

HAYIDION

THE RAVSAK JOURNAL

School-Based Induction Helps New Teachers Thrive

by [Sharon Feiman-Nemser](#) and [Vivian Troen](#)

Issue: Teacher Retention & Development

By necessity, Jewish day schools pay a lot of attention to teacher recruitment, but the other side of the coin, retention, gets short shrift. In fact, when it comes to teacher retention, Jewish day schools are like leaky swimming pools: we keep pouring more in at the top, while neglecting to fix the hole in the bottom. Years of research have shown that, in public schools, 30% to 50% of teachers leave the classroom after their first three years. The 2008 JESNA Educators in Jewish Schools Study confirms that Jewish schools aren't doing much better in keeping our most valued teachers. What are we doing wrong? Or, perhaps more appropriately, what are we not doing at all?

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We have traditionally assumed that new teachers arrive in the classroom fully formed, even though common sense tells us otherwise. In reality, many of the important things new teachers need to know can only be learned in the context of teaching. Who are my students? What am I supposed to teach? How will my teaching and their learning be judged? But most day schools are not set up to support teacher learning, and new teachers usually struggle alone.

This is a failure on several levels. The amount of money invested in education, preparation, and recruitment that flies out the window every time a teacher leaves the classroom is about 33 percent of the first year's salary for each replacement, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. But the greater failure is immeasurable—and our children pay the price. Those teachers who struggle on, in spite of the obstacles, often survive on a combination of grit and determination (and sometimes economic need), but not often enough on the basis of strong teaching practice. Under those conditions, mediocrity can become an acceptable norm.

Altering this norm is central to the mission of the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University, dedicated to improving the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish educational settings. The Center generates knowledge that can directly improve practice, developing model programs for Jewish educators, and shaping public and professional discourse in the field.

The DeLeT Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program prepares college graduates and mid-career changers to teach general and Judaic studies in the elementary grades in Jewish day schools. It consists of two summers of study on campus and a yearlong internship in a local day school under the guidance of an experienced mentor teacher.

The first DeLeT graduates entered Jewish day school classrooms in 2003, and before long follow-up surveys revealed that even some of the best students were struggling, despite their strong initial preparation. Many of the problems the graduates experienced stemmed from problematic working conditions: the wrong teaching assignment, no curriculum, no explicit basis for teacher assessment, limited access to more experienced colleagues.

This motivated us to launch an induction partnership with partial funding from the Covenant Foundation to help a group of local day schools put in place the elements of strong school-based induction while studying the factors that support or constrain this change process. We theorized that the best way to institutionalize strong induction in Jewish day schools was to build institutional capacity.

We identified the elements of strong, school-based induction and designed an intervention that combined capacity building and documentation in each school with opportunities for cross-school interaction. Based on the literature, our own experience as researchers and school-based teacher educators, and what we learned through our collaboration with Induction Partnership schools, we identified six elements of strong, school-based induction.

- A proactive school leader committed to new teacher success
- Early, information-rich hiring practices
- A summer orientation
- Complete curricula
- Formal and informal opportunities for new teachers to learn with and from colleagues
- Formative teaching assessments that inform mentoring and rehiring decisions

We also developed a model that required schools to identify an “induction leader” and assign a mentor to each new teacher and that required the Center to provide each school with an on-site coach/documenter and to offer regular workshops to induction leaders and mentors. Over a two year period, the coach worked with the head of school, the induction leader, and the mentors while gathering data about the school’s efforts to move toward strong school-based induction practices. The Partnership convened induction leaders on a monthly basis and provided workshops for mentors each year.

Now in its fourth year, the Mandel Center Induction Partnership includes five Boston-area Jewish elementary day schools (which have all hired graduates of the DeLeT MAT program), and one high school.

From working in a range of school cultures and organizational structures, we realized that each coach has to adjust her strategy to the realities of the particular school. In one school, for example, the coach worked mostly with the induction leader, co-leading discussions with beginning teachers and with mentor teachers, while in another, the coach began by interviewing new teachers to find out how they were faring and to help school leaders develop a plan to address the new teachers' learning needs.

- Regardless of starting points and strategies, coaches' practice was guided by a set of shared understandings about
- the school's mission and vision of good teaching
- the nature of teaching as complex, intellectual work and the belief that
- learning to teach well is something that happens over time in the context of a professional community that values and enables ongoing teacher development

While supporting and developing new teachers is the heart of our induction program, we take a whole-school perspective because we believe that what is good for new teachers is also good for all teachers. Heads of schools must be actively engaged in the process, and we give them several avenues and supports to ensure their success. We help school leaders institute elements of strong, school-based induction, such as information-rich hiring, orientation, mentoring, curricular support and transparent teacher evaluation processes. Cross-school interactions at mentor workshops and induction leader meetings help ensure that the insights and initiatives achieved by one school get shared with others in the Induction Partnership community.

While the Induction Partnership is still a work in progress, we have learned that new teacher induction goes beyond mentoring. It needs to be school-based and comprehensive. New teachers require formal guidance and support from more experienced colleagues, but they also need reasonable teaching assignments, orientation to school policies and procedures, viable curricula, and a clear understanding of the standards upon which their performance and their students' learning will be judged. Creating comprehensive, school-based induction usually requires making cultural and structural changes. Structures such as mentoring and summer orientations help but must be embedded in a professional culture that promotes teacher collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility for teacher and student learning.

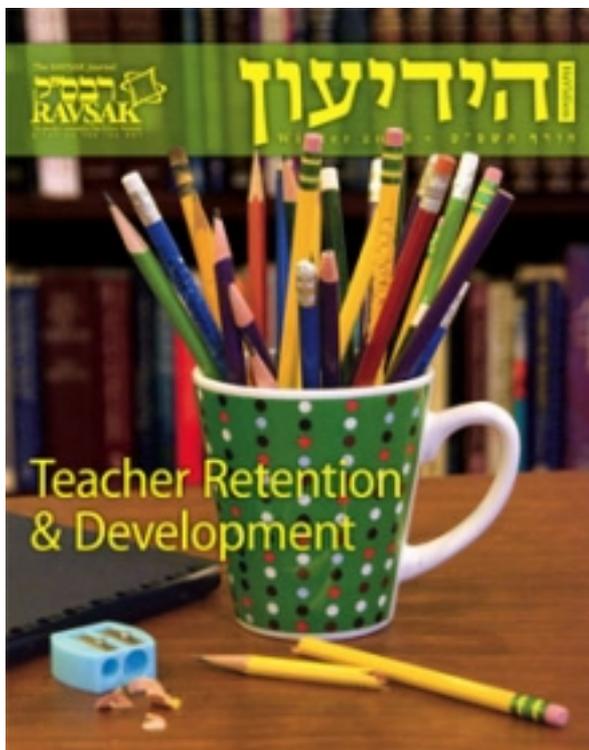
A beneficial side effect of successful induction practices for new teachers is the impact on other teachers in the school. As mentors, new teachers, and induction leaders learn to observe and discuss one another's teaching, to co-plan lessons and analyze student work, the school increases its capacity for productive collaboration among teachers. As schools articulate a vision of good teaching and create systems of teacher assessment, all teachers have an opportunity to explore shared standards and deepen their understanding of what it means to be a teacher in their school.

The Mandel Center Induction Partnership model calls for two-years of on-site coaching. As coaches withdraw their assistance, we plan to maintain ties by means of an evolving “distance learning” model. This year we are experimenting with an on-line community of practice (CoP) focused on new teacher induction and co-sponsored by the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE). Eventually, we hope to support a far-reaching induction network that relies less on embedded coaches and more on the induction “toolkit” that we are developing for Jewish day schools.

Currently, our online Induction Community of Practice reaches out to local participants in the Induction Partnership as well as to leaders in more than a dozen Jewish day schools around the country. As this model is refined and expanded, it may evolve into a nationwide induction education network. And we will have taken the next step toward institutionalizing strong induction practices in Jewish day schools. ♦

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Teacher Retention & Development

Teachers are the most precious resource of any school. The measure of a great school is its ability to recruit and retain great teachers who know their subject and craft, care deeply about all their students, and are passionately committed to their own development and the school as a community. Here, find guidance for finding, preparing and evaluating teachers, and keeping them happy and productive stakeholders.

