Chapter 28

Policy Impact on Teacher Induction: Connecticut’s Story

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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s Connecticut was on the leading edge of national educational reform, developing performance standards for teachers and students, creating a tiered licensure structure, and implementing a state-wide comprehensive, multi-year teacher induction program tied to teacher certification. Since then, many states and districts have begun to implement induction programs as a way to enhance teacher retention and performance and improve student achievement. However, the literature base on successful implementation is limited, as is the research on the effectiveness of specific induction practices as related to teacher development and student achievement. This chapter focuses on informing policy makers and educational administrators about the broad landscape of induction in the United States and explores how Connecticut’s rich history with induction can serve other states considering adoption of a comprehensive induction policy. Research concerns are also explored.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the broad landscape of induction in the United States and examines Connecticut’s past and present induction policies to exemplify the complexity of successful, state-supported induction programs. Using a sociohistorical lens (Vygotsky, 1978; Moll, 1990), this chapter explores the cultural practices of continued support and education for beginning teachers. It is especially useful because, as Moll (1990) noted, education “settings are social creations; they are socially constituted and they can be socially changed” (p. 15). Here, induction is the tool utilized by beginning teachers in their own advancement through the zone of proximal development (i.e., learning to become an effective teacher). The tool is culturally constructed, and through a greater understanding of the contexts in which induction is situated, there arises opportunities for developing stronger induction-related policies and practices.

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The first section of this chapter provides an overview of current statewide induction practices across the United States, focusing on trends and themes across states. The second section describes the development and evolution of state-mandated induction in Connecticut with a focus on implementation outcomes. The final section explores how Connecticut’s story can serve other states considering comprehensive induction and reflects on questions that need to be answered if induction is to become an integral aspect of teacher training and development, particularly in an era of changing teacher certification requirements and high-stakes teacher evaluation.

Information included in this chapter was culled from extensive searches of the literature on induction. An exhaustive review of all available research and scholarly writing on Connecticut was conducted, with literature focused directly on policy used to frame this chapter. In addition, state documents and meeting minutes were reviewed to corroborate claims made within the literature. Information on nationwide induction policy was largely culled from the New Teacher Center and from literature directly tied to state-level induction policy (as opposed to research articles about district or school-level practices).

BACKGROUND OF INDUCTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Induction is a broad term used to describe various support structures that assist beginning teachers as they integrate into the professional culture of teaching. It generally includes, but is not limited to, orientation seminars, workshops, mentoring or professional development activities, and observation and feedback from expert teachers or administrators (Smith, Desimone, Porter, McGraner, & Haynes, 2013). Induction can be further categorized based on the characteristics it encompasses. Informal induction is characterized by a limited, usually unfunded, set of actions and is carried out with available local resources—it is the school tour, district policy overview, introductions, and “holler if you need me” approach to onboarding new teachers. In contrast, comprehensive induction is characterized by its structure, intensity, and sequential nature and is carried out with training for mentors, beginning teacher orientation sessions, professional development, classroom observations, and feedback to the beginning teachers (Glazerman, Isenberg, Dolfin, Bleeker, Johnson, Grider, & Jacobus, 2010). Programs that are focused on improved teaching practices and student learning outcomes are comprehensive in nature and usually require policy and funding support at the state level.

Feiman-Nemser (2012) has expanded the categorical definitions of induction to recognize the varying goals that it seeks to address. Induction used to ease the transition into teaching, to reduce stress, and to address beginning teacher problems is a temporary support, with the anticipated outcome being teacher survival and initial retention. Induction with the goal of fostering new teacher development and promoting effective teaching and student learning is identified as individualized professional development that, in addition to retention, can improve teacher satisfaction, teaching skills, and student learning. Lastly, induction focused on the goals of reducing teacher isolation, integrating new teachers into a school community that supports continuous learning, promoting effective teaching and learning of all students, and reducing the achievement gap exists as cultural transformation—a model that focuses on the continuous learning of all teachers, collective responsibility for teaching and learning, a quality learning environment for students, increased student achievement, and a rewarding career path for teachers. Programs that offer temporary support are often informal, while programs that are focused on improved teaching and learning and the continuous learning of all teachers are more comprehensive in nature. Induction policies that approach or fit this description require funding support at the state level.
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