

# Induction: It's Not Just for New Teachers

A joint position paper by  
the Induction Partnership Project at Brandeis University's  
Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education and  
the New Teacher Center's Jewish New Teacher Project<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

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Teachers form the backbone of a school. They mold students' intellectual experiences, model life-long learning, forge the professional culture, and shape the school's public image through daily interactions with parents. The quality of the teachers drives the quality of the school. With that in mind, school leaders work hard to recruit and hire the best candidates they can find.

But as any school leader can attest, finding and keeping a quality teacher are not the same thing. Some of the most promising hires don't succeed in the classroom and some of the most talented teachers only stay for a few years. Public sector new teacher attrition rates are sobering: Nearly half leave the profession within the first five years. The outlook for parochial schools, including Jewish Day Schools, is even worse: teachers in non-Catholic religious schools are *five times* more likely to leave their schools after the first year than teachers in public schools.<sup>2</sup> This "revolving door" for teachers drains schools of talent, morale, and money, as administrators constantly scramble to recruit and hire new candidates.

Unwanted teacher attrition has gained national attention in recent years, and new teacher induction has come to the fore as a solution. Data tell us that it works: the same researchers who uncovered disproportionately high rates of new teacher attrition in religious day schools also found that participation in a multi-faceted induction program cut beginning teachers' departure rates by more than half.<sup>3</sup> Their studies add to a growing body of research demonstrating the power of comprehensive induction to keep new teachers in the classroom.<sup>4</sup>

At the Mandel Center's Induction Partnership Project and the Jewish New Teacher Project, we work with Jewish Day School leaders to plan and implement induction for novice teachers. We recognize the impact that careful induction can have on new teachers' retention. But our deep commitment to induction stems from a host of *other*, broader benefits we know it brings to schools. Well-planned and carefully implemented induction doesn't just keep new teachers in classrooms; it improves the quality of their teaching.<sup>5</sup> It creates valuable leadership opportunities and status for experienced teachers who are ready for additional challenge and responsibility. The impact of a thoughtfully crafted induction program extends far beyond the individuals involved; our experience shows that it can transform the professional culture of a school.<sup>6</sup> An investment in induction (including time, training and personnel) is an investment in establishing a professional, motivated, effective faculty, and ultimately in improving student learning. We believe that five persistent myths prevent educators and policy makers from seeing the transformative power of new teacher induction. Below we address each of those myths, and offer an image of the kind of new teacher induction that transforms the educational experiences of teachers and their students.

## Myth #1

### Teachers graduate from pre-service training ready to teach.

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Some teachers complete formal preparation before accepting their first jobs. In pre-service training programs they refine their subject matter knowledge, learn about child development, and build a basic repertoire of planning, instructional and assessment skills. They graduate with certificates of completion and sometimes even state licenses, tempting us to believe they are ready for all of the demands of the job. Widely-held school practices reinforce a myth of immediate competence: in schools across North America new teachers are expected to do the same job, and achieve the same results, as their more experienced counterparts.

#### What we know

In fact, teaching is complex intellectual work, and excellent teaching draws on a vast array of skills and knowledge. As in any complex profession, teachers develop much of the necessary skill and knowledge on the job. They learn the work by doing it. Research reveals distinct stages in teachers' professional growth, with a steep learning curve during the five years.<sup>7</sup> The professional learning opportunities available to beginning teachers affect the speed at which they learn and ultimately the kinds of teachers they become.<sup>8</sup> Like most professionals, teachers are more satisfied in their work when they feel successful, and early success in the classroom boosts the likelihood that they will stay.<sup>9</sup> Induction's power to develop beginning teachers' proficiency and its power to retain those teachers are, therefore, linked.

#### Where we stand

We see the first few years on the job as a special phase in the profession, during which novices are learning to teach while taking responsibility for successfully teaching a cohort of students in a particular school context. This phase presents schools with a valuable opportunity to support the development of novice teachers' practice and instill the habits of continuous learning and professional collaboration. Therefore we advocate multi-year induction programs that tap experienced colleagues to address new teachers' unique learning needs, their developing pedagogical skill, and their acculturation into the school's professional community.

## Myth #2

**Mentors do not need extensive training because their primary role is to provide emotional support.**

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Mentoring programs are often conceived of as buddy systems in which the mentor offers a shoulder to cry on, a sympathetic ear, and practical advice such as which restroom or copier to use. This approach to mentoring both reinforces and is reinforced by the myth that new teachers are fully formed professionals, implying that their biggest challenge is emotional.

### What we know

We know that the “buddy” approach to mentoring does little to develop teachers’ instructional skills or to keep them in teaching. However, research demonstrates that thoughtfully-planned mentoring programs with careful mentor selection, training and support have a powerful impact on new teacher retention. The Jewish New Teacher Project, which has coordinated such a mentoring program in Jewish Day Schools since 2003, tracks the novice teachers who complete its program; 86% of its 2003 cohort and a full 100% of its 2004 cohort were still teaching after five years.

Research about adult learning tells us that “buddy” mentoring programs also represent a missed opportunity for powerful professional development. We know that adults learn best when the learning is embedded in the context of their daily work. We know that modeling and guided practice offer powerful learning opportunities for all learners, but particularly adults. We also know that people learn better when they have solid, trusting relationships with the people who are teaching them.<sup>10</sup> Traditional, one-shot professional development seminars do not offer those opportunities to teachers. Mentoring – when it is thoughtfully conceived and organized – can. Indeed, mentoring programs focused on improving classroom instruction have been shown to significantly impact participating teachers’ professional learning and their students’ achievement.<sup>11</sup>

### Where we stand

We believe that mentoring that provides beginning teachers with instructional as well as emotional support is the cornerstone of effective induction. In these working relationships, sometimes called “educative” or “instructional” mentoring, mentors and beginning teachers collaborate on authentic issues of practice that impact student learning. Therefore mentoring is a form of individualized, ongoing professional development with a strong emphasis on novice teachers’ instructional growth.<sup>12</sup>

We believe that new teachers learn best from practice-oriented feedback grounded in a clear vision of what good instruction looks like. Continua of professional teaching standards offer such a vision as well as detailed descriptions of typical stages of growth for each practice. Both of our initiatives train mentors to base their mentoring conversations on such standards-based continua

and to track the mentee's growth over time. In that way the pair engages in ongoing, formative assessment of practice and a continuous cycle of inquiry.

We know from experience that this powerful form of mentoring doesn't just happen. That is why we work with day schools to select mentors carefully and provide thorough, ongoing training for the role. Even effective, experienced teachers must learn how to observe someone else's practice, give constructive feedback about instruction, build productive relationships and analyze teaching practice against standards.

Mentors cannot provide support and assistance to their novice mentees without adequate time to do so. That is why both of our organizations advocate strongly that time for mentors and mentees to meet regularly and observe one another's classrooms be built into the master schedule. Schools are fast-paced, vibrant places, and teachers are busy. If it is not built into the schedule it is not likely to happen.

### Myth #3

#### Mentoring and induction are the same thing.

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The terms mentoring and induction are often used interchangeably. In fact, many so-called “induction” programs are simply systems for matching novice teachers with veteran colleagues. Yet the two terms are not interchangeable. Mentoring is an important part of induction, but not the whole of it.

#### What we know

Research tells us that mentoring is most powerful when it happens alongside a complement of other induction supports. There is no universally agreed-upon definition of what those supports should be, though the most commonly cited include reduced teaching assignments; complete curricula and resources; a summer orientation to school policies and procedures, and supportive communication with administrators.<sup>13</sup>

#### Where we stand

We believe that even excellent educative mentoring, if it does not connect with other systems in the school, will not adequately support and develop new teachers. New teachers thrive when all of their professional experiences in the school, from their first job interview to their formal evaluation, are treated as part of the induction experience. In both of our projects we train and support administrators in their work with new teachers and encourage a comprehensive, system-wide view of induction.

## Myth #4

### Induction is just for new teachers

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Induction has garnered a great deal of attention as a solution to the problem of new teacher attrition. Those who are familiar with the idea of educative mentoring may also see it as a way to help new teachers become proficient and improve their craft. Yet the substantial benefits that an investment in comprehensive induction affords the rest of the faculty are often overlooked.

#### What we know

The first few years on the job are not the only time that teachers are likely to leave their schools. Harvard University researchers identified the “second stage” – years five through ten in the classroom – as a similarly vulnerable time in teachers’ careers. Motivated teachers who have become comfortable in the classroom see few opportunities for professional growth and advancement, and leave the field in high numbers.<sup>14</sup> These teacher-leaders are often deeply missed by their school communities.

#### Where we stand

We see new teacher induction as a means of motivating, developing and retaining *all* teachers. A teacher is never finished learning how to teach. Seasoned teachers need opportunities to reflect on their practice, assess themselves against standards, and set goals for growth. Educative mentoring provides such opportunities as mentors learn alongside their mentees. When pairs of teachers regularly discuss their practice with colleagues, and when they see themselves improving, a buzz begins to form in the faculty room. Teachers hear their colleagues talking about instruction, and they want to join the conversation. In a profession that clings tightly to long-held norms of autonomy and isolation, the appeal of genuine professional exchange is immense. We’ve seen this time and again in our partner schools, as seasoned veterans approach administrators to ask if they, too, can have a mentor. When heads of school leverage that desire to build communities of professional inquiry, it transforms professional learning for the entire faculty.

## Myth #5

**Induction is the provenance of experienced faculty;  
the head need not be involved.**

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Heads of school are very busy people. Their jobs are multi-faceted and demanding, and there is never enough time for everything that needs attention. In response, many wise leaders tap the expertise and ambition of accomplished faculty. New teacher induction seems, on the surface, like a perfect project for teacher leaders. They have sufficient capacity to take on tasks such as planning and facilitating orientation, overseeing a mentoring program, and generating teacher study groups. It is tempting to leave them to the work, confident that new hires are in good hands. They may be. But when the head of school bows out of induction, something irreplaceable is lost.

### What we know

Smith and Ingersoll identified the importance of the school leader in their study of nation-wide teacher attrition. They found “supportive interactions with the principal” to be a key factor in new teachers’ decisions whether or not to stay in their schools.<sup>15</sup> This finding resonates with what we have learned from our ongoing work with Jewish Day Schools: Effective induction turns on the support and involvement of a well-informed head of school.<sup>16</sup> Encouraging new teachers as they get their feet under them is one aspect of that involvement, but school leaders have an even more important role to play in creating the conditions that will allow induction to transform the school’s professional culture.

### Where we stand

We believe that heads of school play an important role in providing new teachers’ ongoing feedback and support. But their role goes deeper than that: the success of a school-based induction program relies on the head’s long-term commitment and investment. Heads and their administrative teams control budgets and manage schedules, and only they can ensure adequate, protected time for mentors and new teachers to work together. They have the last say over school-level policies like hiring and teacher evaluation, and therefore the power to align them with the vision of good teaching on which mentoring is based. Perhaps even more importantly, heads of school deeply influence the culture of the school community. They are idea brokers who touch the thinking of teachers, parents and board members. Heads of school enable powerful induction when they foster a community-wide appreciation for teaching’s complexity and for the time it takes to become proficient. They help mentors work successfully when they educate parents and board members about the value of investing in new teachers’ growth. With a view of the school as a whole, they can leverage teachers’ interest in mentors’ and mentees’ collegial exchange to create a professional learning community among the faculty.



## Conclusion

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The five myths we list above persist because they serve a purpose. Buying into them makes the overwhelming task of creating an excellent school slightly less daunting. Yet each does a disservice to the field by downplaying the complexity of successful teaching, school leadership, and successful school change. By challenging these myths, we hope to expand our collective understanding of the potential for induction, not just as a way to retain and develop novices, but as a way to develop a school-wide norm of ongoing learning, collegial collaboration, and goal setting for instructional improvement.

We have offered an image of comprehensive induction and its promise. This image may raise daunting questions. Where should one start? By building an educative mentoring program? Revising the school's hiring procedures? Educating community members about the complexity of effective teaching? Where will the resources come from? Will they be justified?

Our experience with schools tells us that there is no right way to begin this work. There are different ways of approaching it and many entry points. We invite school leaders to simply begin.

## About Us

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The Induction Partnership Project is a research and development project supported by the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University and the Covenant Foundation. The project has three complementary goals: to help individual day schools create comprehensive, school-based systems of induction for new teachers; to distill lessons for the field about what it takes to do this effectively; and to develop tools and resources that will enable school leaders to pursue this work. The Mandel Center is dedicated to improving the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish education by supporting innovative research, pioneering new approaches to professional development, and shaping discourse in the field. For more information about the Induction Partnership Project, contact Sarah Birkeland at [sbirkel@brandeis.edu](mailto:sbirkel@brandeis.edu) or visit <http://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/projects/inductionpartnership.html>.

The New Teacher Center's Jewish New Teacher Project (JNTP) is dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of beginning teachers in Jewish day schools and *yeshivot*. JNTP's teacher induction model focuses on improving beginning teachers' classroom practice through high quality, intensive mentoring, resulting in reflective practitioners who are responsive to the needs of all students. JNTP is part of the New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, CA, which, since 1998, has promoted comprehensive, research-based instructional mentoring and professional development programs. JNTP is generously funded by the Avi Chai Foundation, UJA Federation of New York and the Jim Joseph Foundation. For more information contact Mark Silk at [msilk@newteachercenter.org](mailto:msilk@newteachercenter.org).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Birkeland, director of the Mandel Center Induction Partnership Project, is the primary author of this paper. The paper draws on shared ideas that the two projects have discussed at length.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, T.M. and Ingersoll R. (2004). Reducing teacher turnover: What are the elements of effective induction? *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(3), 68-714.

<sup>3</sup> Smith and Ingersoll (2004)

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Kapadia, K. and Coca, V. (2007) Keeping new teachers: A first look at the influences of induction in the Chicago Public Schools. The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago; or Johnson, S.M. and the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004). *Finders and Keepers: Helping new teachers survive and thrive in our schools*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

<sup>5</sup> Villar, A. (2004). Is mentoring worth the money? A benefit-cost analysis and five year rate of return of a comprehensive mentoring program for beginning teachers. The New Teacher Center, University of California, Santa Cruz. Downloaded from [www.newteachercenter.org](http://www.newteachercenter.org), October 2005

<sup>6</sup> Birkeland, S. & Feiman-Nemser, S. (2009). Developing Comprehensive Induction in Jewish Day Schools: Lessons from the Field. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 75:3, 240-257; Talbert, J. and David, J. (2010) Evaluation of the New Teacher Center-Ravenswood City School District Instructional Improvement Initiative. The Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

<sup>7</sup> Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching, *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1013-1055; Berliner, D. C. (1994). Teacher expertise. In B. Moon & A. S. Mayes (Eds.), *Teaching and learning in the secondary school*. London: Routledge/The Open University.

<sup>8</sup> Villar, A. (2004)

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, S.M. and Birkeland, S.E. (2003) Pursuing a sense of success: New teachers explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 581-617.

<sup>10</sup> Gless, J. (2006) Transformative Mentoring in Betty Achinstein and Steven Z. Athanases (Eds.) *Mentors in the making: Developing new leaders for new teachers*. New York: Teachers College Press; Villar, A. and Stobbe, C. (2006) Researching the domains of mentor development: The transition from veteran classroom teacher to formal mentor status. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, April 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Villar (2004)

<sup>12</sup> Feiman-Nemser, S. (1998). Teachers as teacher educators. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 21(1) 63-74; NTC about instructional mentoring

<sup>13</sup> Feiman-Nemser (1998); Johnson and the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2004); Smith and Ingersoll (2004)

<sup>14</sup> Donaldson, M., Johnson, S.M., Kirkpatrick, C., Marinell, W., Steele, J.L., and Szczesiul, S.A. Angling for Access, Bartering for Change: How second-stage teachers experience differentiated roles in schools," *Teachers College Record* 2008, 110(5), 1088-1114.

<sup>15</sup> Smith and Ingersoll (2004)

<sup>16</sup> Birkeland and Nemser (2009)