limitation that cannot be ignored is the small number of participants in this program, all of whom are teaching in a rural school system. However, researchers working with larger school districts would add valuable knowledge to the field of study.

Practical implications – This paper includes implications for designing new induction programs or improving existing ones.

Social implications – Mentoring, a major component of high-quality induction programs, has the potential of providing important benefits to beginning teachers including increased motivation, self-confidence, growth in professional identity, and reduced stress and anxiety.

Originality/value – As school systems are struggling to retain qualified teachers, high-quality induction programs are necessary.

Keywords Mentoring, Instructional coaching, Induction programs, Teacher retention, University/P12 partnerships, Video-stimulated recall

Paper type Case study

The transition from pre-service to in-service teaching and the need for induction programs

Many novice teachers do not receive adequate support as they transition from pre-service to in-service teaching and begin navigating a complex and ever-changing educational landscape (Weins, Chou, Vallett, & Beck, 2019; Gray & Taie, 2015). There are often many unanticipated professional realities for which they might feel ill-equipped to handle, and these challenges can be

© Jodi Eirich and Jane Wildesen. Published in *PDS Partners: Bridging Research to Practice*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>

This article was accepted under the previous editorial team.

The following Nine Essentials are highlighted in this article:

Essential 3: Professional Learning and Leading

Essential 4: Reflection and Innovation

Essential 7: Shared Governance Structures



intensified or eased, depending on the type and level of support received (Joiner & Edwards, 2008). One way to address this problem is by implementing evidence-based practices, such as comprehensive induction programs. Positive outcomes of high-quality teacher induction programs include increased teacher effectiveness, higher job satisfaction and commitment, improved classroom instruction and student achievement and higher retention rates (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These considerations are critical when we consider attrition statistics. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), on an annual basis, 13.8% of teachers either leave their school or leave the profession altogether, and over half leave the profession before retirement (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The rates are significantly higher for beginning teachers. However, the longitudinal study, “Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years”, published by NCES, found that 92% of teachers who were assigned a mentor their first year returned the following year, and 86% remained on the job by the fifth year. Conversely, only 84% of teachers without assigned mentors returned in the second year, declining to 71% by Year 5 (Gray & Taie, 2015). Clearly, having ample support and mentoring can make a significant difference for novice teachers. Partnerships between universities and local school districts, like the one described here between Frostburg State University (FSU) and the Garrett County Public Schools (GCPS), provide this critical support.

PDS partners: historical perspective and emergence of professional development schools

Frostburg State University, located in the mountains of rural Western Maryland, is a regional institute known for producing high-quality teachers. Founded in 1902 as State Normal School No. 2, with only 57 aspiring teachers, the university has a current enrollment of approximately 4,000 students with 300 students pursuing teacher education. The Department of Educational Professions offers initial certification programs in early childhood/elementary, elementary, and elementary/middle, as well as secondary teaching certification options in English, Spanish, mathematics, social science, biology, chemistry, earth science, physics and computer science. There are also P-12 programs in music, art and health and physical education. Many student interns are placed in the Garrett County Public Schools, which employs approximately 400 teachers educating 3,500 students. There are 12 schools in the district, as well as an environmental learning center. The PDS partnership between the two institutions spans two decades but has strengthened tremendously in the past few years. The partnership is grounded in the second edition of the NAPDS 9 Essentials (NAPDS, 2021) with a specific focus on Essentials 3, 4, 7 and 8.

The power of our partnership

As part of the Maryland Accelerates program, which is a federally funded Teacher Quality Partnership grant, Frostburg State University and the Garrett County Public Schools collaborated to develop and implement a comprehensive and robust induction experience. The program benefits beginning teachers, referred to as fellows, all of whom are graduates of FSU, as well as established teachers who mentor and coach the new educators. As a faculty member at FSU, I (Eirich) serve as the Teacher Leader Lead and coordinate the induction initiative alongside Dr. Jane Wildesen, Director of Human Resources and Employee Relations for the GCPS. Our work together predates this initiative, as our professional paths have intersected in a multitude of ways over the last 20 years. Dr. Wildesen hired me more than a decade ago as an instructional leader in the school where she was principal. That is where my passion for teacher leadership and instructional coaching began. Among other responsibilities, I served as a PDS mentor teacher for university interns, as well as newly hired teachers. I saw firsthand their intense struggles; struggles that were different than when I began teaching and certainly much different than today. She (Wildesen) saw the need for creating a supportive career pathway not

only for beginning teachers but also for teacher leaders like me. Now, as a district level administrator with a wide, impactful sphere of influence, creating career pathways for teachers is a priority. We are working collaboratively on this initiative, learning valuable lessons along the way, as the first cohort of teacher fellows successfully finished Year 1 of the two-year induction program.

Goals of the teacher induction experience

The fundamental goals of the Maryland Accelerates induction experience are to provide career advancement for first year teacher fellows, as well as teacher leader coaches, through sustained, strategic mentoring; extensive professional development; and validated, competency-based microcredentials aligned to high-leverage practices. The two objectives are to (1) improve teacher effectiveness and retention while accelerating teacher leadership advancement and (2) improve teacher performance and student learning through evidence-based practices with demonstrated movement toward National Board Certification (NBC).

This past year, coaches and fellows participated in continuous professional learning, one full day per month, which was planned and delivered by FSU faculty, GCPS administrators and teachers, and other experts in the field. Substitutes were hired for the teachers, or in some cases, university interns provided coverage while coaches were out of their classrooms. The day was structured to provide half-day professional development workshops and microcredential work and the other half-day was dedicated to fellow-coach collaboration and mentoring. See [Table 1](#).

Strategic mentoring: fellow-coach collaboration

Mentoring programs have the potential of providing important benefits to beginning teachers including increased motivation and self-confidence, growth in professional identity, reduced stress and anxiety and learning ([Kutsyurua, 2020](#)). According to [Kutsyurua \(2020\)](#), mentoring is the most important component of an induction program. Our teacher fellows also recognized the value of mentoring, noting the importance of having a strong support system. They cited an appreciation for the advice, encouragement, and resources that their coaches provided, as well as an appreciation for the coaches’ advocacy. In an interview, one fellow shared:

It is really nice having an outside source of support. There are certain issues that I am not comfortable sharing with my team or administration and questions that I am hesitant to ask. With my coach, I can ask anything, and she helps me problem-solve. Our sessions have been invaluable and are something that I look forward to each week.

Several coaches, through surveys, reported that the relationship with their fellow was mutually beneficial. One coach stated:

Key activities	Structure	Key personnel
Monthly professional development sessions	One day per month (6 times per year) with the district covering the cost for substitutes	Delivered by FSU faculty, GCPS administration, GCPS teachers and other subject matter experts
Microcredentials	Two microcredentials per year, each requiring 15 hours of additional professional learning	Authored by FSU faculty and completed by fellows and coaches
Weekly collaboration and mentoring	Ninety minutes per week	Coaches and their fellows
Video-stimulated recall	Two times per semester	Coaches and their fellows

Table 1.
Overview of the
induction experience

My fellow has taught me as much as I have taught her. Her enthusiasm for teaching and learning new strategies has motivated me in my own teaching practice. We have connected on a personal and professional level and enjoy sharing the daily highs and lows of being a teacher. It's someone to lean on when this profession gets tough and someone to celebrate with when a lesson/strategy works well. We especially enjoy celebrating together when using video-stimulated recall and watch successful lessons.

Video-stimulated recall

In the allotted time for coach-fellow collaboration and mentoring at each monthly session, the coaches routinely observed their fellows and engaged in video-stimulated recall (VSR). VSR is evidence-based lesson analysis that encourages educators to analyze and reflect upon their teaching after watching video-recorded segments of their lessons (Lutovac, Kaasila, & Hannu, 2015). At each monthly VSR session, the coach observed the fellow's lesson in real time and documented highlights through anecdotal notes. Following the lesson, the coach and fellow watched segments of the recorded lesson together. The coach instructed the fellow to pause the recording at various points to ask questions about the fellow's instructional decision-making and explain their thinking processes. This methodology is not meant to be evaluative in nature. The coach did not offer specific feedback, which is typical of most coaches or supervisors, but instead asked thought-provoking questions leading the fellow to draw their own conclusions. The goal of VSR is to stimulate, not dominate, the fellows' reflections. The best VSR sessions are not critiques of teaching; instead, they involve a high level of reflective discourse, with the goal of increasing the fellows' confidence and professional agency (Martinelle, 2018).

Fellows were not the only ones to benefit from this practice, as the coaches exhibited a shared commitment to reflective practice. Guiding fellows through this process enabled the coaches to deepen their own understanding of effective teaching, and they reported that VSR was one of the most valuable components of the induction experience. This process helped coaches to become more reflective practitioners. In a survey, one coach shared:

In our student teaching, we were taught to reflect on our lessons, in writing, as best practice. VSR provides a way for us to continue with this reflective process and be the Monday morning quarterback of our lessons. It is insightful to see the lesson through the eyes of our students.

Another coach commented that she plans to pursue NBC, and this process has scaffolded the process. She now feels more equipped to analyze the required video submissions and craft thoughtful reflections for the written commentary.

Weekly collaboration

In addition to the collaboration time provided to fellows and coaches at the monthly sessions, each pair was required to meet for 90 minutes per week, which most often took place after school hours. These weekly meetings provided consistency in support, which built trust between mentor and coach. Goals were set in advance with documentation submitted after each session denoting what was accomplished. The content varied from week to week, based upon the needs of the fellows. Samples of supports requested and received by the fellows include:

- (1) Using data to inform instruction
- (2) Differentiating instruction for diverse learners
- (3) Writing IEP goals
- (4) Navigating a new literacy program
- (5) Handling challenging behaviors

- (6) Preparing for parent-teacher conferences
- (7) Dealing with angry parents

One fellow described in a conversation a stressful situation in which she did not know how to appropriately respond to a frustrated parent who was questioning her decision-making regarding a literacy assignment. She and her coach met after school that day to review and discuss the research on this particular strategy, and then they collaboratively composed an email to send to the parent. The fellow left the mentoring session feeling confident and supported, and the parent was satisfied with the response.

Professional development and microcredentials

Along with the coach-fellow collaboration, we planned monthly workshop style professional development sessions that were aligned to competency-based microcredentials. The microcredentials each included three sections: Explore and define, observe and synthesize, and act and reflect. In essence, after building foundational knowledge on a given topic, the participants observed in designated classrooms to see the content in action. Finally, the fellows applied what they learned in their own classrooms and then reflected upon the successes, as well as the opportunities for growth, through video-stimulated recall sessions with their coaches.

Both fellows and coaches completed one microcredential per semester and had the opportunity to earn a Continuing Education Unit (CEU) for each from the Maryland State Department of Education. In the first semester, we chose to separate the fellows and coaches for the professional development and microcredential work, as we knew their needs were vastly different. Fellows' professional development centered around behavior support, which was an area that the fellows identified as a need. The microcredential was created by FSU faculty, while the monthly professional development sessions, organized around the microcredential, were delivered by GCPS administrators, teachers and outside local experts. The microcredential for the coaches centered around Teacher Leadership. I (Eirich) planned and delivered the initial professional development session for the coaches, but as a group, we determined that we would alternate leading subsequent sessions, as the goal was to provide the coaches with additional opportunities to serve as teacher leaders. This shared approach proved to be a valuable learning experience, and sessions were tailored to the needs and interests of the participants.

In the second semester, the professional learning was conducted jointly with fellows and coaches co-learning alongside one another. This professional development, along with the microcredential work, focused on high leverage practices (HLP) from TeachingWorks. Participants chose the two HLPs on which they wanted to focus, making the learning more personalized. The microcredential had an observation and reflective component embedded, and video-stimulated recall was again utilized.

Next semester, in Year 2 of the induction, professional development will be centered around culturally responsive teaching. Finally, in the second half of Year 2, coaches and fellows will engage in professional learning that will focus on teacher leadership, with movement toward the pursuit of NBC. As districts are searching for ways to retain highly effective teachers, this is an important component of the program. Research shows that NBC increases teacher quality, which ultimately impacts student achievement. Additionally, National Board Certified teachers exhibit higher retention rates (Day, 2022), which meets one of the main objectives of this program.

A focused effort and shared commitment

Although the Maryland General Assembly requires each school district in the state to establish and maintain induction programs for new teachers until they are tenured, only in the past year

did the university work collaboratively with GCPS on this initiative. GCPS already had an existing program in place, but it was strengthened through this partnership. There is now a more focused effort, and a shared commitment, as we are working together on a common goal instead of working in isolation. I (Wildesen) believe that before this partnership formed, we were only scratching the surface, but the induction program is of higher quality now, in part due to the professional development and microcredentials provided by university faculty, as well as a commitment to weekly collaboration between the university and our district.

Next steps

Many of the program components initiated this past year, as described in this article, will be piloted this coming school year, with a transfer of leadership, via gradual release, from university faculty to the district coaches. GCPS will utilize a lead mentor instructional model, which will provide release time for lead teachers who will provide direct instruction to students for 50% of the workday, while working with new teachers the other half of the workday. This 50/50 teaching model will allow each lead mentor to focus their attention on 8-10 new teachers, mentoring each a minimum of once every two weeks. In the previous GCPS model, it was difficult to work around planning and instructional times, which limited mentors' abilities to conduct non-evaluative visits, model lessons, or have time for discussion with the mentee. The intention is that the new model will provide ample support for novice teachers while providing opportunities to build teacher leader capacity for mentor teachers and coaches. FSU faculty will continue to support GCPS through a shared, sustainable governance structure that promotes collaboration between constituents.

References

- Day, J. (2022). A proposed multi-tiered university-school partnership for a National Board Certification cohort. *PDS Partners Bridging Theory to Practice*, 17(1), 22–25.
- Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2019). *U.S. schools struggle to hire and retain teachers*. Economic Policy Institute. Available from: <https://www.epi.org/publication/u-s-schools-struggle-to-hire-and-retain-teachers-the-second-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/>
- Gray, L., & Taie, S. (2015). *Public school teacher attrition and mobility in the first five years: Results from the first through fifth waves of the 2007–08 beginning teacher longitudinal study*. United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (DCES 2015-337). Available from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Education Research*, 81(2), 201–233. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23014368>
- Joiner, S., & Edwards, J. (2008). Novice teachers: Where are they going and why don't they stay?. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, 1, 36–43.
- Kutsyruua, B. (2020). School administrator engagement in teacher induction and mentoring: Findings from statewide and district-wide programs. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, 16(18), 1–36. doi: 10.22230/ijep1.2020v16n18a1019.
- Lutovac, S., Kaasila, R., & Hannu, J. (2015). Video-Stimulated Recall as a facilitator of a pre-service teacher's reflection on teaching and post-teaching supervision discussion. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 4(3), 14–24. Available from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1075153>
- Martinelle, R. (2018). *Video-stimulated recall: Aiding teacher practice*. ASCD. Available from: <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/video-stimulated-recall-aiding-teacher-practice>
- National Association for Professional Development Schools (2021). *What it means to be a professional development school: The nine Essentials* (2nd ed.), {Policy Statement}. Available from: <http://napds.org/nine-essentials/>

Papay, J. P., Bacher-Hicks, A., Page, L. C., & Marinell, W. H. (2017). The challenge of teacher retention in urban schools: Evidence of variation from a cross-site analysis. *Educational Researcher*, *46*, 434–438.

Weins, P. D., Chou, A., Vallett, D., & Beck, J. S. (2019). New teacher mentoring and teacher retention: Examining the peer assistance and review program. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, *30*(2), 103–110.

Further reading

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2014). Five core propositions. Available from: <http://www.nbpts.org/five-core-propositions>

About the authors

Jodi Eirich is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Professions at Frostburg State University where she serves as Coordinator of Secondary and P-12 Programs. Jodi Eirich is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: jleirich@frostburg.edu

Jane Wildesen is the Director of Human Resources and Employee Relations for the Garrett County Public Schools.