



Teacher Mentorship

A position of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Question

Why is it important for teachers to be mentored throughout their teaching careers?

NCTM Position

States, provinces, school districts, colleges, universities, and experienced teachers share responsibility for the continuing professional support of other teachers at all stages of their careers (e.g., prospective and early-career teachers, alternative entrants, experienced practitioners learning new skills). Mentorship can be provided in structured programs of induction and continued professional development or through informal mentoring arrangements in which more knowledgeable or experienced teachers support the development of other teachers by providing them with opportunities to reflect on and enhance their knowledge of content, pedagogy, classroom management strategies, and teacher leadership skills. For individuals to advance toward excellence, they need the support of a community to help them achieve their potential.

The development and retention of highly effective mathematics teachers are essential to the welfare and prosperity of both the United States and Canada. Currently, those who aspire to become teachers can pursue a number of different routes to achieve their goal. In addition to the more conventional teacher education programs, they can enroll in alternative certification programs, often offered as expedient ways to meet critical staffing demands at schools. Regardless of the preparation pathway, teachers will need continued support to ensure that all students have opportunities to meet the expectations of rigorous standards. Mentorship will be important in shaping and developing the next generation of teachers, particularly as expectations for students become more rigorous.

Without such mentorship, the trend in teacher attrition is likely to continue. Statistics show that nearly half of the new teachers in the United States leave the profession in their first five years of teaching, and Canadian and U.S. attrition rates are both around 30 percent for teachers in their first three years (Carroll & Foster, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Mueller, et. al., 2011; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). These high rates of attrition contribute to the overall shortage of high-quality mathematics teachers, particularly at the middle school and high school levels (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007). This attrition is especially alarming in the United States, where it is predicted that more than 2 million new teachers will be needed in the coming decade. Research suggests that participation in quality mentoring or induction programs has a positive impact on teacher retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Prospective, early-career, and alternative-entry teachers will need support as they grapple with the daily complexities associated with teaching. Unfortunately, these individuals often receive the most challenging teaching assignments in the most challenging settings, and they are often unprepared and unable to succeed (Brewster & Railsback, 2001). These teachers, some of whom may not have strong backgrounds in mathematics content or pedagogy, are often isolated from

professional involvement with colleagues. Frequently, they receive little content-specific professional development to support them in meeting the challenges that they face in today's classrooms. As a result, their students may not be afforded the rich learning opportunities and high-quality instruction that NCTM advocates as essential preparation for college, career, and everyday life. It is only when teachers collectively take responsibility to support and mentor one another that the profession can reach its full potential (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Schwille, 2008).

Recommendations

Teachers need and deserve a strong, structured program of induction and continued renewal, including mentoring, to ensure their success and increase the likelihood that they will remain in teaching, grow steadily in professional expertise, and find lifelong satisfaction in a career of continued service to their students and mathematics education. The goal of any mentoring program is to provide the support needed to ensure the mentees' success and long-term engagement in the teaching profession. To meet the challenge of establishing mentoring programs that support teachers throughout their careers, NCTM recommends the following:

- Experienced teacher leaders need to take responsibility for supporting the professional development of less experienced teachers and peers as part of both formal and informal mentorship programs and arrangements.
- Experienced teachers need to take an active role in supporting the development of prospective teachers by mentoring students who are engaged in their practicum or internship experiences. Partnerships between experienced and novice teachers can support early-career and alternative-entry teachers in making sense of what it means to teach as they engage in school district induction programs. These partnerships should provide a strong focus on mathematics content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of local, state, and national curricular expectations and their implications for high-quality mathematics teaching.
- In making teaching assignments, district and school-based administrators need to consider the additional demands on both beginning teachers and their mentors. Teachers who have been identified as mentors should receive significant and consistent training, as well as appropriate remuneration or release time for their services. To be effective, teacher leaders need to be prepared to serve as mentors for prospective, early-career, or alternative-entry teachers (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2008).
- Research should continue to be conducted on the most effective aspects of mentoring programs and their relationship to mathematics teacher retention and professional growth.

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NCTM Resources

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