Virginia

The New Teacher Center’s 2011 *Review of State Policies on Teacher Induction* provides comprehensive summaries for all 50 states. For each state, the NTC reviews the presence or absence of policies related to 10 key criteria that are most critical to the provision of universal, high-quality induction and mentoring support for beginning educators. The state summaries capture all relevant policies, statutes, regulations, induction program standards, and other guidance on new teacher induction and mentoring.

1. Teachers Served:

State policy should require that all teachers receive induction support during their first two years in the profession.

The 1999 Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act requires school districts to provide mentor programs for first-year teachers. State law requires the State Board of Education to establish, contingent upon state funding, “mentor teacher programs utilizing specially trained public school teachers as mentors to provide assistance and professional support to teachers entering the profession.” [Code of Virginia § 22.1-305.1]

2. Administrators Served:

State policy should require that all school administrators receive induction support during their first two years in the profession.

The state does not require new school administrators to receive induction support.

3. Program Standards:

The state should have formal program standards that govern the design and operation of local teacher induction programs.

State law requires the State Board of Education to issue mentor teacher program guidelines and set criteria for beginning and experienced teacher participation. [Code of Virginia § 22.1-305.1]

In 2000 the State Board adopted *Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs*. The Guidelines require local school boards to meet the following program responsibilities: (1) Establish program objectives; (2) Manage the local mentor program; (3) Develop the program design; (4) Develop mentor selection criteria; (5) Establish school administrator responsibilities; (6) Develop mentor training; and (7) Evaluate the effectiveness of the mentor program.

In addition, the Virginia Department of Education issued *Requirements of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Mentor Programs in Hard-to-Staff Schools* in 2004. The document features 10 program requirements for mentoring programs in hard-to-staff schools.

4. Mentor Selection:

State policy should require a rigorous mentor selection process.

State law requires that teachers selected to serve as mentors must be “classroom teachers who have achieved continuing contract status.” [Code of Virginia § 22.1-305.1] Virginia’s *Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs* allow for additional criteria that are “well-defined, justifiable, and consistent with mentor responsibilities,” including a history of proficient or outstanding performance appraisals, the recommendation of the school principal, three years of successful teaching experience, understanding of formative assessment processes, and possession of effective interpersonal and collaborative skills.
5. Mentor Training:
State policy should require foundational training and ongoing professional development for mentors.

State law stipulates that local programs must utilize “specially trained public school teachers as mentors to provide assistance and professional support to teachers entering the profession.” [Code of Virginia § 22.1-305.1]. Virginia’s Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs require mentor training to include the following components: (1) State Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers; (2) Formative assessment of new teacher performance; (3) Development and use of individualized professional development plans; and (4) Provision of individual assistance.

6. Mentor Assignment and Caseload:
State policy should address how mentors are assigned to beginning teachers, allow for manageable mentor caseloads, and encourage programs to provide release time for mentors.

State law requires that mentor teacher programs: (1) Define a mentor as a classroom teacher who works “in the same building as the teachers they are assisting or be instructional personnel who are assigned solely as mentors”; and (2) Assign mentors a limited number of teachers and restrict instructional personnel “who are not assigned solely as mentors” from serving more than four teachers at any time. State law requires local school boards to “strive” to provide “adequate release time for mentor teachers during the contract day.” [Code of Virginia § 22.1-305.1]

7. Program Delivery:
State policy should identify key induction program elements, including a minimum amount of mentor-new teacher contact time, formative assessment of teaching practice, and classroom observation.

State law requires the State Board of Education to establish “mentor teacher programs utilizing specially trained public school teachers as mentors to provide assistance and professional support to teachers entering the profession.” The State Board mentor program guidelines must set criteria for beginning and experienced teacher participation and the qualifications and training of mentor teachers. The guidelines must guide new teachers “through demonstrations, observations, and consultations to promote instructional excellence.” [Code of Virginia § 22.1-305.1]

Virginia’s Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs require the following program design elements:

- Opportunities for communication and feedback among program participants, including central office staff, school site principals, mentor teachers, and beginning teachers;
- Development of formal and informal linkages among participants, such as institutions of higher education, the Governor’s Best Practice Centers, professional organizations and associations, and Training Technical Assistance Centers;
- Provision of adequate release time for mentor teachers during the contract day;
- Support services appropriate to the working conditions experienced by beginning teachers such as teaching assignments that optimize their chances for success, and provision of additional time and resources when beginning teachers are placed in more challenging settings;
- Professional development activities for beginning teachers that are designed to implement the Standards of Learning and Technology Standards for Instructional Personnel, that are responsive to individual teacher needs and concerns, and that are derived, in part, from formative assessment information; and
- Flexible support systems when a mentor with the content background or at the appropriate grade level is not available.

8. Funding:
The state should provide dedicated funding to support local educator induction programs.

The state currently provides four streams of dedicated funding for teacher mentoring: (1) The Mentor Teacher Program, (2) The Hard-to-Staff Mentor Teacher Program, (3) The Clinical Faculty Program, and (4) Career Switcher Mentoring Grants.

The current state budget funds the Mentor Teacher Program at $1 million each year for FY 2011 and FY 2012. During the next two years, state funding for the Hard-to-Staff Schools Mentor Teacher Program will be provided based on a state share calculated per teacher with zero years of teaching experience in a hard-to-staff school. The state share payments will be based on the composite index. In the event that available state funding is not sufficient to cover calculated division payments for the program, payments to
school divisions may be prorated. This program provides funds to support mentors for new teachers with no teaching experience assigned to hard-to-staff schools. In order to qualify as hard-to-staff, a school must meet at least four of the following eight criteria:

- Accredited with warning;
- Average daily attendance is two percentage points below the statewide average;
- Percent of special education students exceeds 150 percent of the statewide average;
- Percent of limited English proficient students exceeds 150 percent of the statewide average;
- Percent of teachers with provisional licenses exceeds 150 percent of the statewide average;
- Percent of special education teachers with conditional licenses exceeds 150 percent of the statewide average;
- Percent of inexperienced teachers hired to total teachers exceeds 150 percent of the statewide average; and
- School has one or more inexperienced teachers in a critical shortage area.

The current budget provides two additional sources of teacher mentoring funding. For FY 2011 and FY 2012, funding for Clinical Faculty is $318,750 each year, and Career Switcher Mentoring Grants is $279,983 each year. The funds for the Clinical Faculty Program are to assist pre-service teachers and beginning teachers to make a successful transition into full-time teaching. The funds for the Career Switcher Program are to support mentors assigned to individuals who have completed Level I of a Career Switcher Program and who have zero years of teaching experience.

9. Educator Accountability:
The state should require participation in and/or completion of an induction program to advance from an initial to a professional teaching license.

The state does not require new teachers to complete an induction program in order to advance to a professional teaching license.

10. Program Accountability:
The state should assess or monitor program quality through accreditation, program evaluation, surveys, site visits, self-reports, and other relevant tools and strategies.

State Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs requires local mentor program evaluations to be comprehensive, ongoing and include multiple criteria that are related to program goals and objectives. They must include three major components: (1) program evaluation, (2) definition of sources of the data, and (3) standard document design.

The Guidelines require the program evaluation to consist of two levels: (1) institutional (evaluates the school division’s success in the implementation of the mentor program); and (2) individual (assesses the performance of the new teachers and the mentors). Evaluation of the mentor teacher program should focus on its effectiveness in: retaining quality teachers; improving teaching performance; supporting teacher morale, communication, and collegiality; and facilitating a seamless transition into the first year of teaching.

Links:

The Virginia Department of Education has reviewed this state summary.

This information is accurate as of March 2011.