

Creating a Sustainable Web of Support for Early Career Teachers: Examining Induction and Mentoring Practices in Washington State

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide educators and policy makers in Washington state with information and analyses about teacher induction and mentoring to inform and enhance decision making regarding supports for early career teachers. This research focuses on ways in which districts and schools can create a sustainable, multi-layered system of supports, with attention to equitable practices and early career teachers of color.

Research Questions and Methods

This research explores the supports provided to early career teachers in eight Washington districts. Our overarching research question is: ***How can district and school capacity be developed and sustained to support high quality teacher induction?***

We used a qualitative research design relying primarily on confidential, semi-structured interviews with district staff, mentors, early career teachers, principals, and others who held responsibilities for teacher induction and support. We selected and invited the districts based on teacher retention and mobility data, district size, regional location, rural, suburban and urban contexts, proportion of early career teachers, and diversity of the student population served. The districts range in size from 800 to more than 30,000 students and are diverse in terms of their student populations (40 - 95% students of color). Interviews with 86 individuals were conducted from April 2021 to May 2022 via Zoom (due to Covid restrictions). We analyzed the data thematically to establish themes and patterns which formed the basis for our findings.

Key Findings

Findings suggest consideration of the following elements in developing a web of supports for early career teachers: 1) leadership and structures that build capacity and address equity, 2) a systemic approach to professional learning, 3) recruitment, hiring and onboarding, and 4) the role of state level supports.

Leadership and Structures that Build Capacity and Address Equity

Developing a coherent and sustainable approach to induction requires leadership to bring together resources and organizational structures that advance equity and provide a web of supports from a variety of sources at district and school levels.

Leadership efforts in this study included aligning district priorities with induction, dedicated staffing and other resources, and developing leadership and collective responsibility. In seeking to weave the induction work into the fabric of a district, we found examples embedded in districts' improvement plans, threaded through professional development foci, or aligned with an equity agenda as a system-wide priority. District and school personnel noted the importance of the district's instructional

framework and the state's standards for induction and mentoring as anchoring pieces of the induction work. In seeking to build capacity and encourage collectively responsibility, some districts found induction stakeholder teams, often comprised of a diverse representation of district and school staff, had the potential to inform the induction work and address challenges.

A Systemic Approach to Professional Learning

In a sustainable high quality induction system, professional learning for early career teachers—and those who work with them—is differentiated, strengths-based, and focused on continuous growth. Engaging staff across the system can support capacity building and collective responsibility.

Using a strengths-based approach (recognizing that teachers enter the profession through many pathways and with various skillsets), and differentiating through a multilayered web of supports, professional development can effectively address immediate and longer-term learning needs of new teachers. Pedagogically, new teachers often require training around specific subject-matter curriculum and initiatives promoted by their school or district. But the timing, scope and sequence of these activities is critical to give new teachers the bandwidth to benefit from the training and not be overwhelmed by it. Some professional development activities can be carried out with colleagues or in safe spaces, such as racial affinity groups. Nearly a third of the early career teachers we interviewed self-identified as persons of color. Early career teachers of color from several districts described opportunities to meet and collaborate with other teachers of color in the form of affinity spaces. While they found these spaces helpful, an overarching concern was the lack of representation of educators of color in district and school leadership overall, and the limitations they perceived in white mentors' ability to connect with them. The principals of color interviewed for this study acknowledged the challenges of leading for racial justice and equity. They spoke of engaging with teachers of color to reframe their work within the current social context, and spoke of conversations and structures to address microaggressions, ensuring teachers have a voice, and inviting them to reach out for support.

Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding

A sustainable induction program attends to the recruitment, hiring and onboarding of new staff in ways that reflect the values of the district, diversify the workforce, and create supportive, equitable and welcoming environments for all new teachers.

Long before a new teacher applies for a position, districts have an opportunity to influence the outcome of a new professional relationship by clearly articulating organizational values, goals, and expectations. Overall, the districts in this study were committed to the recruitment, hiring and onboarding of new staff in ways that reflected the values of the district in diversifying the workforce and creating supportive, equitable and welcoming environments. School and district leaders were paying close attention to the placement of new teachers, whether that involved grade level, subject matter content, number of preps or physical classroom locations. A theme among the leaders we spoke with was the importance of collaborating with others in making assignment decisions and being careful not to allow the master schedule or senior staff preferences to undermine creation of a successful assignment for a new teacher. All of the districts

discussed challenges they faced in recruiting and retaining teachers of color, and some shared strategies they employ to address these concerns.

The Role of State Level Supports

A well-run state teacher induction program plays a crucial role in recruiting and retaining a diverse, highly qualified teacher workforce. The state helps districts develop and sustain their induction program by funding mentoring positions, articulating standards for high quality mentoring and induction, leading collaborative and differentiated professional development, creating ongoing opportunities for professional networking and leadership, and promoting equity and anti-racist practices.

On their own many districts don't have the necessary capacity to design, implement or maintain high quality induction programs. States, however, have a unique opportunity to improve the quality, diversity and retention of the workforce by investing in a district's capacity to offer supports to early career teachers. Study participants consistently remarked on the vital importance of the resources, staff, standards, and professional development that the state provides. Without exception, they commented that without state support, necessary supports for early career teachers would either be severely curtailed or nonexistent. Participants also described the BEST staff as an excellent, collegial, and responsive resource. Among the foundational elements of Washington state's program which districts found invaluable were statewide mentor roundtables, induction standards with an emphasis on coaching for equity, differentiated professional development support, and leadership opportunities for mentors. Some considerations for improvement were also noted. Suggestions included increased opportunities for rural districts, additional training for principals, enhanced partnerships with teacher education institutions, and strengthened efforts to diversify the educator workforce.

Significance

In this study we found that a sustainable web of supports for high quality teacher induction can be equitably designed and implemented. This requires commitment from leaders at all levels of the education system to share responsibility for supporting early career teachers, dedicate resources for this purpose, and collaborate to attract and retain a well-qualified, diverse workforce.

Introduction

For the past decade, Washington state has invested in providing support for teacher induction and mentoring through the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) Beginning Educator Support Team program (BEST). The BEST program provides state funding for competitive grants to districts and regional consortia, and also funds professional development for instructional mentors throughout the state. The competitive grant process is based on evidence of district need and readiness to implement the state's Standards for Beginning Educator Induction. Prior quantitative research has examined relationships between BEST-funded districts and teacher retention (Elfers et al., 2020; Plecki, Elfers & Van Windekens, 2017), but the research did not investigate the various ways in which teacher induction programs are implemented in districts and schools.

This research focuses on improving our understanding of district and school approaches to teacher induction and mentoring and describes the experiences of early career teachers. We also examine elements necessary to configure resources and build school and district capacity to support high quality teacher induction and to sustain it over time.

Informing Literature

Induction programs are a widespread approach used to support the professional growth of early career teachers and to increase retention rates (Ingersoll, 2012). Formal induction programs offering mentoring and targeted professional development for new teachers have been in existence for many years, but there is considerable variation in their design and implementation (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009).

The Case for Supporting Early Career Teachers

Teaching is a challenging career, and many are worried that too few teachers are entering and remaining in the workforce. Early career teachers often need targeted support as they learn how to plan, execute, evaluate, and adjust content-specific instruction for heterogeneous groups of learners, and learn to navigate the particular state, district, and school cultures and contexts in which they find themselves (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Early career supports are associated with improvements in teacher effectiveness (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Prior research also indicates that the preparation and supports teachers receive as they transition into the profession can influence whether or not they exit the profession early (DeAngelis, Wall & Che, 2013).

Aims of Induction Programs

Teacher induction programs are designed to assist the ongoing development of teachers' skills in their initial years in the classroom and prevent them from abandoning the profession (Feinman-Nemser, 2001; Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008). In a longitudinal study of new teachers in Massachusetts, Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found that experiences at the school site were central in influencing new teachers' decisions to stay in their schools and in teaching. They argue that novice teachers' professional success and satisfaction are tied to the particular school site and that working conditions found to support their teaching include collegial interaction, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources and school-wide structures to support student learning. These issues may be particularly acute for new teachers in low-income schools (Johnson et al., 2004). Based on surveys of new teachers,

these authors found large and statistically significant differences in the mentoring support provided to new teachers in low-income schools compared to their counterparts in high-income schools. The composition of a school's student population with regard to race, ethnicity, and poverty, has been shown to influence teacher attrition and mobility (Guin, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001; Kelly, 2004; Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2002; NCES, 2005; Podgursky et al., 2016; Shen, 1997). While these factors may pose particular challenges, other studies have found that the influence of student demographics on reported teacher turnover and hiring problems may be reduced when factoring in certain working conditions such as school facilities, class size, and adequate teaching materials (Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005).

Mentoring by a school or district staff member is often a primary component of induction support for new teachers. However, there is considerable variability in the supports provided to new teachers. National statistics indicate that among teachers with one year of experience in 2015-16, two-thirds reported participation in an induction program, and of those, 74% were assigned a mentor (US DOE, 2016a). In examining the outcomes of a mentoring program in New York City, Rockoff (2008) found a strong relationship between various measures of mentoring quality and new teachers' reported experiences of success in the classroom, with evidence of increased student achievement associated with more hours of mentoring. In a study of district mentoring programs for new teachers in five Midwest states, researchers found that in 69% of districts, mentoring was provided by full-time teachers without release time from teaching responsibilities. Roughly half of these districts required mentors to observe mentees teach, and only 32% of districts required the mentors to receive training prior to mentoring (DeCesare, Workman & McClelland, 2016), suggesting considerable variability in the implementation of induction and mentoring supports.

Evidence suggests that the quality and comprehensiveness of the induction supports matter for the retention of new teachers (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Kapadia et al., 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Some studies also found that teachers who receive intensive induction support during the early years of teaching have improved student learning outcomes (Fletcher, Strong & Villar, 2008; Rockhoff, 2008). Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) review of the induction literature found generally favorable results for teacher induction supports and retention, though there were a few studies with mixed results or no association. They conclude that the quality of induction programs is important to consider when assessing impact on teacher outcomes. For example, DeAngelis et al. (2013) found no direct impact of simply having a mentor on new teachers' intentions to move schools or leave the profession. However, they found significant results when they took into account the quality of mentoring (based on teachers' perceptions of the helpfulness of the mentor) and the breadth of mentoring and induction activities. When examining teachers' actual retention and mobility decisions after the first year, they found that having more comprehensive mentoring and induction support "decreased the odds of new teachers changing districts and leaving the profession after the first year" (p. 350).

Supporting Early Career Teachers of Color

For many years, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners across the nation have noted the lack of racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the teacher workforce, especially when compared to the increasing diversity of students. Many states have undertaken specific policies aimed at attracting and retaining teachers of color, and there is a broad consensus that increasing their numbers is of vital importance. In this paper, we include a discussion of the challenges faced by

teachers and other educators of color.¹

Research has documented the many strengths of a more diverse workforce, as teachers of color often possess cross-cultural relational skills, have a greater awareness of racial trauma, and are associated with more positive academic and social-emotional outcomes for students of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Philip & Brown, 2020). A growing body of research has investigated efforts to diversify the profession and examine the retention and mobility rates of teachers of color (Elfers et al., 2022; Villegas et al., 2012). Often these studies have used national datasets and surveys to explore differences in retention rates for teachers of color as a group. Analyses of national data show that over the past several decades, there has been a slow rise in the number and the proportion of public school teachers of color (US DOE, 2016b).

The sluggish increase in the percentage of teachers of color is partly attributable to higher rates of attrition. Ingersoll and colleagues (2018) analyzed national teacher survey data regarding the reasons why teachers of color decide to stay or to leave. They found that school working conditions, especially regarding the level of classroom autonomy, individual discretion, and collective influence teachers have regarding school-wide decisions are very important to teachers of color in making decisions about whether to remain at a school. Other scholars have noted the presence of de-professionalizing and disrespectful working conditions for teachers of color, including racial discrimination, relegation to serving in disciplinary roles, and being overlooked for promotions. These factors contribute to a “push out” effect for teachers of color, thereby impacting retention (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Scholars also acknowledge that these contexts, conditions, and structural barriers vary by individual racial and ethnic group and can impact teacher attrition, especially for Black teachers (Carter Andrews, et al., 2019; Sun, 2018). For example, there is a history of Black teachers being excluded and dismissed from teaching positions, particularly after the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* decision (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Oakley, Stowell & Logan, 2009; Philip & Brown, 2020). Furthermore, barriers to entry into the teaching profession (such as testing, licensure requirements and student debt) disproportionately impact teachers of color (especially Black teachers) and there is an increased likelihood of school closures where Black and Latinx teachers are located (Ahman & Boser, 2014; Petchauer, Bowe & Wilson, 2018; Philip & Brown, 2020). In their national study of Black women teachers, Carver and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that three-quarters of these new Black teachers were certified through an alternative route program with less preparation and student teaching experience. While these women were just as likely to receive a mentor as white teachers, they met with their mentor less frequently and found their mentoring experiences to be less effective. These systemic and structural inequities disproportionality impact retention, mobility, and support for teachers of color.

In an effort to improve the recruitment, preparation and support of teachers of color, some teacher education programs have engaged in transforming their approaches by incorporating critical reflection, and transformative learning with community-based organizations (Kohli, 2019;

¹ Throughout this paper, we use the language “teachers of color” to refer to teachers who identify as Black or African American, American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and other Asian American. Teachers of Mexican, South or Central American, Afro-Latinx Caribbean or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race, are also included as teachers of color. We acknowledge that this terminology has limitations, and that other language is also used at times, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color). We note that there is no universal agreement on terminology, and we endeavor to use the most specific language (that is, identifying specific racial and ethnic identifies) whenever possible in our discussion.

Liu & Ball, 2019; Zygmunt et al., 2017). Calls have also been made to increase the prevalence of well-supported teacher residencies and “grow your own” approaches to teacher recruitment and preparation (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019; Guha, Hyler & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Recent literature about teachers of color also suggests strategies that can be adopted to increase supports for early career teachers of color, including better induction supports, more supportive leadership, additional supports for teacher candidates, increased compensation, housing assistance, and loan forgiveness (Achinstein, 2012; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

This study includes the voices of educators of color through a critical and social justice lens, recognizing that organizational and political structures within states and districts are often resistant to equitable policies and practices, and that institutional racism and white privilege play out in various settings (Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A study such as this has policy implications that are not value neutral (Wright, Arnold & Khalifa, 2018), and attention to equity, adequacy and transparency in research can be a step toward educational justice.

Research Question and Methods

Research Question

This research explores the supports provided to early career teachers in Washington state. We strategically selected eight school districts to participate in the study. Our overarching research question is: ***How can district and school capacity be developed and sustained to support high quality teacher induction?***

To address this question, we investigate several aspects of teacher induction, including leadership and capacity building, resource allocation, professional learning for early career teachers and mentors, and attention to equity. We also include the role of the state in developing district capacity to create sustainable induction programs.

Qualitative Design and Sampling

We used a qualitative case study approach to our inquiry (Merriam, 2009) relying primarily on confidential, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with district staff, mentors, early career teachers, principals, and others who held responsibilities for teacher induction and support. Consistent with the research question, we developed initial interview protocols and adapted them to the participants’ role in their school or district. Data collection also included a review of some district documents (e.g., district BEST materials, prior site visit reports), and the researchers participated in one district’s spring BEST stakeholder team meeting. We note that all data collection complied with Covid-19 restrictions, and was undertaken in online environments (e.g., zoom, phone calls, online meetings).

In selecting potential district case study sites, we considered teacher retention and mobility data, based on our prior work conducting quantitative research (e.g., Elfers et al., 2020). We also invited recommendations from the BEST Program Lead. The Program Lead provided us with data regarding the districts which are currently participating in the BEST program and contact information for district coordinators. Because this research was initiated during the pandemic, OSPI sought to encourage district participation by promoting the study at the BEST Spring Symposium in March 2021. OSPI, through the BEST program, also encouraged district and participant engagement in the study by offering to: 1) replace the spring site visit for BEST

districts willing to participate and engage with UW researchers, and 2) provide BEST district participants with some financial compensation for their time beyond the contracted workday.

We invited eight districts to participate in the research, and we based their selection on district size, regional location, rural, suburban and urban contexts, proportion of early career teachers, and diversity of the student population served. The districts include three districts in the Central Puget Sound of varying sizes, one small rural district on the Olympic Peninsula, one mid-sized district in Eastern Washington, and three small, rural districts in Eastern Washington. They range in size from 800 to more than 30,000 students and are diverse in terms of the student population they serve (40 - 95% students of color). The districts reflect differing approaches in mentoring practices for early career teachers. We also interviewed a BEST consortia facilitator.

After completing appropriate application and permission procedures with each district, we spoke with the district BEST coordinators to discuss potential school and district participants. We contacted all individuals who were identified for potential participation via email, with the exception of one district, where the BEST coordinator contacted all participants on our behalf. Most of the individuals who were contacted agreed to participate.

In total, we interviewed 86 individuals, ranging from 4 to 19 persons per district. The interviews were conducted from April 2021 to May 2022 entirely via Zoom, and included 22 early career teachers, 35 mentors, instructional facilitators or BEST stakeholder team members, 10 principals and assistant principals, and 19 district leaders (e.g., program coordinators, human resource personnel, superintendents). The interviews were conducted individually with each participant and one or two researchers. Interviews with teachers lasted approximately 30 minutes, and interviews with other study participants were approximately 45-60 minutes in length.

Given the context of Covid-19, we adapted to conducting interviews via Zoom (Lobe, et al., 2020). With permission from participants, interviews were audio recorded. Interviews were transcribed and open coding was used to begin the analysis of the transcripts. We analyzed the data thematically to establish themes and patterns which formed the basis for the study findings.

We include a brief positionality statement as we are aware of our racial identities and privilege as women researchers whose work continues to be supported by the same elite spaces that educated us. Two researchers on this team identify as white. We recognize the overwhelming representation of white women in the teaching profession. One of the three researchers on this team identifies as Filipina American, who intentionally completed an alternative route to licensure program specifically for more critically conscious training and financial supports. Together, we pursue education research precisely because of its profound influence in the lives of children and families, and how the field fundamentally needs to address issues of equity and educational justice. We acknowledge both the promise and limitations of state and district policy to improve outcomes for students and families. States and districts can be a source of ideas, direction and resources, but also can create obstacles and constraints to change within their respective systems (Shields & Knapp, 1997).

Findings

The work is hard but helping [early career teachers] feel like they're supported, and they have a network, that's the biggest thing...[that] you don't only have your principal, but you have your teaching team, you have your [district] mentor, you have your building [mentor]. We want lots of legs on our chair to hold our new people up. If you have support in place for the new teachers, then you get people to continue in the profession which is good for our kids...We want excellent teachers working with our kids every single day. If we can keep great people and grow them over the years, to me that's a win. There's not a price you can put on that.

Director of Human Resources and Teaching and Learning

Research suggests that a well-designed and implemented induction program can result in positive outcomes for early career teachers and their students. Many elements of induction programs are similar regardless of district context. For example, most early career teachers benefit from both logistical and pedagogical support. Logistically, new staff need to know basic information about the district as well as information specific to their school assignment. Pedagogically, districts want to ensure that early career teachers have the instructional support they need to grow professionally. However, the ways in which these supports are provided vary considerably depending on the priorities, capacity and context of the district and the school.

For the eight districts in this study, the impetus for a formalized approach to teacher induction varied by district context and was influenced by size and location, and at times catalyzed by circumstances. At the time of the study, three mid-sized to large districts and one rural remote district had long-standing commitments to induction and formalized structures to support early career teachers. Several of the smaller districts were newer in the design of their programs, with a greater focus on induction resulting from leadership changes or staffing needs, such as staff turnover or increasing enrollments.

Regardless of district size or location, responsibility for the care and support of early career teachers crosses organizational structures within a school system. For induction supports to happen seamlessly, attention must be paid to these multiple and intersecting parts of the system and responsibility must be shared for addressing organizational barriers that can prevent early career teachers and those who support them from accessing the resources they need.

In the sections that follow, we provide a detailed discussion of this study's four central findings and provide evidence collected from district officials, mentors, school leaders, and early career teachers who have been involved in teacher induction. The four central themes are: (1) leadership and structures that build capacity and address equity, (2) a systematic approach to professional learning, (3) recruitment, hiring, and onboarding, and (4) state level supports and the role of OSPI. We conclude this section with suggestions for improvement from the field.

I. Leadership and Structures that Build Capacity and Address Equity

Developing a coherent and sustainable approach to induction requires leadership to bring together resources and organizational structures that advance equity and provide a web of supports from a variety of sources at district and school levels.

Educational leaders committed to teacher induction prioritize district resources, staffing and re-orient organizational structures in ways that advance equity and provide a web of supports for early career teachers. These efforts include aligning district priorities with induction, committing to necessary staffing and other resources, and developing leadership and collective responsibility.

Alignment of District Priorities with Induction Activities

In order for induction work to be woven into the fabric of a district, it needs to be integrated and aligned with district priorities. While some districts in the study were further along in developing this kind of a comprehensive approach to induction, all had valuable lessons to share. In one instance, the superintendent of a small, remote district described how the BEST grant provided the opportunity to integrate the district's improvement plan and the induction work:

The combination of the BEST grant and our work with instruction collided at the same time because we had done some K-12 initiatives... Plus we overhauled our district improvement plan... And then really what became the bulk of our work for building the culture was about what we do with our new staff, how we support them ...really a wraparound system. And it was the BEST grant that allowed us to do that.

Many districts have embraced an equity agenda as a system-wide priority and as a foundational part of their induction work. As a district leader explained, "We believe that equity and anti-racist teaching is not outside of good instruction, but is a part of good instruction, is good instruction." Ensuring that early career teachers have equity and diversity training is one way to both support and learn from teachers and students from minoritized communities, and potentially influence and begin to change the larger system of all teachers. A BEST coordinator in a larger district stated, "We very intentionally dove deeply into racial equity as the foundational purpose of our work and did that and the program continues to do that in a variety of ways. And really that work was about normalizing conversations about race with our teachers." Seeing the district's equity agenda enacted and maintained is important to new teachers. Many of the new teachers, especially teachers of color, shared that they could locate the district's work towards educational equity through district practices such as professional development offerings and changes in both hiring committees and interview questions.

Threading district priorities through mentoring activities allows early career teachers to form a connection to the effort, whether that involves a professional development foci or an equity initiative. When a rural remote district engaged in a district-wide book study, the district BEST mentor sought to honor that work in induction meetings by taking excerpts and discussing it with mentees. He explained, "So that's definitely a district and building initiative that we want to make sure that we honor and keep present. And then of course our work with UDL [Universal Design for Learning] is something that is very present in our work with our mentees and induction meetings."

Developing induction systems that are consistent with district priorities, including commitments towards equity, are necessary steps in creating a coherent system. Dedicated staffing and other types of resources are also critical to enacting sustainable induction work, as we discuss next.

Dedicated Staffing and Resources for Induction Work

An important staffing and resource-related decision for districts concerns the type of mentor model used (release or colleague) and how the formal and informal work of mentoring is

conceptualized and implemented. We found that mentoring arrangements were influenced by district context, including size, enrollment changes, resources and available expertise.

The smaller districts in the study recognized the value of having a release mentor model and identified strategies for staffing for that role, often combining the assignment with other instructional coaching duties. In a rural, remote district, the director of teaching and learning in his second year of revamping his district's induction program described two reasons for the decision to support a release mentor model: 1) the skillset needed for high-quality mentoring, and 2) making sure mentors understood a systems perspective in their work:

And so that in that first year, I had a lot of people that I was trying to run through the mentoring academies, and none of them were release mentors. And so I'm trying to figure out how to get them out of their classrooms in order to do the academy training and then trying to figure out the time when the coaching cycles could occur. That is a seriously cumbersome model to try to run... And I want them to understand that equity perspective and I'd like them to see it from the system level.

Several districts of varying size made sure each new teacher had both a district mentor (often a release mentor) and a building mentor who ideally would work together to ensure early career teachers' logistical and pedagogical needs were met. The role of the district mentor was to observe and provide feedback and targeted pedagogical support, with attention to what early career teachers would need at different times during the year. The building mentor or "point person" would typically be the go-to for building specific needs, and sometimes provide content area expertise when the district mentor didn't hold that expertise. These building mentors sometimes serve in a formal mentoring capacity in which they receive a small stipend for their work, but in other cases, the arrangement is informal. New teachers often recognized both their district mentor and their building mentor as equally useful sources of support. A new middle school teacher from a small district, shared that he was able to go to his building mentor for as-needed quick responses to both instructional and logistical questions. Additionally, the new teacher looked to his district mentor for weekly scheduled check-in meetings about teaching and pacing for the year.

One rural district was prompted to focus on induction due to the structural change of adding grades at the secondary level and subsequently needed to hire more teachers. Despite its small size, the leadership carved out a dedicated staff position to support induction and coaching work. An assistant principal in this district described how important it was to have a dedicated person to support staffing transitions: "We've had a ton of new staff and a lot of new-to-teaching staff, period. And I don't know what we'd do without [the BEST mentor]. She is invaluable." Two rural remote districts with limited resources formed a two-district consortia to share mentoring expertise. For example, a first-year agriculture teacher in one district is the only teacher in the content area at his high school; however, he was being mentored by the veteran agriculture teacher in the neighboring consortium district. This collaboration offered a mutually beneficial arrangement for induction support.

Across the districts in this study, the mentoring structure also varied depending on the experience level of the early career teachers. Even though educators recognized that mentoring needs often extend beyond the first year of teaching, districts typically could not offer release mentor support for second- or third-year teachers, primarily due to resource constraints. When asked what they wish they could do to support teacher induction, a BEST mentor replied: "I think that if we could, we would probably hire more mentors to offer full release support to our second-year teachers." Many of the new teachers we spoke to also wanted mentoring support beyond their first year.

Some district and school leaders strategically made staffing and resource decisions related to induction that had broader resource implications. One example was a tool that some districts used to highlight and flag potentially challenging placements for early career teachers. A high school assistant principal explained how her district is using such a tool during their stakeholder team meetings:

It's like a matrix of all the things that you should think about in terms of placement of a new teacher. So like "Are they on a team by themselves? How many preps do they have? Where are they physically located within the building?" You have people who are at the end of the middle school and then way out there. "And are they team teaching? Are they using a canned curriculum or a self-built curriculum?" All these different things. And it calculates. And so if they're in the red, it's really different for admin to think like, "Are we really setting up with brand new teacher for success if they're in the red?" Probably not. So what are some adjustments we need to make to the master schedule? Or their replacement or whatever to make sure that we're adequately supporting them. And that has been a game changer in forcing us to think differently about how we onboard our new staff.

Such a review can result in reorganizing teaching positions, subjects or grades, or changing the environment to better support early career teachers. We found examples of districts and schools changing their master schedule to accommodate first-year teachers with fewer course preparations, arranging concurrent preparation periods for new teachers and mentors to meet, and asking veteran teachers to be "the roamers" on carts so that early career teachers could have a regular classroom. Other examples included decreasing the pressure for new teachers to immediately join committees, and compensating teachers and mentors for induction activities outside of the workday. These examples of prioritizing the welfare of early career teachers and their mentors illustrate the intersection of organizational structures, resources, staffing, and schedules. In several instances, these resource-related decisions also served to help ameliorate inequities that early career teachers often face.

In many of the instances cited above, the staffing and other resource commitments for induction required a variety of funding sources above and beyond the state-supported BEST grant. In several instances, TPEP was a source of funding that supported some of the induction work for new teachers and principals. Some district leaders mentioned using Title I or Title II funds to help meet particular needs of early career teachers, such as support to meet certification requirements or ways to prioritize the work of district or school-based coaches in support of new teachers. Other categorical programs (such as Special Education, Learning Assistance and English-learner programs) that fund specialists and paraprofessionals were leveraged to support early career teachers, especially with respect to meeting the needs of diverse learners.

For several Washington districts, support for induction is negotiated with the teacher's association through contractual arrangements that serve to solidify a district's resource commitments to induction support, as staff in one such district describe:

...especially when we get into areas where there can be budget deficits, if things aren't written into the contract, they don't happen in many ways... I know that just from experience in our district, like if something is not in the contract, it's really easy for senior leadership or others to say, "Well, we can't do that. Or we don't have funding for that." I think there are benefits and advantages to having things spelled out in the contract as clearly as we do.

Dedicated resources and staffing are certainly an important element of quality induction programs, but it is equally vital to create coherence within and across the various sources of induction support.

Creating a Coherent and Multi-layered System of Supports

Induction supports need to be organized so that they are accessible and tailored to the varying needs of new teachers in ways that make sense to them. All of the districts in this study noted that one of the challenges to creating a coherent system for new teachers involved the coordination of supports and clear communication between district and school levels. In some districts, building-specific supports for new teachers were not uniformly available across schools. In the words of one release mentor, “some schools are doing induction and they're doing it well, and others are not.” We heard several examples of new teachers lacking support from staff within their own buildings. Several early career teachers reported not having anyone follow up with them after they were hired, and their emails to school staff went unanswered. In several cases, new teachers had to take the initiative to figure out who to go to for help and how to get things done (e.g., what curriculum to use, which students have IEPs, what are the language needs of my students?). While these teachers often found some support among other teachers in their building, these experiences speak to the importance of clarity concerning whose responsibility it is to reach out and address immediate building-specific concerns.

Some districts focused on developing good communication between release mentors and principals as a means for creating coherence and clarity. A BEST coordinator in a larger district described the strategies they employ starting at the beginning of the school year:

So, one of the things [the release mentors] do at the very beginning of the year after they have met their teachers is they actually work to set up a half an hour or more meeting with the principals to go in and introduce themselves, to talk about what their role is in the building, the teachers that they are working with in the building, and then to ask the principals how the principals are actually supporting and onboarding their teachers, especially in racial equity. And so, that is something that is set up right there. We also let teachers know that if they have meetings with their administrators, especially post-conference meetings, and they want the mentors to be there for those meetings, they can, and the mentors will go to those. We let the principals know that they can come to the mentors anytime that they want to talk about a teacher, but we always push back with, “But have you told the teacher this?”

Similarly, a BEST coordinator in another district highlights the importance of communication between district release mentors and school leaders:

But I do think it's really important that they [release mentors] partner with school leaders around their work because I think one of the things that can be really challenging for new teachers is when they're getting feedback from lots of different sources and that feedback feels different. So I think one of the ways to avoid that is to make sure that there's regular ongoing communication between the [release mentor] teachers and the school leaders. So I think that's something that the program has gotten better with over time, but is definitely something that we're still thinking about.

In addition to establishing good working relationships between district mentors and school leaders, some districts in this study acknowledged the importance of having multiple touchpoints of support for new teachers at both district and school levels. While one individual typically held the organizational authority for induction work, districts often had a knowledgeable team of

mentors, coaches and instructional specialists with a deep understanding of teaching and learning.

In some districts, the BEST stakeholder team served to provide oversight for the specific components of their induction program and met to review data to assess and make refinements. Stakeholder meetings can be a place collectively to review who holds responsibilities for aspects of the program and to make changes, if needed. A building administrator in a small district explained:

In those meetings ...what I like is we have created, and then curated, different checklists. What should the principals go over with new staff? What should their building [mentor] go over with them? What should the HR go over with them? We've worked on changing the schedules of when should they come in? And what should they do? We help with the PD component. And then we also review what's working and what's not working in terms of the amount of hours, the types of supports... And so getting to hear from the building [mentors], too, of like, "Hey, this was a waste of time because of this." And then having the opportunity to redirect it. Fix what wasn't working.

Stakeholder meetings were used for professional development, budgetary discussions, consideration of program outcomes, review of data such as surveys and redirecting the work. The director of teaching and learning in a rural district explained, "I think it helps us to operate more systemically as we're trying to grow and improve our induction program." Where the stakeholder teams were actively engaged in the work, the composition of the groups represented a diverse group of voices including district and school administrators, human resource staff, special education staff, mentors, association representatives, and often early career educators. Several districts found it beneficial to include the voices of early career teachers directly in these conversations.

Districts that found the stakeholder teams to be valuable had an invested leadership that offered continuity and sustainability. One district described asking people to serve for two years, so members would "have some skin in the game to see things grow and change." However, a few districts faced the challenge of getting the right leadership to attend and support stakeholder teams. Districts with fewer resources and thin capacity sometimes give the coordination to staff who don't have formal authority to make decisions, such as a principal intern. A BEST facilitator in a small district described, "If I have no formal authority to say anything, that's not going to change. It almost, again, takes somebody at the district office level to either have a stake in the game and make some of these things happen, or they don't [happen]." An experienced ESD consortia facilitator explained that in such cases, unless there is district leadership involved it can be viewed by staff as a waste of time:

The stakeholder teams in the smaller districts is usually a principal, a teacher and maybe two or three district office people who show up sporadically, unless the superintendent or the assistant superintendent are involved... when the superintendent's sitting at the table-everybody else shows up. Yeah. That's the signal. And in the smaller districts, it almost just needs to happen.

In some districts, the stakeholder team played a substantial role in developing the induction system and building collective responsibility. Several years ago, a rural Eastern Washington district adopted the use of a tracker system to aid in making staffing and assignment decisions around challenging teaching assignments. The instructional mentor for this district explained how discussions during stakeholder team meetings changed members' perspectives:

We've adopted that tracker and got hires, starting to plug people in what their assignment is. And then it has this [category] of, is this a high need? What kinds of

things are going to be hindrances? Is this the best place for this new person? ...So teachers within their teams, they're starting to understand like, oh, this is going to be really hard for that person. Maybe I should volunteer. And it's building that collective sense of responsibility.

Some stakeholder teams had a sharper focus on collective responsibility for teacher induction than others. One release mentor described a frustration with her team:

In our stakeholders meeting yesterday, when we did a little debrief, one of the administrators had said, "Thank you, you are doing a great [job]..." It's always, "You guys are doing a great job. Great job guys, great job team," and not that they're part of it.

A BEST coordinator in a larger district shared how the stakeholder team developed some of their induction strategies:

...As we developed our BEST stakeholder's team, I think I told you the first year was really about understanding the Washington State induction standards, what an induction program is, that mentoring is one component of six, and what mentoring is and isn't, we actually did t-charts. That cleared up a lot of misconceptions right away with our stakeholder's team. Then, at the end of that year we identified the standard we wanted to address the second year that I was there, and that I was hiring, and we worked. We had some crossover with HR.

In addition to having formal structures such as a stakeholder teams, districts also used frameworks and standards to guide the development and implementation of a web of continuous support for new teachers.

Use of Frameworks and Standards as an Anchor

Many district and school personnel with responsibilities for teacher induction referenced the importance of the district's instructional framework and/or the standards for induction and mentoring in serving as an anchor for their work. The instructional framework provided a common reference point for both mentors and school leaders, and the standards for induction and mentoring were instrumental in guiding decision-making about induction activities and assessing their effectiveness.

A principal who is also a district framework trainer described how she collaborates with the district's full release mentors around use of the instructional framework with early career teachers:

...the fact that I get to collaborate with the mentors on that training that really sets the foundation for what it's going to look like moving forward, not just with evaluation but establishing the culture, the idea of growth mindset and that this is not a gotcha. My job as an administrator is to come alongside of you to grow instructional practice. We set that tone together in those new teacher trainings.

Another way leaders leveraged the induction activities was through supporting new principals to learn the instructional framework in relation to their early career teachers. In nearly every interview with school administrators, the role of the instructional framework was referenced in their work with early career teachers. An ESD leader explained how "...all the new principals are going to go through a framework training. If you wanted to get some BEST program ideas on the table, that's the place to do it." This also provides a natural space where school and district improvement strategies intersect, such that funds from both BEST and TPEP can be used to support instructional rounds. BEST materials, such as the principles of practices protocol, also

can be used as a walkthrough form. A principal who works with a release mentor described how new teachers are supported in their area of focus:

I know when I go in and I just do observations using the teacher's area of focus and provide feedback just on that focus, what I've noticed is that teachers are sharing their notes, my notes, with [the mentor]. And the reason I know that is because when I go in and finish to do my post observation, I can tell that... It's like, "Oh yeah, [my mentor] talked to me about that." And the teacher already has generated ideas for how to implement [a new practice].

The embedded nature of the state's instructional frameworks within the BEST program supports a coherent vision of high-quality instructional practice and a direct way to support new teachers' professional growth. It also demonstrates ways in which new teacher induction can be coordinated and embedded within other school and district improvement strategies. A release mentor explains, "I actually took our CEL instructional framework and I aligned it to the phases of the first year of teaching by indicator. So we use that as a template."

However, for districts that have a strong diversity, equity and inclusion focus, the instructional framework doesn't go far enough and some mentors struggle to emphasize anti-racist pedagogy. One release mentor said, "So my particular conviction is that mentoring is part of culturally responsive teaching. And so I have an obligation to have race-based discussions with teachers, so that has been my intention." And a district leader in another setting explained, "It's really hard to meet our goal of assessing teachers on their ability to provide anti-racist and culturally responsive teaching when none of those things are named in the rubric."

Several mentors and BEST coordinators noted how mentoring and induction standards influence a variety of activities such as hiring, recruiting mentors, and offer clear direction. A BEST coordinator noted how the induction and mentoring standards provide clarity regarding mentoring activities:

The [roundtable] trainings certainly are important, but I also think having the standards around induction and around mentoring are super important because they also provide an anchor that you can sort of point to when someone wants to push back on something, you can say, well, here's what it says. So like I think even just for having that it's super useful.

And a release mentor described the reliance on mentoring standards:

These mentor standards are something that we rely on. And in trying to recruit our colleague mentors, and reaffirming who our colleague mentors will be next year, we've asked them to respond to some questions about, what does being an anti-racist educator mean to you? How do you see equity as part of your practice as a mentor, and your classroom practice? So, identity work, which has been new to me with those novice educators, and asking them how they identify, what they feel are their biases, or others' biases. We talked to some people in the union yesterday about how disproportionately educators of color are receiving more non-renewals, or different scores, sometimes, compared to our other educators.

The standards for induction also serve as a means for planning induction support over time. An instructional coach describes the system in her district:

We have a teacher leader cadre that meets, traditionally we've met at the very end of June before we go off to summer to look at the induction standards, and to look at the surveys from fall induction from the new mentees to assess what we did well and where we need to go with the following year's fall induction.

As noted in the discussion thus far, the establishment of a coherent and multi-layered system of support requires collaboration and leadership at both district and school levels. Next, we discuss the vital role of leadership in developing a sustainable induction system.

Developing Leadership and Collective Responsibility

Districts implement induction programs that are dependent on the coordination of policies and activities among a variety of personnel at both district and school levels. This coordination of effort requires leadership at district and school levels and a collective sense of responsibility for supporting early career teachers. Principals, mentors and district staff all play key leadership roles in creating a multi-layered system of supports for early career teachers.

Release mentors often play critical leadership roles in developing capacity and sustaining induction supports. In some instances, the leadership work of mentors begins with their understanding of the complexities of the mentoring role. A release mentor in an urban district describes her responsibility as a capacity-builder:

My job as a mentor is not to fix the teacher or to even teach a teacher what good teaching is supposed to be. My job is to teach a teacher how to reflect on their practice so they can figure out who they are as a teacher and begin to trust that they'll figure it out themselves.

In some districts, mentors took the initiative to develop systems for managing caseloads, setting up professional learning schedules, collecting data about new teachers' needs, initiating conversations about equity, and developing plans for improvement of the induction program. The director of teaching and learning in an urban district describes some of the leadership work of mentors: "We have such a strong team. They [release mentors] have systems in place...for instance, they have a system for how they place mentees with mentors, how they recruit colleague mentors."

Working in collaboration with mentors, school leaders can create conditions to help early career teachers thrive and remain in the profession. Many school leaders spoke of their responsibility to contribute to the teaching profession by supporting the growth of early career teachers. An elementary principal described this work as her priority: "Our first-year teachers are always our priority. And I tell them that. 'You're not priority because there's something wrong. You are a priority because we want to ensure your success this year.'" Principals and assistant principals described being in the classrooms of new teachers more frequently, seeking to establish relationships, and encouraging them to ask for assistance, if needed. They often set up opportunities for new teachers to observe others with specific expertise in areas targeted for growth. These school leaders saw their role as creating structures and supporting spaces for professional growth. They understood the district's mentor model, but often went further to create additional supports. Some school leaders spoke of seeking to create a welcoming environment and providing building-specific opportunities and resources for new teachers to learn to work collegially with staff, students and families. Many new teachers across districts shared that they also viewed their principals as sources of support. Beyond classroom observations, new teachers felt they could approach their principal with questions, requests for additional resources, and instructional guidance.

While many school leaders were specifically focused on creating a supportive environment for early career teachers, a lack of consistency between schools was noted several times by BEST

coordinators and mentors. An experienced release mentor who serves a number of schools in a larger district explains:

And then another elementary principal has everything written out as kind of like, here's your guide to this school and these are all the things you'll need to know—that kind of thing. So, and here are your people resources. So it just really depends on the leadership in the building. And then there are some buildings that do nothing at all. And there, the teachers are like, I don't even know who to go to for what... You can see depending on the leadership style and the principal, how the principal provides support or the vision of the principal, how much turnover they get... that those systems that are put in place at the school really have a lot to do with why people stay.

A BEST coordinator shared that some principals were overly reliant on the mentors:

I believe that sometimes principals rely too heavily on the mentors to fix teachers, and they go in and they observe them maybe twice a year because the mentors are there working with them. And trying to get them to understand that it's still a collaborative venture, and if you are not helping to onboard your teachers, whether they are new to teaching or new to the district, then it's a disservice for teachers and students.

An overarching concern from the early career teachers of color in this study was the representation of district and school leadership. A first-year science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) specialist teacher in a Central Puget Sound district recognized her district mentor's work but also described the limitations in her mentor's ability to connect with teachers of color: “[My mentor] is doing that from the district, which is great, but he's also limited in what he can offer because he's also new to the district and he's also a white man and it's harder for me to relate to him and be able to share certain things.”

In some buildings, school leaders spoke candidly of situations in which teachers of color did not feel well-supported or that traditional approaches weren't meeting their needs. This sometimes resulted in what they described as “messy conversations” to uncover engrained ways of doing things and encourage staff to let go of oppressive traditions they had been clinging to. A high school assistant principal explained addressing issues of race and equity through curriculum and modeling it in her role as a white middle-class woman seeking to dismantle white privilege:

So, as we have those conversations about race and equity, making ourselves vulnerable to learn, vulnerable to being wrong, which is really hard to do sometimes for some of our white staff, exposing that white fragility. That, I think, has really been instrumental in attracting new people because our staff of color are out there saying, “Hey, come and work here. They were not perfect, but they're doing the work, and they're not afraid.”

Many leaders in this study acknowledged the complexity and challenges of leading for racial justice and equity and understood the implications it has for supporting early career teachers of color. They frequently mentioned the need to create safe spaces for teachers of color to engage with others and described their attempts to address school level working conditions and culture to better support early career teachers. Some leaders have promoted the establishment of affinity groups as one strategy to better support new teachers of color. One release mentor describes the program in her district:

We do have an Educators of Color group, and it's run through our union. And then we also have LGBTQ, trans, queer, group as well. So generally, when my new educators express interest, we refer them to that. And then one of my mentees, a black male, is partnering with one of our in-building mentors to do a PGP [professional growth plan] for educators of color. So, that's another group. We have included on our survey, “Are you a

novice educator of color? And what other supports do you need, or would you like to see?”

Others noted that affinity groups are a welcome addition, but insufficient if there is not district-wide leadership and commitment to supporting teachers of color. One BEST coordinator said, “You can have a great program like that [affinity group], but if the district itself is not a place that teachers of color find themselves welcomed and cared for, then that does not navigate what we need.” A new teacher shared that partnerships between the district and the university could be one way to alleviate issues with placing burdens of social justice teaching and racial equity on teachers of color rather than district and building leadership. She said:

I've always kind of wished that there were some elements of [continued district and university partnerships], that there was more cohesive and not just okay, now you're off and now you're teaching and now that's not in the real world where everything is very different than what you've experienced for the last year. Because it is hard... I feel that conversation of 'how long can we do this?' comes up a lot.

In addition to addressing the leadership challenges discussed above, it is also important to ensure that changes in leadership at school or district levels are planned for and do not disrupt the positive aspects of the induction work that are already underway. A superintendent in a small district stated:

And the most important thing too when I look at the shelf life of a principal or a superintendent or somebody running the program is that you have to be thinking about who will take that position next year, and what systems do we have in place? I can bullet out 10 things that we do every single year that keep the system in place. That's the most important thing. When I walk away from the table, if I do as superintendent, I want to make sure this is in place. It's that important to our students and their learning.

Exerting the requisite leadership to establish the structures and resources needed to create coherent and sustainable induction is a necessary component for a system that can effectively support new teachers. In addition, attention also needs to be paid to creating multiple avenues for continuous professional learning. In the next section, we describe districts' efforts to establish a coherent approach to professional learning.

II. A Systematic Approach to Professional Learning

In a sustainable high quality induction system, professional learning for early career teachers—and those who work with them—is differentiated, strengths-based, and focused on continuous growth. Engaging staff across the system can support capacity building and collective responsibility.

A strategic systems approach to teacher induction incorporates professional development for early career teachers' pedagogical needs as well as for the staff who work with them. Using a strengths-based approach, and differentiating through a multilayered web of supports, professional development can effectively address immediate and longer-term learning needs of new teachers. Pedagogically, new teachers often require training around specific subject-matter curriculum and initiatives promoted by their school or district (e.g., culturally responsive teaching, PBIS, SEL, etc.).² But the timing, scope and sequence of these activities is critical to give new teachers the bandwidth to benefit from the training and not have it be overwhelming. Some professional development activities can be carried out with colleagues or in safe spaces,

² Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Social and Emotional Learning.

such as racial affinity groups. Additionally, it is important to support mentors in developing a nuanced skillset for working with their peers. Principals also benefit from training to work with early career teachers. A strategic, systems approach can enable a variety of induction supports to be incorporated with intentionality and sustainability.

Professional Growth in a Strengths-based System

Early career teachers enter the profession through many pathways and with various skillsets. In this study, we found that while many of the new teachers we interviewed joined a school district directly from a university-based teacher education program, others arrived with previous in-district experience as paraprofessionals or substitute teachers. Some new teachers also had previous business and industry experiences as career changers. Additionally, some new teachers navigated late hiring processes and teaching on conditional or limited certifications during their first year. Early career teachers, from each of these pathways and situations, have different needs and therefore benefit from differentiated supports, but also bring valuable experiences to their new assignments.

In a strengths-based system, leaders acknowledge the assets and teaching talent new teachers bring. During the pandemic year, some new teachers were directly supporting the technology needs of their more senior colleagues. An instructional facilitator discussed how her principal believes new teachers are helping to shape the culture of the building, “She also looks to our new teachers as kind of like beacons of change. ...But that’s the level of communication and trust and relationship that we have built in our building and that all goes back to the groundwork that our administration has laid.” Some school leaders recognized that new teachers are more knowledgeable and receptive to engaging in issues of race and equity, which they found to be a considerable asset.

Many mentors acknowledge a reciprocity of learning experiences with their mentees. A school-based mentor in a rural district explained: “I feel like I’ve learned so [much] from her. She’s got all this new stuff from school and I just like all of her ideas... And so I am enjoying learning from her at the same time.” Similarly, a third-grade special education teacher spoke of how much she appreciated the reciprocal and intergenerational support she experiences with her teaching partner and colleague mentor:

Because I feel like between us two, we bounce a whole bunch of ideas. Like I have new strategies that I’ve learned or I’ve been more up to date with some other stuff. And then she has more background knowledge of all the years that she has. So, it’s something that has very well worked for both of us, of helping each other.

A strengths-based approach recognizes the skills and talents of all staff and values their contribution to professional learning. In the next section, we explore ways in which districts and schools can introduce new teachers to site-specific curriculum and initiatives.

District and School Specific Professional Development Tailored to New Staff

Districts and schools can differentiate their responses to new teachers’ situational needs during their first years in the profession. Examples include teachers working on limited or conditional certifications, connecting early career teachers to skilled colleagues with specific areas of experience, or inviting teachers to participate in targeted professional development. Tailoring support to situational needs involves awareness of teachers’ concerns, and the ability to connect them to information and knowledgeable staff within the larger web of supports, as illustrated in the following examples.

Teaching on a limited or conditional certificate can create an added layer of stress for those new to the profession. In response to a need in her district, a release mentor in Eastern Washington created a support group specifically for new teachers completing their edTPA. While edTPA support usually falls under the responsibilities of the teacher certification program, the district mentor was responsive to her cohort of early career teachers, some of whom were on conditional certifications while teaching full time in the district. In a Western Washington district, early career teachers noted that colleagues in the district's human resource department provided responsive support for certification issues. A second-year CTE teacher credited an HR administrator for her opportunity to teach while also working on her certification:

I emailed [the HR administrator], and asked her what the qualifications were because I had seen the job opened and she said, 'Actually, there's this new program for the business and industry route and your hours worked could qualify you,' so I went ahead and applied... HR, they were very helpful in getting me set up to getting my certificate, applying for a conditional certificate and all the pre-work up to being hired.

Early career teachers also benefit from working with school and district colleagues with specific subject matter or pedagogical expertise. These connections, sometimes cross-district, included opportunities to collaborate on curriculum and planning or observing master teachers in their subject area. An urban principal offered her perspective on these kinds of opportunities for early career teachers: "They need opportunities not only to observe but to sit down with an experienced teacher who is implementing effectively to ask like, 'What are you doing behind the scenes?'" District, building or teacher-specific curriculum without training or support can inadvertently create an added challenge for new teachers. In instances, for example, where teachers in the same grade are using different curricula, this lack of commonality both within and between grades can create confusion, as a release mentor described, "So [with] new teachers coming in, that's been a really big struggle... 'what resources should I be using? What are the best practices?' And unfortunately, because we're not at this point solid in that, they're learning some, I don't want to say bad habits, but they're kind of finding their own way. And it's a different way than everyone else." This example illustrates an inadvertent disadvantage new teachers may face with a lack of clarity on curricular matters.

Introducing new teachers to a district may involve acquainting them with initiatives specific to the district or school context. Sometimes this information or content is delivered through monthly professional development sessions coordinated or led by a district's release mentors, instructional facilitators or coaches. Several districts in the study were heavily invested in anti-racist and culturally responsive teaching initiatives. In one urban district, all early career teachers were required to participate in courses on racial equity and culturally responsive practices to gain a shared understanding of district expectations for professional practice. Tailoring professional development to new teachers' situational needs and aligning them to school or district priorities can help support their transition into the educational community.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Affinity Spaces

Collaboration and opportunities to learn from other professionals can take a variety of forms for new teachers. Having a wide array of educators beyond mentors and school administrators can contribute to the professional growth of new teachers and doing so strengthens the capacity and sustainability of induction supports. For new teachers of color, racial affinity groups can provide safe spaces to share teaching experiences with others.

Instructional facilitators, coaches and veteran teachers often provide additional support for early career teachers as part of the same building, grade level, or department team. Many of the early career teachers in this study identified at least one of these types of veteran teachers as another point person for their induction needs. A third-year middle school teacher in Eastern Washington said: “There is something called instructional facilitators (IF). And so, ours is really great. He’s awesome. He was a teacher [at my school] for many years and now he’s the IF. And so, he was kind of my point person.” A first-year teacher from a Central Puget Sound district described her team of support: “One of the people I was paired with was our math coach, one of the instructional coaches. She and the literacy coach divided up the new teachers.” Additionally, school counselors and athletic coaches also served as sources of support for new teachers.

Regular collaboration with building colleagues can provide opportunities for new teachers to learn across subjects and curriculum. A BEST mentor in a small rural district described the collegial support offered to new teachers:

At the secondary level, we have 6-12 PLCs in each subject area... so each of our secondary new teachers is involved in one of those. And they’ve been, those are very supportive. In each one there’s a head of the PLC who has kind of taken them under their wing and been like an onsite content area mentor for them. So that’s been really, really helpful. The new teachers there are feeling like a lot of support from their colleagues.

Early career teachers who work in specialist roles also recognized building and district teams as sources of support for problem solving and interdisciplinary collaboration. A second-year Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher in Western Washington shared how she worked with other teachers in both the CTE and math departments at her building to problem-solve revamping furniture in her classroom kitchen. A first-year middle school music teacher in Eastern Washington described being able to have discussions with a high school music teacher in the same district. Together, they talked through problems of practice and instructional strategies. The new teacher also shared that he frequently met with other middle school music teachers across the district:

It’s really nice to be able to talk with them, and to go out, have dinner and talk music, and talk programs. The inter-district communication between, at least the music team, has been really strong, and that’s one of the things that I really like in our district is that we have really good communication in between all the middle schools, and in between just the music in general. That’s been really beneficial.

In some districts, mentors intentionally designed cross-district opportunities for early career teachers to connect with one another. An instructional mentor in a rural district described hosting professional development opportunities which bring early career teachers together:

Hosting PD once a month is always my goal... To think about those things that are really important and big on brain of a beginning educator, mostly centered about, how do I do this well? Procedures, protocols, classroom management, behaviors, and being able to connect with other early career teachers who go, “Oh, you feel the same as I do? Okay. Maybe I’m normal. It’s going to be okay. I’m going to get through this.”

In a different rural district, monthly group meetings with all the early career teachers were also afterschool and compensated. Organized by the BEST mentor, he used exit tickets and “worry waterfalls” to generate data that would inform future planning. He explained:

We had parent teacher conferences last month and our first-year teachers were pretty nervous about that. So we included and set up some role-play for situations and tried to put in some additional supports to help them feel comfortable going into conferences. So

just kind of depends on what they feel like they need is kind of what's been driving the development that we kind of help facilitate.

These cross-district spaces for collaboration hold potential for building community, sharing teaching techniques, and providing space as a social-emotional outlet for new teachers.

Collegial observations also can be a powerful opportunity for professional learning. Likely due to the pandemic and a shortage of substitutes, very few new teachers spoke of opportunities to observe other teachers. However, a third year English and drama teacher described how important it was for him to see how other teachers organized their classrooms:

One thing we did, and I kind of forced them to let me do it, is to... just have my class covered or take a couple days to go see what other teachers are doing, not just in my subject matter. Did a lot of that early on, those first couple months, and that was really helpful. I would love to see something like that, or have that even be a requirement of new teachers of like, 'Hey, once a month, you have to take a half a day and go see what other people are doing'... I would've loved to have spent a little more time doing that, just to see what other people do.

Of the twenty-two early career teachers we interviewed during this study, seven teachers (32%) self-identified as teachers of color. We asked these teachers about their induction experiences as it related to their needs and perspectives as teachers of color. Early career teachers of color described opportunities to meet and collaborate with other teachers of color in the form of affinity spaces, some started by the mentors and others by the teacher's association. A first-year STEAM specialist teacher in Central Puget Sound shared:

There has been a teachers of color affinity group that has been started by [the district mentors] and that has been probably the most helpful thing, possibly also the only thing that has been offered, but it's just a safe space to share our experiences with each other because we are very clearly in the minority in our schools. So that has been nice.

An Eastern Washington district in our study was on the verge of launching an affinity space for teachers of color. An early career teacher in this district described the outreach to her by her district mentor and the complexities associated with it:

[The mentor has] been emailing a lot about teachers of color. She's trying to start, I think it's a mentor program and I think she asked me to be a mentor for their teachers of color, we're going to start meeting and talking about equity stuff and how to support students of color and things like that... She originally sent out an email basically saying, 'Are you interested?' And so then she sent out another email to everyone who was interested and I was looking at the list of names and mostly they're all Mexican teachers. And so I was kind of disappointed that there wasn't more Black teachers on there because there's hardly any of us, but there is, we are there. And I'm wondering how we can get more of them involved, but also, they don't want to be involved because they're so stressed. It's hard being the only one.

Finally, another source of support for new teachers has been their respective university-based teacher education programs. Some of the early career teachers in this study shared their various affiliations with university-based teacher education programs. For four of the new teachers we interviewed, they were in recent communication with their teacher education programs because they were on conditional or limited teaching certifications and were taking courses while teaching full time. One of the teachers on a conditional teaching certificate immediately named her professors as her point person for questions:

My professors in my credential program... in the beginning it was every week that we would meet in a class and then we could email or meet with [the professors] besides that class at any time. So, they've also come into my class quite a bit to observe me.

This new teacher went on to share how her professors have also been a tangible resource for her instructional strategies. She said, "They kind of model what [new teachers] could be doing in the classroom, which is amazing because I need all the support..." While this new teacher saw her professors as her immediate source of support, another first-year teacher on a conditional teaching certification saw both his certification's program mentor and his district mentor as equal partners in supporting his first year.

Other new teachers saw their university-based teacher education programs as potential models for providing more inclusive support in order to feel successful during induction. A first-year elementary teacher in a Central Puget Sound district reflected on both her induction experience and her teacher education program. She said:

I have always wished that there was some thread that connected the [teacher education] program and the missions of the program to the [school districts] that you go to that do not reflect the missions of the programs that you graduate from. Some kind of continued support, especially thinking about the racial and the diversity aspect for both students and staff.

This new teacher identified support and resources that university-based teacher education programs provide through their communities of students, faculty, and partners. While some new teachers were able to maintain connections to university-based teacher education programs, such as through certification programs and representation of alumni in a district, other teachers wanted more consistent support from their programs or at least better alignment between the district and their programs.

Attention to Timing, Scope, and Sequence of Activities

Beyond orientation, the timing, scope and sequence of activities developed for early career teachers can influence whether teachers perceived these supports to be beneficial. Some districts subscribed to a "just in time" approach to professional development for early career teachers in the initial months. Trying to provide too much information all at once or too quickly could be overwhelming, as a director of teaching and learning explains:

It's really thinking about what is the "just in time" professional development that these folks need in order to continue to feel successful while also not being overwhelmed. So really trying to be careful of the fire hose effect, because in that case, then the support actually exacerbates the problem.

Induction leaders all spoke of issues that are specific to being a new professional, such as setting up classroom routines or learning new curricular programs. As a director of teaching and learning explained, it is important to consider how these issues are interconnected in a holistic way:

...from a systems perspective, that's a difficult balancing act, making sure that our new professionals have what they need in order to be successful without completely blowing them up. And I think historically, we're not great at, if you get lucky and you're in the district during the adoption year of a curriculum and you get all of that professional learning... if you missed that, then it's the district trying to provide the support that you need to understand those materials. And so that can sometimes be less than what the folks in the district have received.

The scope and sequence of activities is an integral part of the planning done by release and colleague mentors. The induction coordinator in a large district described the work of their mentors in developing six district-specific outcomes expected of all new teachers and how they determined not only what the scope and sequence would look like over the course of the year, but also the skills that mentors would need to know to support new teacher's growth in those areas. The director of teaching and learning in another urban district described how they use data to inform the scope and sequence of the mentors' work:

They [release mentors] have a process for a data-based formative assessment process of how they teach what they teach at certain times of the year. Taking the instructional framework, aligning those indicators to the phases of a first-year teacher, looking at all of their feedback forms and exit slips seeing which indicators were identified at different times of the year and aligning that so they could align their PD appropriately. They do the three BEST surveys over the course of a year. They have systems for how they set up, assign and take teachers on their master teacher observations. They have assigned duties. They have a monthly best practices class for year one teachers, a monthly best practices for year two...

Early career teachers felt the intentional pacing of induction supports and appreciated this timeliness. New teachers from one Eastern Washington district all noticed how their professional development opportunities would arrive "just in time" such as a session on parent teacher conferences prior to, but close enough to, the conferences date. The timeliness of a professional development opportunity, in addition to the relevancy of its content, is crucial to supporting early career teachers effectively.

Professional Learning of Mentors

A universal priority for induction among all the districts is having highly skilled mentors prepared to work with their new teachers. This requires an ongoing investment in the training of mentors. District leaders acknowledged that being a distinguished classroom teacher doesn't automatically transfer to being an effective mentor of adults. Mentoring requires a deep skillset that needs to be developed, as a district coordinator in a large urban district described:

You don't necessarily have [a deep skill set] coming straight out of the classroom, just because you were a great teacher. It is really key to the way we think about [supporting early career teachers]. ...we have ongoing professional development for our mentors... I think that's a big strength.

Similarly, the director of teaching and learning in a small rural district described seeking out training for release mentors: "...that skillset, that coaching skillset is critical for their role regardless...What do our mentors need in order to be successful? Because they're a huge part of [retaining our new teachers]." All of the districts in the study expressed appreciation for the mentor training provided by OSPI, which will be discussed in a later section of the report.

Mentors benefit from learning together with others in similar roles. In several of the smaller districts, there was a deliberate attempt made to team up educators who could discuss the induction work or share the mentoring responsibilities. A mentor in a small rural district shared:

[The lead mentor] is really good at just asking questions of the mentees and getting them to reflect and learn from their own thinking rather than like telling them, oh, you should do it this way. He's really, really good at that. And so I've learned a lot from him because in my mind, going into it ahead of time was like, oh, well, I'll use my experience

to teach them how to do it. And that's not the best way to mentor. So I've been really enjoyed learning from [him] and then also kind of learning for myself.

Several mid-size and larger districts in our study developed considerable internal capacity for skill building with their mentors. In one large district, the release mentors meet regularly, shadow each other and also receive feedback from the program coordinator. A mentor explains:

We have weekly meetings between us, our mentors, a couple hours every week where we just kind of touch base and talk, we shadow each other and give feedback to each other. [The program coordinator] shadows us at times, she comes to some of our professional development and gives feedback. ...right now we're doing a book study--our professional development team is doing that together.

In this same district, a release mentor discussed the shift she had to make to be open to observation and feedback regarding her mentoring skills:

When I was first starting [as a mentor], I was scared to have somebody come watch me because I want to do well. And you kind of got to get over that doing well thing and being perfect so that it's, it's okay to have your peers come give you that feedback and that we're always growing and learning as well. That's probably what I would say the most, to just take every advantage you can to learn. And don't be afraid to have feedback given to you.

Weekly meetings, book clubs, and skill building activities were created by looking at survey data from new teachers, and noting the skills the mentors needed to support those activities, as the district lead in another district explained:

...with input from the team and surveys they have done, [they] think about 'what are new skills that we need to learn? What are things that we need to be able to do?' And I know a lot of that has come from skills within Aguilar's book.³ So, I know what's one of the things up and coming is us practicing skills around *The Ladder of Inference*. We have talked about what does it look like to have those honest conversations around race or what you see your teacher doing something that is racist. So, they also plan, and they also have another whole day where we practice skills around that.

Trainings like this also provided an opportunity for mentors to align their work with district priorities and initiatives. In the last few years, several of the districts intentionally dove deeply into racial equity as a focus. In support of that effort, mentors included racial equity as a foundational part of their work with early career teachers. A former lead mentor described the work in the following way:

...that work was about normalizing conversations about race with our teachers. I would say that over the last five years, I think we have seen new teachers coming in, more prepared for those conversations. ...the teacher core is still predominantly white, certainly at the elementary level, predominantly female and white, regularly working in communities that they don't have deep experience. ...with new teachers, we have less unlearning to do, although there is some, and that's an advantage of sort in terms of being able to impact the system, having the advantage and the gift of working with teachers in their first year, allows us to help set some ideas and expectations around what that work looks like.

In addition to district-specific work, district leaders in the study indicated they were always on the lookout for external professional development opportunities that would benefit their mentors.

³ *Coaching for Equity: Conversations That Change Practice*, by Elena Aguilar.

Sometimes mentors requested a certain training which districts were able to accommodate as described by this district coordinator:

...if professional development comes up that one or two of the team says, "I would really love to go to this. I think it's really important for my learning." We see about getting them to either go or paying for part of it and then they come back and they teach us some of it. So, it's a little bit of a train-the-trainer type model. ...So, that's how we continue to grow professional development-wise, not only internally, but then also what are those things that are external to us that we want to learn from.

Investment in the development of mentors is a critical component for building sustainable capacity and leadership in a robust induction program. Another important element is providing support for principals.

Support for Principals

School leadership can be understood as a pedagogical act and one that can be enhanced by support and training. Educators involved in supporting early career teachers in this study routinely reported that school leaders have a varied understanding of induction supports and could benefit from additional training. While many of the school leaders we spoke with had a deep knowledge of instructional practices, they acknowledged that they themselves hadn't had much formalized training around the BEST program. Several mentioned participating in BEST conferences and meetings in their district where information is shared in that capacity. As referenced earlier in the report, principals have opportunities to serve on stakeholder teams, but time was a barrier to participation.

Several induction leaders went so far as to suggest that induction training should be required for school administrators to better understand the challenges new teachers face. A principal in a small district stated:

I really think principals should have some early induction training. You know, I respect my colleagues very much, but I think that sometimes our new teachers aren't understood... They [principals] need a little bit more understanding about induction practices. And it's not about just reading a book or going to a meeting. It really is PD that is ongoing... part of the onboarding of a principal.

For some in the study, the lack of connection and coherence between induction supports and school leadership was identified as a weakness of their program. Release mentors often intentionally seek to connect with building leaders around the instructional focus of the program and building-specific needs or concerns. The mentors described considerable variation in the responsiveness of school leaders, noting that aligning supports for mentees with leaders' priorities can benefit everyone. A former BEST coordinator in an urban district explained the variation he sees in principal responses:

We have some principals who know our work deeply. And, before we even know who their new teachers are, they're telling us, "I got three new teachers. Who's going to be here? What's going on?" So, we like that. But I think part of our work is helping principals, assistant principals, evaluators, see us as a part of their feedback to teachers in a way that we can help support what they're wanting to see in their teachers.

Recognizing this challenge, induction leaders in some districts sought to introduce the induction program in a formal way to principals who were perhaps not familiar with it. In the case of a small district that was newly implementing BEST, district staff were in conversation about how to bring the building administrators up to speed and involve them in the process. The release

mentors in this district opted to reach out and set up meetings with building principals to explain and explore the work they were doing with their new staff. For a larger district with site-based leadership, there was no formal requirement for the principals to be involved in induction, which resulted in variation in their engagement. The district sought to remedy this by including information on induction as part of the district's regular professional development for building leaders. In another urban district, the director of teaching and learning described sharing a principal activity list for use in supporting new teachers across the school year:

We took the, there's a suggested activity list for principals, for instance. These aren't exact but it might be August and September, October and November, December to February, but how principals can support their new teachers after you hire them, keep in touch with them until the school year starts, don't leave them in no man's land.

As we have seen throughout this section, professional learning for early career teachers and those who work with them is experienced most seamlessly within a system that integrates numerous and differentiated learning opportunities and is supported by a variety of staff. Shared responsibility for professional growth also has the potential to increase organizational capacity and the sustainability of induction supports.

III. Recruitment, Hiring, and Onboarding

A sustainable induction program attends to the recruitment, hiring and onboarding of new staff in ways that reflect the values of the district, diversify the workforce, and create supportive, equitable and welcoming environments for all new teachers.

Recruitment and hiring of new teachers are among the most important responsibilities a district undertakes because well-qualified teachers are essential to student learning. Long before a new teacher applies for a position, districts have an opportunity to influence the outcome of a new professional relationship by clearly articulating organizational values, goals, and expectations. In doing so, districts and schools are in a better position to identify candidates whose qualifications and assets are likely to be a good match for their students and community, and prospective candidates have a sense of whether they should apply. In this section we consider how districts engage with potential employees through the recruitment and hiring process, as well as steps districts can take in determining equitable teaching assignments and welcoming environments for early career teachers and staff. We also examine steps districts can take to attend to the needs of new teachers of color and support the recruitment of diverse mentors.

Teacher Recruitment Aligned with District Values

Early career teachers benefit from clear recruitment and hiring practices in seeking to identify an optimal position. Schools and districts can assist potential employees in finding a good match by providing as much information as possible about their organizational culture and values, current initiatives, and knowledge of the local community. For the districts in this study, there was a strong emphasis on professional expectations for new staff and an effort to be transparent about the nature and context of the local community. Most districts sought to hire racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse candidates who could better reflect their increasingly diverse student populations.

Districts communicate their organizational values and initiatives through information provided in job postings, recruitment fairs, local events, university-based partnerships, and more directly as part of the hiring process, which is later reinforced in onboarding activities. An HR director described how she emphasizes three district values in her recruitment efforts, "we really are

looking for people who can model respect, integrity and commitment. So tell me what that means to you. And then tell me what I would see in your practices that align to those three core beliefs.” Another HR director in an urban Western Washington district described how they encourage current student teachers to apply by offering them extensive job application and interviewing experiences:

We hold those two student teacher nights because my feeling is we have these 87 student teachers that we trained up. Why are we losing them to other districts? We have these student teacher nights that I get all of the school leadership [to attend]. We get the student teachers. We do mock interviews. We do resume feedback and cover letter feedback. Then each student teacher gets an opportunity to sit and they get... two interviews to sit in front of two different interview teams of leadership so that they can see, they can get exposure to our team. They're involved at the get-go.

While this district is transparent with their hiring processes by offering explicit interview support to their student teachers, other districts strive for clarity with their hiring and subsequent onboarding processes. For a rural Eastern Washington district that has high expectations around professional culture and collaboration, the human resources director describes how they try to be clear about the district's priorities:

A big part of the onboarding process in our opinion is welcoming people to our district and helping them feel like a valuable teammate and helping them know what we're about. We want it to be a good fit. Through the hiring process hopefully, this occurs as well. We want you to know what our expectations are... if you don't like collaboration, this is not going to be a good place for you. We want to be upfront about how we operate. Onboarding also covers those pieces of what our beliefs are, about what we do here with kids and how important our people are.

These initial recruitment, hiring and onboarding processes are most effective and supportive when they clearly communicate the expectations and structures of a school district, as well as the unique district context.

Recruitment and hiring practices that recognize and embrace a district's unique strengths and challenges may also have an advantage in attracting new to career teachers. The director of special programs in a small remote district emphasized the importance of helping new teachers make connections within the local community:

We have challenges in drawing new teachers in. I mean, I feel like it's difficult, we're a small area, rural, kind of isolated. There's not a social scene here. If you want to go to Walmart, you want to go to Costco, you got to drive 40 plus miles to go to grocery stores. That in itself presents some unique challenges that may not necessarily draw in a lot of people. And then of the flip side of that, if we are able to draw them in, it's trying to get them involved in to feel like a part of a community, whether that's through extracurricular stuff at school or things that even in a small town help them feel connected to the community.

Some districts took advantage of what is called the “draw of home” phenomenon, in which new teachers seek to find a position near the location where they grew up. This was true in both urban and rural settings among our study districts. It was seen as a particular advantage for rural districts when staff who grew up in the area had a prior understanding of the advantages and challenges of rural living, and sometimes, personal connections and opportunities to save money. However, changes in the housing market have created recruitment and retention challenges. One new teacher returned to the district where she grew up, sharing that this option made the most sense because she knew she could both return to her parents' home and build

up her savings this way. The cost of housing has drastically escalated in many parts of the state, and in some regions, housing stock has moved from long term rentals to vacation rentals creating a serious housing issue. Part-time positions also are less attractive to new teachers because it isn't affordable to move for a position that isn't full-time. Some districts have creatively worked to fill positions by offering a signing bonus, or hiring candidates through a conditional certification process, and then working with them to acquire the necessarily credentials.

As recruitment and retention has become more challenging, some districts are seeking alternative ways to recruit early career teachers, while simultaneously seeking to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce. Several districts have developed their own version of a "grow your own" program to recruit potential teachers from the local community who often are multilingual, community-rooted and persons of color. The goal of these programs is to provide a clear, high-quality pathway into teaching. These programs typically target high school students, career changers, or staff internal to the district who may be working as instructional assistants or in other roles. These individuals often lack pathways, guidance, or resources necessary to overcome the systemic obstacles they face in order to become a certified teacher. According to one urban district's "grow your own" coordinator, the biggest barriers include, first, just being invited to consider becoming a teacher, then, the financial costs, and lastly, developing a program that supports the person's specific needs and strengths. Rural districts also are finding ways to recruit and develop staff internally as a director of special programs describes:

It's not like an established path, but we certainly have conversations all the time with some of our longstanding [paraprofessionals] that are established in the community that live here, that we know aren't going anywhere, that are fantastic with kids. We know they would be great classroom teachers. And there's been a few situations where we are like, "Hey, have you thought about this? We can help navigate different alternatives to get your certification." ...So, things like that, we try to grow our own because when you're in a rural area, you want folks that are used to the area and used to the lifestyle. They seem to stick better.

Recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher workforce is on the forefront of educators' minds, looking within various school staff populations to tap for teacher education and licensure pathways. Districts in this study were on a continuum in terms of how actively they were working to recruit and retain a workforce that more fully reflects the diversity of their student populations. Several districts used the induction program itself as a recruitment strategy to entice potential new hires. A participating district with an established induction program, including pathways into teaching, emphasized that recruitment isn't enough to retain teachers if the culture of the organization isn't welcoming. The program manager explained:

...the program has also been very intentional about recruiting teachers of color and building that capacity. So that's been one important avenue again on its own. You can have a great program like that, but if the district itself is not a place that teachers of color find themselves welcomed and cared for, then that does not [facilitate] what we want.

While this school district prioritizes the culture of their organization in regard to sustaining the identities and careers of teachers of color, new teachers are also looking for welcoming and caring environments in their districts. For example, an early career teacher from Eastern Washington reflected on his sole presence as a teacher of color in his high school: "I am the only minority here as high school teacher and it's been like that for years." As the program manager above emphasized, the work of recruitment will be in vain unless the conditions are in place to support and retain teachers of color. Several districts had staff who were actively involved with the NAKIA Academy, and others were seeking out advice from this group about

how to better support their staff of color. A district administrator in a small rural district had begun asking how districts in the region could work together: “How can we maybe do something in our valley that would support our beginning educators of color? ...it's definitely on the top of our mind and we need to get educators in front of our kids that look our kids.” This administrator reflects the challenge of creating conditions that are tailored to better meet the needs of teachers of color.

In addition to hiring new and diverse teachers and welcoming them to a district, induction programs must also attend to creating assignments for new teachers that are equitable and supportive. In the next section, we discuss strategies that districts in this study use to determine new teacher assignments.

Equitable Assignments

An initial teaching placement can be a make-or-break situation for a new teacher. School and district leaders need to pay close attention to the placement of new teachers, whether that involves grade level, subject matter content, number of preps or physical classroom locations. Equitable decisions around assignments in the initial years of a new job are particularly important for early career teachers who typically hold little power within an organization. A theme among the leaders we spoke with was the importance of collaborating with others in making assignment decisions and being careful not to allow the master schedule or senior staff preferences to undermine creation of a successful assignment for a new teacher.

Collaboration with school staff for hiring and placement decisions can be particularly important when the school culture includes strong teacher teams or learning communities. An elementary principal described how teachers in her school care deeply about who will be joining the team, such that she ended up taking extra time for her staff to engage in the hiring process to ensure a good fit. A high school principal spoke of the challenge of working with departments in determining assignments:

I find that it's about seniority versus what's best to really grow a new teacher. So I have my personal parameters and I share these in a written form actually with my department leaders to let them know that, especially with our new to the profession teachers, we're going to identify the content areas that they feel most comfortable with... I'm going to try to accommodate that because the more comfortable they are with the content, the more I'm going to see the pedagogy come into line.

Other pieces of the assignment puzzle include the number of preparations and allowing new teachers to remain in the same placement for a while. As a middle school principal explained, “I really make an effort not to change placement within the first few years.... Usually, I will ask a veteran teacher to move.” Other school leaders spoke of minimizing the number of preps in different subjects, and asking more experienced teachers to take on additional courses, as a high school principal described:

There's no reason to give a brand-new teacher four preps. And then longitudinally, I like to keep them with the same content over a couple of years to build their capacity in that class. When we move new teachers from, oh you're teaching ninth grade ELA this year and 11th grade next year, they don't get a chance to get grounded and get comfortable and try it again. And so those are parameters that I share with my department leaders as we do this work and that I hold tight to.

In this example, the duration of a teaching assignment is as important as the classroom context when assigning and supporting early career teachers.

Leaders also spoke in terms of ensuring a good fit, which meant the right fit for a new teacher's skill set and the school context. A high school principal explained, "How do we help them identify student populations and staff cultures and specific classes that would match their skillset so the first experience that they have with teaching is amazing?"

Nevertheless, some early career teachers discussed experiencing challenging placements throughout their first three years of teaching. A fifth-year elementary teacher in Western Washington described the challenges that arose in her second year of teaching when she was moved to a different grade level. She recognized receiving more support from her mentor during her second year as a result of this move:

In fact, I actually got more support my second year, I think, because of that. I think my second year was actually hardest. I had [my mentor]. She would come in. She was very supportive. Almost at one point, every week. Sometimes it was just little pep talks. Sometimes it was check-ins. At one point, we made a checklist, because I was overwhelmed. I needed help organizing what I needed to do.

As we have seen in this example, assignment decisions can impact early career teachers beyond their first year, as well as the work of mentors who are called upon to support them. Next, we examine how orientation and other welcoming activities can help smooth the transition into the job and community.

Smooth Transition from Recruitment to Hiring

Ensuring a smooth transition from recruitment and hiring to the initial days on the job involves introducing new teachers to the community and attention to logistics at district and school levels. For districts that embrace wraparound induction supports, planning and activities may begin well before the start of the school year. Even before formal orientation activities, districts may choose to send new teachers foundational reading materials that will be the focal point of activities in the fall (e.g., the Universal Design for Learning framework), or a book particularly appropriate for early career professionals. District orientation activities typically are arranged over multiple days prior to the start of school and address both logistical and pedagogical issues. Most of the early career teachers in this study shared that their first-year orientation was helpful, particularly for getting to know the district at large. A second-year middle school teacher in Eastern Washington shared: "I remember being pretty impressed by it. I want to say it was split up over two weeks, but it was probably five or six days in total. But it was thorough." This new teacher described one particular part of the orientation week that stuck out to him:

So they gave us a tour of the city. Some of the main spots, downtown-ish area, different locations, but it was nice... it was a really nice introduction to the community. I think we had been given a pamphlet, a booklet of things to do, upcoming events, that sort of thing. So really, not just welcoming to your job, but really to the community too. And there were different events coming up like specifically for networking with employees, the district or just ways to get involved with the community.

Onboarding new staff requires coordination among a variety of staff who have responsibilities for new teachers. Some districts had developed a checklist which they use to ensure everyone knows their responsibilities, as this HR director explained:

...we've been able to develop a pretty comprehensive checklist of items that either the new teachers' [building mentor] goes through with them, parts of it, and then the principal goes through parts of it. Then in the district office, [HR] goes through parts of it. Things that are more district level paperwork types of things, she'll go over with them. Then in

the building, their [building mentor] or their principal go over more building specific things. If it says I'm on bus duty, where do I go for bus duty? If I'm on playground duty, where do I go for playground duty? What is the K1 pod? The ones that are specific to the building. The [building mentor] and the new teacher get to meet over the summer, paid time together... They help set up their classroom, help go through planning the first week of your lessons and just trying to help people feel confident and excited about the work that they get to do with students in our district.

In reflecting on their orientation experiences, new teachers focused on different aspects such as community-building, payroll onboarding, or training specific to their teaching positions. A new teacher described how he had more focused trainings during orientation to navigate his salary and classroom budget: "Also a lot of understanding the procedures of the district, as well. Understanding how to go through and fill out your paperwork for payroll, and how to have access to credit cards to spend your classroom budgets, and so on." This new teacher also benefitted from his district's differentiated training for new specialist teachers during the orientation week. For a specialist teacher in a different district, the general new teacher orientation was useful but also more than she could deal with in the moment:

The orientation was very helpful on how to set up your classroom... They had a helping hand, a guide, so that was really helpful. And then, of course, all the years and all the curriculum and everything was kind of over my head. I just really didn't have the grasp for that at that time, so actually the orientation was pretty overwhelming.

In addition to the district orientation, some new teachers also attended a building-specific orientation. New teachers shared that these orientations felt more local or personal since they were now meeting colleagues within their own school setting. A second-year middle school teacher in Eastern Washington said:

One of the first days there were three of us who were new that were here at [the school]. And the first afternoon, we met with our instructional facilitator and he took us out to lunch first. So it was nice, we talked a little bit more casually, not just business or anything, just to get to know each other. But then he took us on a tour around the school, showed us the real basic procedures, just how to get into the building. Here's the mail room, here's the office, this sort of thing. Which hallways were which, and stuff like that...And then we spent much of that afternoon going over the local procedures, like our grading system, our attendance, just making sure we know everything that we're going to need, especially for like the first day.

While new teacher orientations typically happen a few weeks or days before the academic year to better prepare teachers, this schedule does not account for new teachers who are late hires by the district. We spoke with several late hire teachers on their orientation experiences. A first-year elementary school teacher in Central Puget Sound was not able to attend her orientation. She said she received some onboarding support from the human resources department but that was all. She shared: "I didn't have much of an orientation. The only person who really kind of gave me an orientation [was an HR administrator] and she talked me through this is what our district is... I didn't really hear anything else." A first-year elementary school teacher in Eastern Washington also noted that she was not able to attend the new teacher orientation. For this new teacher, her first official meeting in the district was her building's staff meeting, rather than any sort of make up or late hire orientation. Specific attention to the onboarding experiences of late hires can help them feel welcomed and valued as new members of the community.

Supporting New Teachers of Color and Recruiting Diverse Mentors

In this study, we sought to listen to the voices and experiences of leaders and new teachers of color. Educators in all of the districts discussed challenges they faced in recruiting and retaining educators of color, and some shared strategies they employ to address these concerns. Principals of color spoke of engaging with teachers of color to reframe their work within the current social context. Several principals mentioned conversations and structures to address microaggressions, ensuring educators of color have a voice and inviting them to reach out for support. A middle school principal spoke of helping her staff of color see themselves as agents of change in the education system. She explained:

I encourage them that they are social agents... And so I just reminded them when things were hard back in January [2021], that they are agents of change and that they should reach out to me anytime they feel that they need support. And I did the same with all my staff.

This principal supports teachers of color by empowering them to make change within their roles as teachers, as well as maintaining open lines of communication between the teachers and herself. Access to both confidential and structured building-wide communication is important to sustaining new teachers of color.

A district coordinator described the need to provide additional support for new teachers of color: "... it is both about equipping [new teachers] around instructional practice in preparation for being teachers, and it's also equipping around navigating an institutionally racist system as teachers of color." An elementary principal of color described making sure teachers of color have a voice, and had established norms to address microaggressions within her school community:

I think making sure that they have a voice. I mean, it happens to me as a principal. I am much more likely to be cut off than one of my white principal colleagues, and especially if it's a male, but females will do that to me, as well, but they won't do that to other white females. And I think the same for teachers. So making sure, and we work on this every year, that there are established norms of collaboration in the team, and it's not just any generic norms. We actually have a process that we take our teams through, to craft norms that are unique to their own experiences in working with teams. Everybody has a voice in the creation of those. There's also expectations set for what will happen when these norms are not adhered to. ...Any time there's problems in the team, I'm comfortable to go back to, "Let's revisit our norms. Is that happening at the beginning of meetings? Is it just reading them, or are we actually following them, and calling it out when they're not being adhered to, in a professional way?"

Leaders also shared that co-constructing norms was another way in which both they and teachers of color could share their experiences and advocate for themselves when needed. In addition to building-level support from school leaders, districts across the state acknowledged the need to further diversify the mentor cadre, particularly mentors of color. New teachers of color in this study explained wanting mentors who share their racial, linguistic, and intersectional identities as well as colleagues and leaders who are willing to understand and support these identities as it relates to the demands of teaching. An instructional mentor in a rural district who was aware of the NAKIA Academy described asking administrators to consider teachers of color who could become mentors: "...who can we identify within the district that are strong already as BIPOC teachers. That we send them to NAKIA and have them begin to be a part of that... So we have people that when you hire teachers of color can really connect with..." However,

recruiting teachers of color for mentor pathways is not the only challenge that districts face. Districts also navigate fraught processes in regard to how mentors are appointed.

Larger districts in the study were cognizant of how mentors were appointed and encouraged ways to diversify the mentor applicant pool. In a large district where principals play a role in recommending teacher leaders to serve in these roles, the district coordinator changed the process after gathering data that revealed who was being recommended:

Everyone had to be invited, in writing, to apply, where the previous practice was that the principal just went to the person they wanted and said, "You'll be in [the mentor cadre] now." So, who are principals most likely to go to? People that look like them, right? And the other thing is, who's most likely to volunteer in a system created for white people? The people most likely to volunteer are going to be white people. So you have those two things creating the disproportionate numbers... So I think increasing awareness, as a system, increasing conversation around it. Two, is that I just straight up named it. Every time I talked to a principal, I was like, "Here's our data. This can't continue." So that made principals really look around and go, "Okay, who else can I [appoint]? Because I don't want to be the racist principal?" So that was a big part of it.

After gathering data that revealed bias, this district leader disrupted the mentor application process in order to support a broader range of applicants. In addition to recognizing and valuing the skills and expertise of mentors of color, district leaders are also using data to be aware of how previous systems also played a role in blocking teachers of color from becoming mentors. Both an awareness of the vital strengths of mentors of color and a commitment to disrupting previous mentor appointment systems are essential to supporting teacher diversity in the workforce. These findings suggest that concrete steps need to be taken to improve the experiences of new teachers of color who often navigate complex pathways towards becoming a teacher, and then later a mentor, in comparison to their white counterparts.

Creating a supportive, equitable and welcoming environment for all new teachers begins with the recruitment, hiring and onboarding process, with particular attention to the experiences of teachers of color and those who support them. In the final section of this report, we consider state-level supports and their role in teacher induction.

IV. State Level Supports and the Role of OSPI

A well-run state teacher induction program plays a crucial role in recruiting and retaining a diverse, highly qualified teacher workforce. The state helps districts develop and sustain their induction program by funding mentoring positions, articulating standards for high quality mentoring and induction, leading collaborative and differentiated professional development, creating ongoing opportunities for professional networking and leadership, and promoting equity and anti-racist practices.

States can play an important role in providing induction and mentoring support for early career teachers. On their own, many districts don't have the necessary capacity to design, implement or maintain high quality induction or training for their staff. States, however, have a unique opportunity to improve the quality, diversity, and retention of the workforce by investing in a district's capacity to offer supports to early career teachers. In this section we discuss the state's role in anchoring an equity-focused high-quality induction program and the elements that Washington educators find invaluable in supporting their new teachers. Among the foundational elements of the program, we discuss induction standards, differentiated professional

development support and leadership opportunities for mentors, and promotion of equity and anti-racist practices.

Investments in Teacher Induction

Washington state has placed a high value on supporting early career teachers through a long-standing investment in the BEST program. Throughout this study, participants consistently remarked on the vital importance of the resources, staff, standards, and professional development that the state provides. Without exception, they commented that without state support, necessary supports for early career teachers would either be severely curtailed or nonexistent. Comments from study participants describe the BEST staff as an excellent resource, the services as invaluable, and “one of the most responsive departments in OSPI.” One release mentor said, “I feel very supported by OSPI... I know that if we have questions, there’s always a quick response.” While the program is regularly up for renewal in the Legislature, dedicated BEST staff have created an enduring, well-run state program that offers districts extensive benefits and is connected and aligned with other K-12 initiatives.

As mentioned previously, BEST staff developed the Washington State Standards for Mentoring, which provide a framework for the induction work that is expected of participating districts. The induction standards and other equity-based resources serve as an anchor for investing in the professional growth of mentors and others who support learning-focused relationships with early career teachers. A district-level coordinator talked about the importance of the foundational elements of the program such as the standards:

The trainings certainly are super important, but I also think having the standards around induction and around mentoring are super important because they also provide an anchor that you can sort of point to when someone wants to push back on something. You can say, well, here’s what it says.

As a program, BEST has modeled the continuous professional growth that it espouses for participating districts. With the assistance of highly skilled mentors from across the state, BEST developed differentiated learning opportunities to support a diverse range of mentoring needs and skill levels. The state’s Mentor Academy 101 and 102, and the NAKIA Academy are among the professional development elements that anchor the program. While the Mentor Academy training is required for mentors in formal roles, districts often encourage other staff to participate, which is facilitated by a flexible training schedule across the year. Staff in several of the districts in the study serve as facilitators or trainers for the mentoring academies and spoke of the value of having the state use its authority to support and encourage robust induction practices. One district coordinator said:

I think, yeah, the Mentor Academy consistently is something I think that across the state is really important to districts. Certainly, all of our mentors take a Mentor Academy and we’ve encouraged people beyond our mentors to take the Mentor Academy, which has happened in some places. And I know for sure, in other places in the state, especially in smaller districts, that’s a huge anchor point, because it’s a place to also connect with other mentors.

Perhaps one of the most far-reaching and valued elements of the program for participants is the evolution of a professional network of mentors from across the state who support one another. One expression of the professional network is the Mentor Roundtables which provide regular opportunities for mentors and coaches to gather (in person prior to the pandemic, or virtually since) to learn together, practice mentoring skills, and share resources. A release mentor explained: “[BEST] provides the roundtables every month, which is a great time to learn some

new things, but also connect with our colleagues across the region.” Across all the districts in the study, staff in formal mentoring roles participate in the monthly Mentor Roundtables, and some serve as hosts and facilitators. Despite having multiple release mentors in larger districts, mentors also appreciated the opportunity to connect with others outside their own district.

Mentors from smaller districts spoke of networking with others and discussing ideas, and some were advocating for meeting more frequently, as this BEST mentor in a rural remote district explained, “...they're so enjoyable and you get something out of every single one of them, even if they're only an hour long. I just wish that they were a little more frequent so that you could collaborate more often.” An instructional mentor in another small district spoke of the value of attending roundtables:

I do not miss them because I know, every time I get a chance to practice my mentoring skills and then I walk away with things that I take and I modify and I share with my staff... it's a resource as a practice session, and it's a connecting with and networking with other mentors. And it's like, 'Oh, I could reach out to this person. There are other people doing this work, it's not all [me].'

When statewide roundtables moved to Zoom during the pandemic, mentors appreciated the flexibility to connect with others virtually around the state. In some areas of Eastern Washington, the attendance at roundtables increased according to an ESD facilitator. This was partly attributed to the fact that people did not have to travel to attend. Beyond regional roundtables, participants could attend a roundtable anywhere in the state at a time that met their needs. However, a roundtable facilitator lamented the loss of a direct connection with the mentors in his own region. He felt there was a benefit to having relationships with people that enables deeper and more consistent conversations, particularly for practice coaching conversations:

And those conversations were just a little more authentic and more robust when you had a cohort of people that knew each other versus I'm on Wednesday's roundtable, and I might be in a room with people from Vancouver that I've never met. So I feel like there was something lost there too. But how do you balance it? You've got the convenience now. More people are showing up, so more people are involved.

This roundtable facilitator suggested that a cohort structure with mentors from around the state would be beneficial:

I just think there's some benefit in the conversations when you start to build relationships with people versus I'm in a room with people I haven't met before and I'm not going to open up... That coaching conversation piece, even in the new model, that's the highlight. That's where people get to practice. And that is where I feel like the authentic conversations with people you've got relationships with and are comfortable saying, “Oh, I botched that up. I should have said this” versus trying to put on your best face... It's an opportunity for mentors to grow greatly in their skill set. And I think they will benefit. So two things. Keep the coaching conversations no matter what, and they would be better in a cohort type situation.

In addition to the Mentor Academies and Mentor Roundtables, the Spring Symposium was viewed as a meaningful opportunity to stay abreast of new ideas, share experiences, and learn from others around the state. A BEST coordinator appreciated the opportunity for teams to participate in the symposia and stated, “...historically the BEST symposium has been a place that we've definitely interacted in and gotten training and connection with.” These convenings offer safe spaces for educators to collaborate and grow professionally. Recent convenings have hosted national and local keynote speakers of color who focus on race and equity.

A Collaborative Approach to Providing Support

As a state-funded program, BEST staff are responsible to oversee the district's induction work. Unlike some state programs, those we spoke with welcomed their interactions with OSPI staff. Districts with BEST grants formally meet twice a year with OSPI staff for fall and spring check-ins, and more frequently as needed. Many spoke of the collegial nature of the meetings and OSPI as a good thought partner. A leader in large urban district valued the reciprocal nature of the relationship: "I really appreciated the sense that we were invited into being part of a system that we contributed to, and then also treated us as colleagues in the work." The director of human resources in a small rural district spoke of the willingness of OSPI staff to problem solve solutions, "If we have an idea we're like, 'Can we do this?' ... It's not like, 'No. You can't do it this way.' [BEST staff is] always willing to brainstorm with us and find a way to make it work."

Several participants in the study have served in leadership roles for the state, such as roundtable facilitators and instructional framework trainers, and believe that these leadership opportunities further develop their knowledge and skills in providing induction services. As part of the structure of BEST symposia, teams involved with induction are invited to share their experiences in presentations for others across the state. These examples highlight the state's commitment to collaborative work in partnership with educators across a variety of settings and locations around the state.

The professional development activities, guidance, and messaging emanating from the BEST program are well-connected to other important state initiatives. As discussed earlier, many of the induction-related actions of district and school staff are informed by their implementation of the TPEP program and the instructional frameworks used in teacher evaluation. Through programs such as the Mentor Academy 101 and 201, Mentor Roundtables, and Symposia, BEST staff take special care to articulate how they are infusing state priorities into the work of induction. Additionally, BEST staff intentionally focus on investing time and resources in advancing equity work and helping educators learn to navigate changes in the field.

Emphasis on Coaching for Equity

The Washington State Standards for Mentoring are grounded in educational equity and high-quality teaching practices for all students. BEST staff recognize the need to enhance the equity-focus and asset-based nature of the program. A release mentor who has participated in a number of academies over the years notes the shift in emphasis towards a more inclusive way of thinking about and working as a mentor:

Well, I think the biggest shift is that we are moving from this kind of prescriptive; this is what mentoring is, and this is how you do it, and there's one way, it's the best way; to a little bit more asset-based. Let's look at what everybody's bringing to this work in different ways at different entry points that we have to it. So, OSPI's anti-racist stance has allowed [BEST staff] to really create a richer and less rigid PD opportunity for people.

This mentor highlights the changing nature of the field with regard to asset-based mentoring approaches and a greater emphasis on coaching for equity. Mentors described other new trainings with a focus on mentoring for special education and English language development. Among recent changes, Mentor Academy 101 was revamped with an equity focus, and 201 was developed to further conversations around racial equity and equitable classroom practices, and support mentors in their roles as antiracist educators. Many mentors valued the *Mentoring*

Matters text⁴ that formed the basis for training for Mentor Academy 101 over the years, and while they found the new text, *Coaching for Equity*,⁵ valuable, it did shift the focus away from some foundational elements, as a Mentor Academy facilitator and release mentor explained:

...so shifting the focus in those ways, I would say most of it's good. I think maybe, so [another release mentor] and I just facilitated the newest rendition of Mentor Academy today, and maybe we threw out the baby a little bit with the bath water, because, what are the skills that they're taking away in mentoring?

Mentors described the continuous and ongoing nature of the equity work and how discussions both at state and district levels have impacted them in working toward change, as this mentor describes:

...we've done a lot of examination of our own practices... For me, it was like I have to be brave enough to ask these questions. And when I'm seeing inequitable practices [how do I] make who I'm working with, aware that I'm seeing it, and be able to challenge and be okay with making the statements or asking more questions and not be afraid to do that because they're difficult conversations to have.

Due to variability in mentor arrangements, such as mentors who rotate in and out of the role, and changes in the trainings, there was encouragement for mentors who attended earlier versions of the training consider attending again, as a refresher, as this release mentor in an urban Western Washington district describes:

I just recently re-did the BEST, the Academy 101 and 102 again, just because I had the opportunity. I actually went through 101 and 201 six years ago. But I'm glad I did it again because I just thought, oh, I'll do it again just to refresh my memory. But according to what I remember, the content was the same, but the delivery was different, I would say, because one, the instructors were different and the method was different because it was virtual. And then I think also, they say your timing of what you're ready for. It's kind of like reading the same book at different times. And so I'm at a different place obviously of mentoring, year seven versus year two. And so I was able to glean different things from it. I think especially 201 which is on equity, which is a very personal and pertinent topic, I think for me right now. So I think that was very timely. So I'm glad I was able to do both of those again.

The NAKIA Academy is a new collaborative effort to build leaders and mentors of color across the state. This mentoring and leadership academy is designed and led by and for educators of color. As part of this study, we spoke with a few educators participating in the NAKIA Academy, including a coach who was delighted that the state was finally supporting mentors of color and teachers of color in this way. One of the mentor faculty for NAKIA explained, "I help write the curriculum for it. And every other Saturday, I get to sit in a room with nothing but teachers of color and just get my bucket filled to the brim." Those whom we spoke with were encouraged by having a space of their own for leadership and support.

Overall, educators we spoke with were supportive of the direction of the BEST program and understood the changes needed to influence and support an increasingly diverse workforce and student population. Finally, we consider feedback from the field regarding ways the state's induction program can be enhanced.

⁴ *Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning Focused Relationships*, by Laura Lipton, Bruce Wellman and Carlette Humbard.

⁵ *Coaching for Equity: Conversations that Change Practice*, by Elena Aguilar.

Ways to Enhance BEST: Suggestions from the Field

The BEST program has strong support from educators across the state. They spoke with great appreciation for the support they received from OSPI through the BEST program. And because they care deeply about the program, they also shared several ideas and perspectives regarding ways in which the BEST program could be enhanced. Universally, participants mentioned the need for stable funding for the program, but other suggestions were more context-specific, such as networking opportunities for rural districts, and some advocated for principals to receive specific training for working with early career teachers.

Extra support for early career teachers is vital for attracting, retaining, and diversifying the teacher workforce. As is true for most professions, teachers deepen their knowledge and abilities as they gain experience, and they benefit from collaboration with trusted colleagues who are skilled in supporting those new to the profession. Participants in this study were worried that they would not be able to provide a sustainable induction program if BEST resources were not available to them. As a BEST coordinator in a large district said, “Yes, I mean, I think if the funding goes away, it would be a serious problem. I don’t think we would be able to support the program with internal funds alone. So we really rely on the funding.” A lack of resources was often cited as the reason why second and third-year teachers did not receive the level of support that many mentors and other leaders believe they need. As discussed earlier, districts that provide release mentors for first-year teachers often switch to a colleague mentor model for second-year teachers because they lack the resources to fund release mentors. This is especially important for second-year teachers who experience changes in school, grade level, or subject matter assignments from the first year to the next. Given the essential and necessary services provided by mentors, some induction leaders suggested that adequate access to a well-trained mentor should be part of the state’s commitment to basic education.

Networking opportunities with other professionals across the state is highly valued but has greater urgency for those in rural and remote districts. These induction leaders wanted more opportunities for mentors, and also potentially early career teachers, to meet as this mentor explained:

As far as supporting our first-year and second-year teachers, I would love to see them have the opportunity to collaborate with other first and second-year teachers outside of just induction meetings. If there was some opportunity, maybe even it was on Zoom through OSPI just like a first- and second- year teacher summit. Something like that I think would be great. I think in a small district, it’s easy to feel like you’re on an island. And so it’d be great for them to have the opportunity to talk with folks around the state.

A number of mentors and district leaders suggested that principals could benefit from additional opportunities for support or guidance provided by the state. Some mentioned having principals attend the Mentoring Academies, even if they have already attended one, to focus on communication skills. An instructional mentor explained: “...it would be a big win if I could get the administrators from each building to attend. Even if they’ve taken it before, I think it would be a great refresher course and just would help them be more effective in communicating with their staff.” A release mentor in a large district suggested some ongoing form of communication from the BEST program for principals who have limited amounts of time:

We have our monthly best tips for mentors and I wonder what could we have as best tips for principals who had novice teachers, you know, just a newsletter. That’s... not a time obligation. Principals are very busy. That’s the thing—they’re overworked. We don’t want to do things that make them feel they have to do one more thing... It’s so hard, but I do think just starting with, if you have novice teachers in your building, principals, here’s

some things you might want to think about. Here are some best practices. We have that in the induction booklet but making it a regular piece of communication might be a way to create that responsibility.

This study revealed the importance of leadership and collective responsibility for developing a sustainable system of induction supports. There are possibilities for considering how a sense of collective responsibility could be enhanced at the state level. One strategy would be to further develop collaborations with the state's professional associations (e.g., AWSP, WEA, WASA, WSPA)⁶ to address how efforts that support early career teachers can be coordinated and deepened.

District officials, mentors, and early career teachers in this study shared their preferences about expanding and coordinating the role of teacher preparation institutions in improving the transition to teaching for candidates. Some advocated for the expansion of long-term residences, while others noted that further involvement and coordination of teacher preparation activities with the state induction program and district recruitment and onboarding activities would be useful.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the state faces significant challenges in further diversifying the educator workforce. In this study, "grow your own" programs were cited as a promising approach. "Grow your own" programs are especially attractive for paraprofessionals and other individuals of color who are already engaged in the education system. However, a lack of reliable sources of funding for those who are working full-time while attempting to pursue certification can present significant barriers to entry into the profession. There are several state agencies focused on this strategy, but they are not especially well-coordinated, adequately funded, or accessible to all. Efforts at the state level to improve on strategies for attracting and supporting individuals of color who desire to be teachers should be considered.

While those responsible for supporting early career teachers in their districts experience challenges and acknowledge areas in need of improvement, they also are committed to finding solutions to the problems they face. Since its inception, the BEST program has expanded, enhanced, and modified its approach to supporting teacher induction, often by seeking feedback from educators in districts and schools. In the future, continuing this commitment to collaboration among state, district, and school leaders is one way to work towards increasing the collective capacity to support early career teachers and enable them to thrive in the profession.

Summary

Information and insights from the district officials, school leaders, mentors, and early career teachers who participated in this study provide a complex portrait of their efforts to create and sustain high-quality teacher induction programs. Given the notable variation in district size, location, number of early career teachers, organizational structures, access to resources, and student populations, it is not surprising that a variety of approaches to induction exist. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, this study found important elements common to districts and schools that are productively engaged in the effort. We briefly review the four major themes that emerged from the study's findings. The themes focus on school and district leadership and

⁶ AWSP is the Association for Washington School Principals, WEA is the Washington Education Association, WASA is the Washington School Administrators Association, and WSPA is the Washington School Personnel Association)

organizational structures, opportunities for professional growth, recruitment, hiring and onboarding, and the role of the state in supporting high-quality teacher induction.

- 1. *Developing a coherent and sustainable approach to induction requires leadership to bring together resources and organizational structures that advance equity and provide a web of supports from a variety of sources at district and school levels.***

Dedicated school and leadership is needed to build organizational structures and processes that support a coherent, equitable and a multi-layered system of induction supports. All of the early career teachers in this study were able to identify multiple sources of induction supports, from district staff to school-based individuals and groups. Teacher induction can be facilitated by integrating frameworks and standards as an anchor, and collective responsibility is essential to sustaining a productive program. A coherent system also is aligned with specific district priorities and has dedicated staffing and other resources to ensure the program's continuity.

- 2. *In a sustainable high quality induction system, professional learning for early career teachers—and those who work with them—is differentiated, strengths-based, and focused on continuous growth. Engaging staff across the system can support capacity building and collective responsibility.***

High quality induction stems from an understanding of professional growth that is a strengths-based and continuous. Professional learning can be tailored to the unique needs and strengths of early career teachers and offer supportive opportunities for collaboration. These opportunities include affinity spaces and other resources to support the unique needs of early career teachers of color. However, this professional learning system is not limited to early career teachers. It also provides support for the learning needs of mentors and other leaders with induction responsibilities.

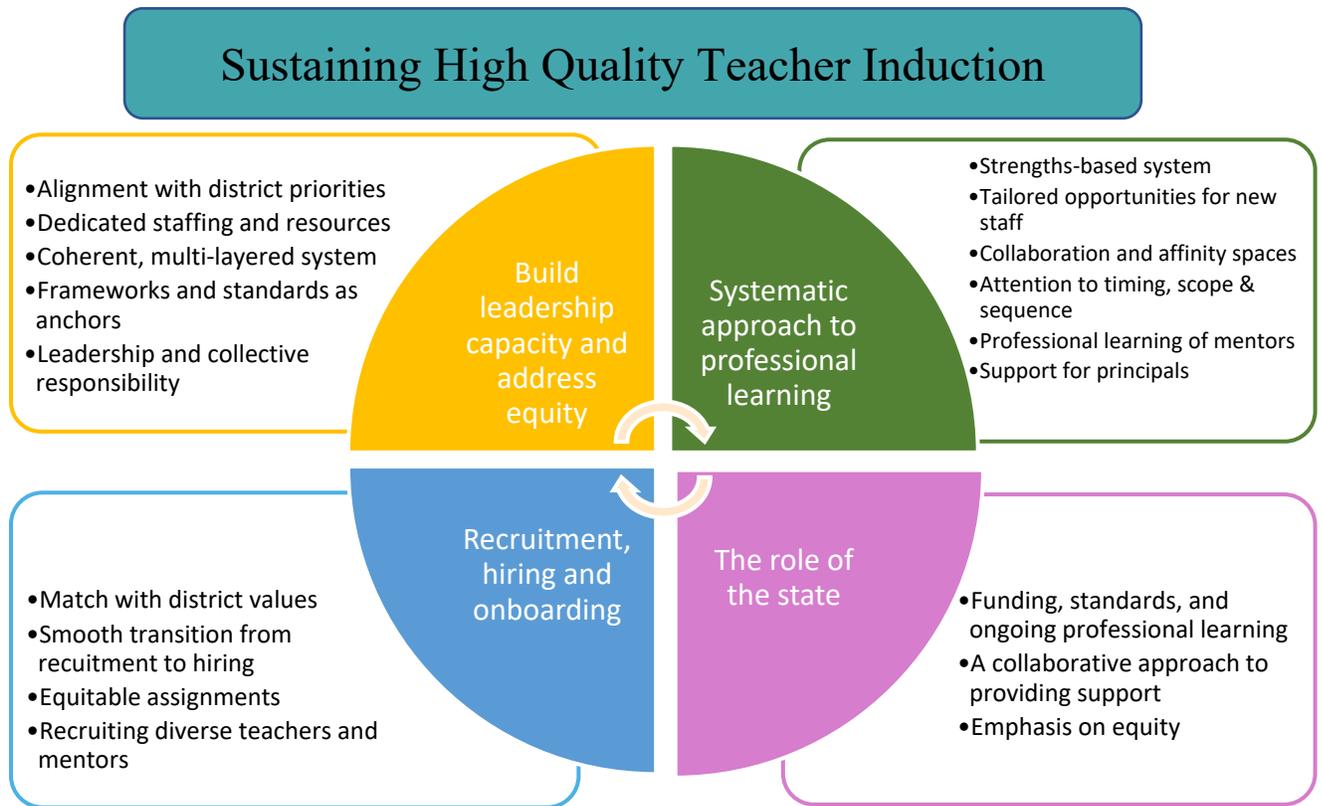
- 3. *A sustainable induction program attends to the recruitment, hiring and onboarding of new staff in ways that reflect the values of the district, diversify the workforce, and create supportive, equitable and welcoming environments for all new teachers.***

Teacher induction should be considered part of recruitment, hiring, and onboarding activities. Districts' recruitment efforts benefit from efforts to match candidates with the values and professional expectations of the district. Specific attention to equitable assignments and supporting transitions to the classroom can help create supportive working environments for those entering the profession. The recruitment of diverse mentors and other supports for new teachers of color can aid in retaining a diverse teacher workforce.

- 4. *The state helps districts develop and sustain their induction program by funding mentoring positions, articulating standards for high quality mentoring and induction, leading collaborative and differentiated professional development, creating ongoing opportunities for professional networking, and promoting equity and anti-racist practices.***

The state should play an active, collaborative and responsive role in providing staffing, resources, guidance, and offering ongoing differentiated professional learning to districts. The state also plays a key role in advancing anti-racist teaching practices with inclusive and supportive professional training for mentors and educational leaders.

As a point of reference, the figure below depicts the four key elements and summarizes important attributes of each element that were informed by the data in this study.



Through this study, we learned that a sustainable web of supports for high quality teacher induction can be created, continually improved, and expanded. This requires commitment from leaders at all levels of the education system to share responsibility for supporting early career teachers in all aspects of their professional experiences, dedicate resources for this purpose, and collaborate to attract and retain a well-qualified, diverse workforce.

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