Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM)
Program Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

There are more beginning teachers in classrooms than ever before, and many of those teachers will choose not to stay in the profession for more than a few years. The type and quality of support provided to new teachers can have a direct effect on their decision to remain in the field, their effectiveness in the classroom, and their ability to positively impact student outcomes. While research has shown that beginning teachers are generally less effective than their more experienced colleagues, it has also demonstrated that high-quality induction programs can increase the rate of instructional improvement and student achievement for beginning teachers while reducing rates of attrition by as much as fifty-percent. Induction can also provide an economic benefit to school districts—one research study has found that for every $1.00 invested in teacher induction, school districts gain a return of $1.37 in the form of retention and reduced hiring costs; another study demonstrated that the $13,000 per-teacher price tag of a two-year program in a California district yielded a $8,500 return on investment. These findings suggest that, with the right support, beginning teachers are more likely to stay in the profession and experience professional growth that positively impacts the state, the district, and student outcomes.

Beginning teacher induction has been a part of Connecticut’s education system since the mid-1980s. In 2009, the former induction program, Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST), was phased out and the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program was initiated. The 2009 - 2010 school year served as a development year for the program, and full implementation began during the 2010 - 2011 school year. In 2012, in effort to identify exemplary induction models nationwide, the New Teacher Center examined the scope of individual state policies; it identified Connecticut as having one of the most comprehensive teacher induction policies in the nation—ranking third among all states with induction requirements.

1.2 Evaluation Overview

In May 2012, Shoreline Psychometric Service, LLC was hired to conduct a review of Connecticut’s Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) induction program. Shoreline Psychometric Services, LLC developed a survey for all beginning teachers and stakeholders (mentors, administrators, reviewers, and district facilitators) asking for their perceptions of TEAM. The survey was developed with input from state-level TEAM Program representatives as well as stakeholder representatives during the summer of 2012. The survey was distributed to 6,538 educators who were involved in TEAM during the 2011 - 2012 academic year; 3,090 responses were obtained from across the stakeholder groups.
1.3 Evaluation Findings

Beginning teachers reported that engagement in TEAM and work with their mentors has positively affected their teaching practice and their decision to remain in the profession and in their district. Overall, responses across all stakeholder groups suggest that the TEAM program is a valuable induction tool that provides a system of support focused on professional growth and reflective practice. Respondents indicated that the module structure of the program helps beginning teachers improve their effectiveness in the classroom and that it contributes to positive academic and non-academic student outcomes. They also recognized the critical role mentors play in helping beginning teachers successfully engage in the program. Additionally, mentors reported that serving as a mentor in TEAM has positively contributed to their own classroom teaching.

Specifically, data suggest that beginning teachers are receiving individualized, often face-to-face support from their mentors—usually 1 - 2 hours per week. Structured, district level support, reported by district facilitators, is more varied. Most districts reported providing some type of in-district training, but additional support is distributed unevenly.

Respondents across all groups felt that the TEAM module process had a positive impact on beginning teachers’ practice and responses suggest that there is a general level of satisfaction with the TEAM Program. Beginning teachers attributed the TEAM Program and support structures as positively influencing their decision to remain in the profession, to remain in the classroom, and to remain in their district. Further, beginning teachers overwhelmingly reported that their mentors positively influenced their decision to continue teaching.

Mentors reported being positively affected by their engagement with TEAM. They reported modifying their own teaching and relating their practices to student outcomes, making more purposeful decisions about students and instruction, gaining an understanding of the CCT, and becoming inspired to continue their own development as ways in which TEAM involvement increased their effectiveness.

Across stakeholders, suggestions for improvements to TEAM were most often centered on district-level implementation of the Program, such as timing and logistics, and opportunities for beginning teachers to engage with mentors and colleagues. Among several suggestions related to state-level implementation of TEAM, responses generally indicated that improvements in communication among state-level TEAM Program representatives and district and building administrations could better support the work of mentors and beginning teachers in the TEAM process, among others.

1.4 Evaluation-Based Recommendations

Based on a review of the data from this evaluation study, we (Shoreline Psychometric Services, LLC evaluators) strongly support the continuation of the TEAM program as an effective tool for developing and
retaining high-quality teachers in the state of Connecticut. We also offer four recommendations to improve implementation of the program at the state- and district-levels.

1. **Improved state-district-building-level communication regarding TEAM:** Responses indicate that, across stakeholders, there are numerous misunderstandings about TEAM Program expectations and requirements, and how those requirements should be enacted within districts and schools. This leads to varied experiences for beginning teachers, who are subject to their individual district and building practices. Therefore, we recommend that TEAM Program representatives at the state and regional levels work closely with district representatives, such as district facilitators and TEAM Coordinating Committees (TCCs), to improve communication with district and building administrators and to strengthen district support practices. A significant goal of that communication should be the development of district-level guidelines that support beginning teachers’ development through participation in TEAM-related activities. For example, districts should consider implementing practices that allow for beginning teacher observations of and by colleagues. The TEAM Program should consider incorporating reflection review in the mentor training process so that mentors can better support the beginning teachers with whom they work.

   It is also recommended that the TEAM Program office and RESCs communicate with districts and their mentors to increase awareness of and responsibility for ensuring beginning teachers’ adherence to program expectations. Although a very small number of stakeholders expressed concerns about beginning teachers’ adherence to program expectations, districts should have a clearly articulated process in their District Support Plans to address any issues that may arise; and mentors should understand the important role they play in ensuring and supporting beginning teachers’ adherence to program expectations.

2. **Continuation of the development of state-level infrastructure:** Responses indicate that the website content and functionality are generally sufficient and have undergone changes as necessary to meet the needs of TEAM stakeholders; however, respondents also reported a desire for greater breadth in exemplars and links to more resources on the website. Respondents also reported a desire for additional training opportunities for stakeholder groups. Therefore, we recommend that the TEAM Program continue to enhance the website features by providing additional TEAM and professional resources for beginning teachers and mentors. It is also recommended that the TEAM Program explore the feasibility of online training modules for stakeholders, which can supplement the in-person training sessions offered throughout the year.

3. **Foster beginning teachers’ understanding of the Common Core of Teaching:** Responses indicate that experienced stakeholders recognize the importance Connecticut’s Common Core of Teaching (CCT) in developing strong professional skills and behaviors in beginning teachers, yet that understanding was not strongly evidenced by beginning teachers themselves. The TEAM Program should continue to foster beginning teachers’ understanding of the CCT as a tool to enhance teaching practice. To that end, it is also recommended that the TEAM Program further
develop current outreach practices to teacher education programs within the state. Outreach should focus on supporting teacher education programs’ systematic engagement with the CCT so that beginning teachers are familiar with the framework prior to their induction years. Greater alignment of pre-service and induction practices are likely to diminish the uneasiness often reported by beginning teachers regarding performance expectations, while ensuring that they are prepared to meet the needs of their students and the standards of their profession.

4. **Follow-up study to examine long-term effectiveness of TEAM:** This recommendation is not based on data from this study. We recommend a follow-up study so that the State Department of Education and the TEAM Program office can better understand how TEAM supports beginning teachers’ professional growth in the years following induction and the extent to which beginning teachers are retained within district and within the profession. This information can be used to further refine the practices within TEAM.