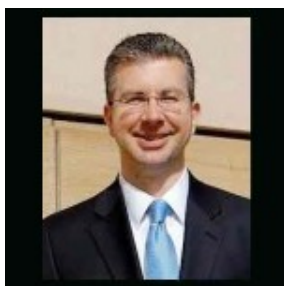


Opinion: California must keep promise to new teachers

By Liam Goldrick

California's recognized national leadership on developing and supporting new teachers is at risk. That's bad news for beginning teachers – and for the students they teach. Here's why – and how we can fix it.

More than 200,000 new teachers enter the profession annually across the United States – 10 percent of them in California alone.



Liam Goldrick

As New Teacher Center (NTC) reported in our Review of State Policies on Teacher Induction, 27 states require school districts to operate an induction or mentoring program for every new teacher. California used to be among them.

Seventeen states provide dedicated funding for teacher induction and mentoring. California used to be among them.

Only three U.S. states require and fund a multi-year induction program for every beginning teacher. California used to be among them, too.

The economic recession severely weakened California's widely heralded Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program. BTSA provides new teachers with job-embedded,

individualized support aimed at making them more effective educators and helping them to fulfill state credentialing requirements. In 2008, California provided more than \$4,000 in dedicated BTSA funding per beginning teacher. Since then, as a result of the categorical flexibility granted to school districts in the face of budget cuts, school districts have been allowed to redirect this funding toward “any educational purpose.” According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office, 55 percent of school districts have shifted funding away from BTSA and 10 percent have shuttered their BTSA programs entirely.

While these temporary rules were slated to sunset after the 2014-15 fiscal year, Gov. Jerry Brown’s proposed school finance reform plan would codify the state’s lack of direct investment in beginning-teacher development.

In a recent EdSource Today post, NTC founder and CEO Ellen Moir argued for restoring California’s historic commitment to developing a world-class teaching force. She served on State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson’s Educator Excellence Task Force, which recommended strengthening and reinvesting in BTSA, so all new teachers receive much-needed, personalized instructional support.

While rightly focused on equalizing school funding, the governor’s plan would eliminate dedicated funding for teacher induction and professional development in the state budget. Given that teachers are the greatest school-based determinant of student learning and that beginning teachers are more likely to teach in high-need, low-income schools and districts, this exclusion merits reconsideration based both on evidentiary and equity grounds.

NTC supports the intent of the governor’s school finance reform plan. We believe it can be achieved while restoring our investment in California’s beginning teachers.

Comprehensive, high-quality induction programs can be costly—but they achieve results that lesser approaches do not. One California study found a positive return from investments in comprehensive teacher induction: \$1.66 for every dollar spent after five years, as a result of reduced teacher turnover savings and enhanced teacher effectiveness. And a federally funded randomized controlled trial found that multi-year induction programs increase student achievement in mathematics and reading.

But we certainly shouldn't throw good money after bad. That's why, as California reinvests in its beginning educators, it also should ensure that its investment has the desired impact. In the past, all BTSA programs were not created equal. Some employed research-based approaches. Others sought to fulfill basic state mandates, but didn't provide new teachers the type of support needed to accelerate their development and keep them in the classroom.

California should continue to require new teachers to participate in a BTSA induction program to advance from a preliminary to a professional teaching credential. But the state cannot continue to let school districts off the hook. Today, districts no longer are required to operate BTSA programs, but teachers with a five-year preliminary credential must still complete an induction or clear credential program to earn a clear credential. This places an added burden on beginning teachers in those districts to locate a provider (often a college or university) of the support required to advance in the teaching profession. This is not sustainable.

As NTC initially recommended in a 2010 policy paper, California should do more to ensure the implementation of high-quality, standards-based BTSA programs that lead to more effective teaching and improved student learning. The state should deepen its analysis of BTSA impact – not only on teacher retention, but teacher effectiveness as well.

California also should promote program innovation and efficiency. It should encourage consortia approaches to supporting new teachers within existing BTSA clusters and the use of online mentoring.

Strong induction programs with deep support from local educational leaders and a proven track record will persist in isolated settings across California. This will include the NTC-affiliated Santa Cruz/Silicon Valley New Teacher Project and our many other long-standing partner districts and consortia across California. But our challenge is to extend that opportunity to each and every new teacher in the state.

State policy has an important role to play in this effort. California should restore its commitment and reclaim its mantle as a national leader in supporting new teachers.

As state policymakers aim to equalize and restore education funding, I hope you'll join New Teacher Center in encouraging Governor Brown and the Legislature to reinvest in high-quality beginning teacher induction programs that improve teaching and strengthen student learning in every California school.

Liam Goldrick has served as director of policy for New Teacher Center, a California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, since 2006.