

Strengthening All Educators Through Mentoring and Coaching

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New teachers exude enthusiasm, optimism, and novel ideas to the teaching profession. Unfortunately, an estimated 20 to 44% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years due to lack of perceived support, job dissatisfaction, and low pay. Retaining effective teachers positively impacts school culture, community relationships, progress towards school goals, and student achievement. The issue of teacher attrition is particularly concerning in North Dakota because of the unique circumstances attributed to recent changes in population and demographics. The North Dakota Teacher Support System was established in 2010 to increase teacher retention by providing support for comprehensive teacher induction.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a challenge. Numerous studies contend that teaching is one of the most stressful professions and can be particularly stressful for new teachers who lack adequate support and extensive teacher training (Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, & van Veen, 2018; Prilleltensky, Neff, & Bessel, 2016). Subsequently, a large percentage of new teachers leave the profession early in their career. This turnover requires schools to perpetually work to recruit, hire, and train new teachers (Holdheide & Lachlan-Hach, 2019). Instability in teaching faculty has a negative impact on school climate and culture, community relationships, and student progress (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In contrast, effective teachers who stay in the profession continue to expand and grow their skills, assume leadership positions within the school, seek professional learning opportunities for themselves and others, and work to build the capacity of their colleagues. If schools continually lose teachers before they reach a level of expertise, the impact can be felt by everyone within the school community.

Teachers of all experience levels likely have similar stories to share about their first years of teaching. While navigating the labyrinth of the teaching profession, beginning teachers often lack teaching

resources and materials, knowledge of school-dependent processes and procedures, and the professional judgment that derives from classroom experience. Educational leaders within the school can help develop and nurture skills in new teachers by providing continual opportunities for professional learning and collaboration, time to reflect and apply new learning, and collegial support.

Classroom management, scheduling, student behavior, paperwork, assessments, and parent relationship are all challenges teachers continue to face well beyond their first years of teaching. Many new teachers exit preservice teaching programs moving directly to their first teaching job. Even with comprehensive university education programs, many new teachers enter the classroom feeling underprepared, isolated, and overwhelmed (Harmsen et al., 2018; Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Prilleltensky et al., 2016; Schmidt, Young, Cassidy, Wang, & Laguarda, 2017). Considering the growing list of responsibilities of a teacher combined with feelings of being under-supported and stressed, it is not surprising that many new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Chambers Mack, Johnson, Jones-Rincon, Tsatenawa, & Howard, 2019; Ingersoll, Merrill, Stuckey, & Collins, 2018; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

Teacher Shortage and Retention

A growing issue facing many schools across the nation is teacher shortage. While recruitment has been a focus, studies suggest teacher retention plays a critical role in teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Current and accurate teacher retention data is difficult to achieve, yet studies suggest between 20 to 44% of new teachers leave the profession within the first few years in the classroom (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). A study conducted by the Learning Policy Institute listed North Dakota as having the 19th highest turnover rate in the nation, with Arizona and New Mexico being in the top two positions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). According to this same report, the estimated annual rate of teacher attrition for North Dakota is 14% (2017).

When schools focus on retaining current teachers, they are building the capacity and investing in the expertise within the four walls of the school. By providing resources, building relationships among staff members, and creating a positive work environment, schools are better equipping beginning teachers to navigate challenges and ask for help when it is needed (Guha et al., 2017). As a result, investment in school faculty leads to establishing and maintaining a quality workforce, collaborative climate, and successful student outcomes.

Factors impacting teacher retention include compensation, location, teacher preparation (pre-service programs or alternative certifications), support from colleagues, and school leadership (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Of these factors, new teachers indicate job-related stress as the leading cause for exiting the profession (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Stress can become magnified when teachers feel overwhelmed, isolated, and exhausted and attribute these feelings to lack of support. Having the encouragement and camaraderie of colleagues mitigates these feelings. If schools and districts wish to increase retention rates, targeting these areas for further research and action would be beneficial.

Retaining teachers in rural school districts can be difficult due to available resources, teacher salary, and collegial support. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), the average salary of a teacher in a rural school district is almost \$8,000 less than the salary of a teacher who is employed in a larger city. With more than 88% of North Dakota's school districts categorized as rural, teacher retention in North Dakota is not only a challenge but also critical in ensuring students in these school districts receive quality educational opportunities (NDES, n.d.).

Low teacher retention rates have a negative impact on student achievement, school improvement, teacher effectiveness, and school finances (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). High turnover rates are especially concerning in school districts that serve a large population of students who experience poverty, identify within a minority group, and/or live in rural school districts (Guha et al., 2017; Holdheide & Lachlan-Hach, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2018). However, teachers who find support within their school community and/or with a mentor teacher have an increased likelihood of staying in the

teaching profession (Prilleltensky et al., 2016; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Teacher induction programs can provide the necessary support for decreasing teacher turnover.

Teacher Induction

Teacher induction is an umbrella term used to describe support provided to new teachers within one to three years of teaching. Comprehensive induction programs consist of peer mentoring, observations of other teachers, mentor observation of the first-year teacher, video recording and reflection, study groups or networks of other new teachers, online and face-to-face professional learning, and book studies. The current research emphasizes the impact of teacher retention and strong comprehensive induction programs as indicators of teacher retention, thus leading to student achievement (Guha et al., 2017; Prilleltensky et al., 2016).

According to Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), beginning teachers who receive induction support (including mentoring and professional learning) early in the profession are less likely to move to another school or leave teaching altogether. Holdheide & Lachlan-Hach (2019) suggest that mentoring support for beginning teachers increases teacher effectiveness, student engagement, and consistent use of formative assessment. Combined, these factors have a positive effect on student outcomes.

Summary

New teachers consistently report feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and underprepared when they enter the classroom. Higher education pre-service programs play a crucial role in preparing teachers for the day-to-day challenges they face in the classroom. However, the uncertainty that accompanies teaching requires teachers to be flexible, improvise, and problem-solve invariably throughout the school day. These types of skills are acquired with the support of skillful teachers, practical application, and experience-learned skills. Unfortunately, many new teachers do not stay in the profession long enough to learn these skills.

With the steady trend of teacher shortage and issue of teacher retention, school and districts face the challenge of recruiting and hiring effective teachers while working to retain them at a high rate. Although retirement accounts for an estimated 18% of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019), efforts must be made to better support and encourage the remaining teachers who leave the profession as a result of other undesirable factors. Specialized and research-based support for new teachers can help to moderate or eliminate many of these factors. Comprehensive induction programs that include structured mentorship, offer support for new teachers that have been linked to higher retention rates.

Recognizing the importance of keeping teachers in the profession and building capacity within teacher leadership, legislation took place in 2009 to establish the North Dakota Teacher Support System (NDTSS). The NDTSS was developed as a structured and research-based support network to address the needs of new teachers employed at kindergarten through twelfth grade public schools across North Dakota. The goal of the NDTSS is to increase support for first-year teachers with the intent of developing effective teachers who stay in the teaching profession. To combat teacher attrition, the state of North Dakota established a system offering training and continual support for mentor teachers, instructional coaches, and beginning teachers.

This article offers a glimpse at the many supports and resources offered by the NDTSS. Over the past 10 years, North Dakota has experienced a robust growth in population and demographics. In response, the program has evolved to address the unique and changing needs of teachers across the state of North Dakota.

NORTH DAKOTA

To retain effective teachers, North Dakota legislature created a grant that would fund a program called the North Dakota Teacher Support System. The Teacher Support System was written into the state Century Code to provide support services to teachers employed by school districts, special education

units, area career and technology centers, regional education associations and schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education. The work of the ND Teacher Support System includes selection and training of experienced teachers who will serve as mentors for first-year teachers and assist the first-year teachers with instructional skills development; or support non first-year teachers address their needs using research validated interventions and proven instructional methods.

The state of North Dakota has 175 school districts, 482 schools and 113,646 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade public education system. The 175 school districts can be broken down by size to give a more complete picture of the education system in North Dakota. Fifteen districts have been 1,00 - 13,500 students, 84 districts have between 201-999 students and 709 districts have 200 or fewer students. Additionally, six districts are Bureau of Indian Education schools with 100 - 475 students (J. Frohlich, personal communication, November 13, 2019).

The current statistics state that 76% of students in North Dakota are white, 9% Native American, 6% black, 5% Hispanic and 2% Asian. The graduation rate for students is 88.3% and 66.2% of students with IEPs graduate from High School (NDDPI, 2020).

Recent efforts in North Dakota have attempted to alleviate some of the challenges facing the state's teacher shortage. The result was legislation allowing increased flexibility. Individuals who hold a four-year degree and have the required number of credits in the desired teaching field, are issued an Alternate Access license. They must complete the required teacher education coursework within 3 years. The most recent legislative session brought further flexibility, enabling those without a 4-year degree to teach in "non-core" areas (HB 1531, 66th Leg. Session, ND 2019). Although the intentions of this law were noble, lowering standards for teachers is not a solution which positively impacts student achievement. Current data also does not indicate these efforts mediated the teacher retention challenge. Licensing agencies in North Dakota, and around the country, struggle to negotiate the intersection of high standards for teachers and the teacher shortage. Licensing agencies alone cannot alleviate the shortage through standards reduction, but instead need to work with stakeholders to support programs with clear data indicating positive outcomes relating to retention.

MENTORING PROGRAM

Layers of Impact

The NDTSS Mentoring Program has identified five layers of impact that must work together in order to have the most significant results on student achievement. These layers move from the state level to the school level.

The first layer of impact begins with legislators who create policy and make decisions about funding. It is important to have ongoing conversations with legislators during the session as well as in the interim. The next layer of impact is the administrators at the district and school levels. Administrators set the tone for the culture of the school and decide if the first-year teacher will be enrolled in the mentoring program. Ongoing conversations with administrators occur through conference presentations, emails and mailings. The third layer of impact is the Instructional Coach, who is working with both the administrator to help move initiatives forward as well as the teacher to model and give feedback. The fourth layer of impact is the mentor teacher who works most closely and regularly with the beginning teacher. The mentor teacher has a unique role as a non-evaluative colleague. The fifth layer of impact is the beginning teacher, who has direct contact with the students in their classroom. It is important to note that each of these layers impacts each other and ultimately has an impact on the achievement of students in the beginning teacher's classroom.

Role of the Building Administrator

The state of North Dakota does not require mentoring for first year teachers, which leaves the decision in the hands of each building administrator or superintendent depending on the structure within each district. Enrollment for the NDTSS Mentoring Program is communicated to building administrators each spring. Once the enrollment is open, administrators can enroll first year teachers that have been hired

and pair them with a mentor of their choice. Mentors are often chosen by administrators based on proximity and content area. However, some administrators have begun to assign the role of a mentor to a specific teacher who is utilized each time a first-year teacher is hired. The NDTSS Administrator Training is designed to support administrators in the areas of teacher retention data, guidelines for selecting a mentor, needs of beginning teachers, creating a positive culture for beginning teachers, description of mentoring activities and requirements of the NDTSS Mentoring Program.

Once an administrator has enrolled a first-year teacher, they have agreed to support the required mentoring activities and provide ample time for the beginning teacher and mentor to work together. Administrators are required to meet with each mentoring pair that they have enrolled in the program, two times per year during a triad meeting. The triad meeting is led by the mentor teacher in the fall and again in January. During this meeting, the administrator, mentor and first year teacher discuss: requirements of the program, clarification of the firewall, upcoming dates and expectations and questions. The triad meetings allow mentors to strengthen the principal-mentor interactions. For first-year teachers to take the necessary risks to grow, they must feel safe. Thus, they must trust that the relationship between themselves and their mentor is confidential. A principal who understands and respects this confidentiality fosters a community of trust. Involved administrators develop effective three-way relationships that sanction confidentiality and clearly demonstrate how everyone is working toward a common goal of successful teaching and learning.

It is essential for the beginning teacher to trust that what is shared with the mentor is confidential. In order to build a trusting relationship, the beginning teacher must know that the mentor is not sharing information with the building administrator. This is what NDTSS calls, working with a firewall. A firewall is placed between the mentor and principal concerning the content of the conversations between the mentor and the beginning teacher. This allows the relationship between the mentor and the beginning teacher to be far more effective in helping the new teacher to improve.

Professional Development for Mentors

Once a mentor is chosen by the building administrator and enrolled in the program, they are engaged in a training program. Mentor teachers are often skilled veteran teachers who have experienced success as a teacher. However, there are additional skills that a mentor must learn and practice in order to experience success as a mentor teacher. To teach these skills, NDTSS provides a two-day training for all new mentors. During this training, mentors work with other mentors across the state to learn content and tools related to these four questions: Why is mentoring important? What is good teaching? What skills and strategies are needed to be a good mentor? and How do I meet the requirements of the teacher support system mentor program?

Mentor trainers can work towards being what is considered an Advanced Mentor. To become an advanced mentor, mentors must complete a three-year professional development plan that includes: mentoring three first year teachers, attending a two-day face-to-face mentor training, attending a half-day face-to-face seminar training and participation in three mentoring webinars each year. The three years of professional development is built upon the idea of what we focus on is what grows. It is important to continuously bring the focus back to mentoring throughout the year. Mentors often have different challenges during different parts of the school year. During the webinars, mentors are placed in breakout rooms to discuss mentoring and problem solve with each other.

Professional Development for First-Year Teachers

The first year of teaching can feel lonely and overwhelming. In addition to providing a mentor, the NDTSS offers an optional online course for first year teachers. The course allows teachers to earn a total of four professional learning credit hours through the University of North Dakota. Participants in the course are placed in small group of teachers based on grade-level and/or content area. Responders facilitate group discussions and provide feedback to teachers in their group. Assignments are designed to foster relationships, facilitate meaningful discussions, promote critical thinking, offer new ideas for instructional application, introduce and share educational resources, and create networks of support.

Requirements of the Mentoring Program

The NDTSS Mentoring Program requires two types of activities that promote a cycle of ongoing reflection and feedback. This cycle takes place throughout observations and one-on-one conferences. There are three types of observation required of each beginning teacher. The first type of observation takes place when a mentor observes their first-year teacher six times per year for a minimum of fifteen minutes each observation. First year teachers work with their mentors to decide on a focus for the observation. Mentors are trained to give feedback on the focus and not give additional feedback outside of the focus area. The second area of observation is when the first-year teacher observes other teachers. First year teachers are required to observe other teachers for six hours in the first semester and three hours in the second semester. The third type of observation is through a video recording. First-year teachers are required to record their teaching two times per year for a minimum of fifteen minutes. The mentor and the first-year teacher watch the recording and feedback is focused on a decided upon focus for the recording. It is understood that video recording is a best practice used by educators to help them reflect on their practice and grow professionally.

Mentors and first year teachers are required to meet fifteen times each semester to complete a one-on-one conference. During the one-on-one conference, the mentoring pair moves through Reflect- Focus-Plan-Implement-cycle (RFPI). This cycle moves the conversation through successes, challenges and into implementation of next steps. Following this structure for the meetings assures that these meetings are efficient and effective in moving the beginning teacher towards their professional goals. During this conference, the beginning teacher identifies a teaching standard to work towards. Mentors are trained to use the teaching standards as a growth tool and utilize the rubrics to define data that would indicate growth.

Cooperating Teachers

Another area of need that has been identified is training for district level cooperating teachers of student teachers. In collaboration with North Dakota Universities and local colleges, training for cooperating teachers has been created and is being used with a pilot group of student teachers in the Fargo Public School system. The development of this training was a collaboration with university supervising teachers, state mentoring coordinators and district mentoring staff developers.

North Dakota currently requires cooperating teachers to acquire a minimum of two semester hours in supervision of a student teaching course, at least three years of teaching experience and be recommended by the administrator of the school in which the teaching is performed. During discussions with cooperating teachers, it became clear that cooperating teachers understand the student teacher requirements but needed support in the areas of co-teaching models gradual release of responsibility, observation data collecting and giving actionable feedback.

To create the training, the North Dakota Metrics-Student Teacher Observation Tool (STOT) from the North Dakota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NDACTE) was utilized to build a common language around the expectations for student teachers. Aligning the expectations of cooperating teachers and university supervising teachers allows the student teacher to focus on specific areas of need and measure growth towards proficiency. The outcomes of this training include a focus on providing effective feedback using protocols and tools to support an effective co-teaching cycle, building positive relationships through effective communication and tracking student teacher progress using self-assessment reflection.

Beginning Teacher Networks

Induction programs are developed to provide a wide base of support for beginning teachers. While mentorship is the foundation, other scaffolds should be in place to offer a comprehensive range of support. Regional Education Associations (REA) and school districts provide supplemental activities and networks to bolster the confidence, skill set, and agency of the first-year teacher.

The NDTSS recognizes that REAs and school districts are in the position to connect new and experienced teachers on a regional level, therefore, becoming a critical local source of support. To

establish more complete induction programming, the NDTSS offers grants to qualifying REAs and school districts across the state. School districts and REAs are encouraged to apply for Beginning Teacher Network grants by submitting a proposal for supplemental induction activities implemented by the district or association. Applications are reviewed by the NDTSS and award money is granted based on need. Considerations include number of teachers participating, relevancy of outcomes, and plan of implementation.

Beginning Teacher Networks utilize the grants to fund induction activities, including observation rounds, book studies, network professional learning opportunities, online courses, and in-service days targeting pertinent topics for new teachers.

COACHING ACADEMY AND BUILDING ON

The North Dakota Century Code includes a section about supporting non first-year teachers by addressing their needs using research validated interventions and proven instructional methods. NDTSS provides this type of support by offering two specific opportunities for professional development. An Instructional Coaches Academy has been offered yearly for the past eleven years. During the Academy, instructional coaches gather for six days of learning. The coaches go through an application process to attend the Academy. Many of the coaches are in their first year as an instructional coach and are working in their setting full time as an instructional coach. In a survey, 99% of the Coaches Academy participants expressed an increase in their knowledge and ability to coach as a result of attending the Coaches Academy. The second opportunity for professional development is called Building on Our Coaching Skills. This has been offered to graduates of the Academy for the past two years.

During the six-day Coaches Academy, instructional coaches engage in collaborative learning with peers from around the state, generally in cohorts of approximately 40 participants. Since many of these coaches are in their first year of service in this role, they are relieved to gain clarity during the first day of the Academy about the work that coaches are intended to do, as defined by ten distinct roles defined by Harrison and Killion in *Taking the Lead* (2017). While there is flexibility for coaches and principals to work together to determine which roles have greatest priority based on the specific needs of the school, most coaches feel far more equipped to strategically plan how they will spend their time on a day-to-day basis as early as the end of the first day of the Academy.

Throughout the Academy, coaches gain knowledge, skills, and dispositions that prepare them to carry out their roles, always with the intent to build the capacity of teachers to improve instructional practices in their classrooms that are likely to result in increased student achievement. In addition, coaches learn ways to influence a culture of trust, collaboration, and inquiry within the buildings where they work. During their six days of learning together, they develop a network of trusted colleagues to whom they can turn for support throughout the year. They become thought partners to each other -- colleagues with whom they can share ideas, learn new approaches to the work, conduct problem solving, and address the challenges they face in their work.

The curriculum for the Academy is divided into modules and the sessions are conducted over the course of several months. In between sessions, the coaches are expected to put into practice some of the things they learn in the Academy, ensuring that they move beyond learning about new content to implementing new practices in their schools. Most Academy graduates report significant growth as a result of their participation.

TEACHER RETENTION IN NORTH DAKOTA

Beginning teachers enter the classroom with fresh perspectives, contagious energy, and expertise in current research and practices gained from preservice education courses and practicum experiences. Working with beginning teachers provides an opportunity for experienced teachers to share knowledge, explore innovative ideas, learn mentoring skills, and acquire leadership roles. Mentoring offers a chance

for both new and experienced teachers to grow in their teaching practice and become more effective educators.

However, the novelty and excitement that accompanies beginning teachers often are stymied by common classroom challenges, including classroom management, parent involvement, access to adequate resources, rigorous curriculum, and extracurricular activities. Studies suggest beginning teachers who do not receive adequate support through a well-developed induction process are more likely to leave the teaching profession. The financial expense of school districts to replace new teachers is estimated between \$17,000 and \$22, 000 (Holdheide & Lachlan-Hach, 2019). Not only costly to school districts, more importantly, teacher attrition has an impact on student academic growth and emotional well-being (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Because student achievement is the goal of education, it is important to examine factors that are related to teacher retention.

Schools can support beginning teachers through induction programs that include opportunities for professional learning and mentoring. The state of North Dakota recognizes the critical role that support and mentoring plays in retaining beginning teachers. Thus, a state Mentoring Program through the North Dakota Teacher Support System (NDTSS) is offered to all certified beginning teachers, in compliance with Century Code Chapter 15.1-18.2. The goal of the NDTSS is to support veteran teachers and educational leaders in building capacity in the new generation of teachers by providing a multi-tiered program focusing on mentorship. The Mentoring Program offers layers of support including one-on-one conferencing, observation of other teachers, video teaching reflection, and online professional learning. As a component of a comprehensive induction program, the Mentoring Program aims to increase teacher retention in North Dakota. Until recently, little data have been collected to compare the rate of retention to teachers who participated in the Mentoring Program and teachers who did not participate in the Mentoring Program.

The NDTSS conducts an annual retention study to quantify the percentage of participants who completed the Mentoring Program and have been retained as educators in North Dakota schools. No known comparison data has been collected and analyzed for teachers who do not participate in the Mentoring Program until now. In the spring of 2019, the NDTSS expanded the retention study to include all North Dakota teachers, thus allowing a comparison of Mentoring Program participants and teachers who did not receive mentoring through the NDTSS. The following table summarizes the findings of the study.

TABLE 1
THREE-YEAR RATE OF RETENTION COMPARING TEACHERS MENTORED IN
NDTSS AND TEACHERS NOT MENTORED IN NDTSS

Initial year of teaching	Mentored in NDTSS	Not Mentored in NDTSS	Rate of Retention for ND
2017-18	94.3% (n=211)	85.6% (n=257)	89.5% (n=468)
2016-17	90.7% (n=258)	74.7% (n=304)	81.9% (n=562)
2015-16	82.5% (n=273)	73.2% (n=340)	77.0% (n=613)
Cumulative Total	88.3% (n=742)	77.2% (n=901)	82.2% (n=1643)

The NDTSS utilized the mandatory state education form, referenced as the MISO3, to collect data pertaining to years of experience for all teachers in the state. New teacher data were collected from the 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 school-years. All teachers who indicated zero years of experience on the MISO3 formed the sample for this study.

To increase the validity and reliability of the study, teachers who were enrolled in the NDTSS Mentoring Program during the years analyzed in this study were cross-referenced. Teachers who were enrolled in the Program yet did not indicate zero on the MISO3 form were removed from the findings. Teachers supported by the NDTSS over the three-year range was approximately 45.1% of the total number of beginning teachers.

Analysis indicated that teachers who participated in the NDTSS Mentoring Program were retained at an 11% greater rate than teachers who did not participate in the Mentoring Program. Further, the rate of retention for NDTSS participants is 6% more than the overall retention rate for all North Dakota teachers over the three school years analyzed in the study. See Table 1.

PROGRAM IMPACT

In addition to retention data, the NDTSS collects program feedback through quantitative and qualitative surveys and a third-party evaluation. The feedback data are analyzed to inform planning for future trainings and professional development.

Third-Party Evaluation: Program Quality Report

New Teacher Center provides a Program Quality Survey (PQR) that captures data on the experiences, attitudes and behaviors of beginning teachers, mentors and administrators. This survey was administered by New Teacher Center to all the administrators, mentors and first year teachers in the program every other year, most recent data was collected in May of 2018. The PQR measures factors that support program evaluation in the following areas: Job intentions, job satisfaction and commitment, beliefs about teaching and school environment and instructional leadership.

According to the 2018 PQR data, 87% of first-year teachers attribute their success to the support they receive from their mentor. Among the first-year teachers who were surveyed, 92% agree that working with a mentor has positively impacted their students' learning. Of the mentors who were surveyed, 98% believe their teaching practice has improved as a result of working with a beginning teacher and 100% believe they have positively influenced the teaching practice of their mentee.

Quantitative and Qualitative Surveys

At the conclusion of each training session and professional learning opportunity, the NDTSS surveys participants for program feedback. Participants respond to questions regarding key points from the trainings, specific ideas for improving or extending the program, and how they plan to apply their learned knowledge in their school and classrooms.

Table 2 lists examples of qualitative feedback collected from the surveys conducted with first year teachers, mentor teachers, and instructional coaches in the 2018-2019 school year.

TABLE 2
PROGRAM FEEDBACK FROM INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES, MENTOR TEACHERS,
ADMINISTRATORS, AND FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

	Feedback
Mentor Program	<p>“This program is very important in supporting new teachers and keeping them in education.”</p> <p>“Our relationship enabled us to collaborate, to work out student and colleague issues, and to develop a system of support for issues that occurred outside of school.”</p> <p>“I not only helped my mentee grow in her teaching profession, but feel I, too have learned a great deal about my own teaching and how to improve my profession.”</p> <p>“Mentoring creates such an amazing support system and enhances our school culture and climate.”</p> <p>“Before I even started teaching, I had someone who was there for me and could help me through the upcoming challenges.”</p> <p>“Without my mentor this year, I would have felt very lost! Knowing that I had someone there to help me and answer any questions I might have, gave me reassurance to try things on my own.”</p> <p>“I am a special education teacher and my mentor is a general education teacher. We became close colleagues over the year and because of this, inclusion amongst my students and hers increased.”</p> <p>“The first year comes with many good struggles and challenging. My mentor was there in supporting me through it all.”</p>
Coaches Academy	<p>“Thank you for your great leadership skills and modeling what great PD looks like! I learned so much!”</p> <p>“The take-a-ways from the training will be sticking with me for many seasons to come!”</p> <p>“I plan to make a conscious effort to work on improving my communication skills.”</p> <p>“The structure and information were invaluable. It was also great to be with coaches from all over the state. Forming a professional network was wonderful.”</p>

The feedback collected from the surveys plays an important role in assessing the program’s effectiveness and needs. Once feedback is collected, the NDTSS reviews and considers it as planning for upcoming trainings and professional learning. Data are also presented and shared with legislators, governing board members, administrators, and program participants.

CONCLUSION

The teaching profession has a critical hand in every other profession, yet many teachers leave the classroom to pursue other jobs within the first few years of teaching. Many educators exit teaching citing unsatisfactory working conditions, lack of resources and support, and low salaries as primary reasons for seeking alternative professions. With high teacher attrition comes devastating consequences, including impact on student achievement, school and community relationships, and school culture.

To combat teacher turnover, the North Dakota Teacher Support System has developed a multi-tiered structure of support. This article presented an overview of the framework and function of the NDTSS. It is recognized that as education evolves and the role of the teacher continues to be redefined, it is necessary for the NDTSS to examine and address the needs of North Dakota teachers. The current program is being re-evaluated to explore extending the one-year Mentoring Program to two years, mirroring induction programs from other states. The second year would be based on a gradual release model and provide extra support for teachers who self-select to continue in the Mentoring Program.

Additionally, the NDTSS is working to extend the previous retention research to include data specific to demographics and regions in the state. This data could be utilized to analyze trends in turnover and regional relocation and inform the NDTSS of gaps in support and specific areas of need. Findings will inform and guide future planning for professional development, mentor support, and program outreach.

Finally, future collaboration with higher educational institutes in North Dakota could explore partnerships in training of cooperative teachers. The focus of these trainings would be on strengthening observation protocols and feedback processes. This collaboration would allow for better alignment of outcomes and support for pre-service and newly licensed teachers.

Since 2010, the work of the NDTSS has extended throughout almost all 175 school districts in North Dakota and supported over 2,500 first year teachers, 2,000 mentor teachers, seven REAs, and 515 instructional coaches. Although these numbers are definitive, the impact the NDTSS has had on student success, educational leadership, and school climate in North Dakota schools is unquantifiable.

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