Inducting New Teachers in Illinois: Challenge and Response

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This article reports on efforts to improve beginning teachers' induction experiences across the state of Illinois. The authors focus on the role of the Illinois New Teacher Collaborative (INTC), which was created to promote new teacher induction in Illinois and to supply resources and support for new teachers and for those who support them. This article, which builds on Wilkins and Clift (2007), describes challenges facing Illinois state-funded induction programs and INTC's responses, including professional development opportunities and web-based resources and discussion forums. The authors make the case for induction programs and for state funding, and for the importance of having an independent entity to provide support for and to conduct research with the programs.

"Over the past several years, a new consensus has emerged that teacher quality is one of the most, if not *the* most, significant factor in students' achievement and educational improvement" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 3).

At one point, it was long assumed that preservice teacher education programs carried the burden of ensuring that teachers were, at graduation, well qualified to teach. Schools handed new recruits a textbook and a key to their classrooms and blamed the novices or their preservice programs if they were unprepared for all of the realities of teaching. Since the 1980s, however, experts have come to realize that preservice programs are weak interventions when compared with on-the-job experience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). "Beginning teachers have legitimate learning needs that cannot be grasped in advance or outside the contexts of teaching"

(Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 26). Districts are encouraged to provide new teachers with structured induction programs, which include focused professional development, trained mentors who provide instructional coaching, and supportive working conditions. Induction is not a frivolous add-on to the "real" education preservice teachers receive, but an essential stage in the continuum of teacher learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Systemic, consistent, and fully supported induction programs increase teacher competency and quality (Wanzare, 2007). For example, students in classes where new teachers participate in an induction program focused on improving instruction can achieve test scores that are at or near those of students of more seasoned teachers (Strong, 2006). Induction also shortens the period of culture shock experienced by beginning teachers.

Comprehensive induction programs can also cut attrition rates by as much as half (Fulton, Lee, & Yoon, 2005; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Research shows that between 30% and 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years of their career (Curran & Goldrick, 2002; Herbert & Ramsay, 2004; Ingersoll, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1997). Stemming attrition directly helps improve teacher quality, as experienced teachers are more effective than novices (Johnson & Kardos, 2008). This is not only a matter of education but of social justice. Teachers who leave the profession disproportionately affect poor and minority students, and "such attrition consigns a large share of students in high-turnover schools to a continual parade of ineffective teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 9). Teacher turnover has financial costs as well. Schools in the United States lost $2.6 billion annually to teacher attrition (NCTAF, 1997, p. 8).

Despite the evidence of need for induction and mentoring, in 2005 only one third of states had policies that required, guided, or financed any kind of new teacher induction (Fulton et al., 2005). Three years later, 88% of states provided at least a policy or suggestions for induction (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2008), suggesting that states recognize this as a concern. However, the vast majority of states does not yet require—let alone finance—induction programs. This is a problem because state induction programs are most effective in reducing turnover (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Instead, most induction programs are run by districts and individual schools. They are typically self-contained and are not able to provide new teachers with access to external resources. They often are composed of "discrete and disconnected events" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1049). Without state mandates and funding, these programs exist at the whim of the administrators and are likely to be cut or reduced due to funding difficulties. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (Fulton et al., 2005) called for states to create, support, and fund comprehensive mentoring and induction programs for new teachers. These prescriptions should still allow induction programs to be responsive to local concerns and issues (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wanzare, 2007).

This article reports on efforts to improve beginning teachers' induction experiences across the state of Illinois. We focus on the role of the Illinois New Teacher Collaborative (INTC), which was created to promote new teacher induction in Illinois and to supply resources and support for new teachers and for those who support them. Wilkins and Clift (2007) described the initial formation of INTC and the organization's efforts to address induction needs in the state of Illinois through professional development opportunities and web-based resources and discussion forums. These were available at no cost, in part, because of funding from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the State Farm Companies Foundation, and the College of Education at the University of Illinois.

This article picks up the story where Wilkins and Clift (2007) left off: announcing the first-ever ISBE budgetary line item for teacher induction to fund competitive induction program grants in 2006. It is organized around five challenges faced by the induction situation in Illinois and how INTC, individual programs, and other statewide stakeholders responded to them. We first describe the challenge of selecting the initial 10 grant-funded induction programs and the expansion to 66 programs over the succeeding 3 years. Second, we discuss the diversity of funded programs— geographically, structurally, and demographically—and describe INTC's and ISBE's efforts to support the programs and respond to their individual needs. Third, we describe efforts to learn more about the programs to better support them as well as to inform statewide induction policy. Fourth, we describe how INTC uses the Internet to support programs and disseminate information and how we have met the technological challenges. Finally, we describe various challenges faced by specific programs and how they are individually and collectively working to meet the needs of beginning teachers. The article ends with a look at current challenges in Illinois and plans for the future. The conclusion also contains suggestions for other states based on the Illinois experience.

CHALLENGE #1: STATEWIDE NEED FOR HIGH-QUALITY INDUCTION AND MENTORING PROGRAMS

As described by Wilkins and Clift (2007), prior to 2006, Illinois lacked funding or statewide supports for new teacher induction and mentoring programs. Some districts funded their own programs or relied on federal funding, such as Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, to make induction and mentoring programs possible. "Across the 850-plus school districts in Illinois, there are districts and buildings in which educators are willing and able to provide new teachers with some form of support, but not all districts have sufficient funding to do so" (Wilkins & Clift, 2007, p. 28). Instead, most districts—particularly those in small, rural, and/or high-need areas—relied on informal "buddy" mentoring systems or simply left new teachers to flounder on their own.

RESPONSE #1: STATE FUNDING FOR INDUCTION AND MENTORING PROGRAMS

A year after INTC was founded by a consortium of P-20 educators, state agencies, professional organizations, and business partners and based at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), a parallel group of induction and mentoring stakeholders met and established the Illinois Induction Policy Team (IIPT). The group included, but was not limited to, the New Teacher Center (with support from the Joyce Foundation), ISBE, and many of the same individuals constituting INTC's Executive and Partnership Boards. Where INTC focused on resources and supports for induction providers, the IIPT advocated for state funding and policies for beginning teacher induction. Thanks to the IIPT's collaborative efforts, the Illinois General Assembly approved $2 million for induction and mentoring programs in June 2006. Because these dollars were not nearly enough to distribute statewide for each beginning teacher, ISBE decided to fund 10 Beginning Teacher Induction Pilot Programs with INTC as their administrative home. These programs represented diverse organizational and program implementation models, as well as geographic and demographic contexts.

TABLE 1
Illinois Beginning Teacher Induction Grant Programs

Fiscal Year	Funding Awarded	Number of Programs
2007	$2 million	10
2008	$8.5 million	40
2009	$10 million	67
2010	$7 million	64

To determine the initial programs, ISBE issued a request for proposals for the creation of local induction and mentoring programs that would receive ISBE grant funds. Eligible applicants included school districts, public university laboratory schools approved by ISBE, charter schools, and area vocational centers. Partnerships made up of any combination of these entities or institutions of higher education, professional associations, regional offices of education, or not-for-profit providers of educational services could also apply. A major goal for INTC was to learn from the early cohorts of funded programs and to groom these programs to become models and mentors for newly developing programs across the state. In addition, these grant-funded programs would "serve as exemplars to influence policymakers to provide sustained funding for induction and mentoring in Illinois" (Wilkins & Clift, 2007, p. 33).

Ongoing IIPT, INTC, and ISBE collaboration and increased funding from ISBE allowed for the growth in the number of the Beginning Teacher Induction Grant Programs in subsequent years, as shown in Table 1. The drop in the number of programs between 2009 and 2010 is more a result of programs combining than of program attrition, despite the reduction in funding (see Table 1).

The FY10 funded programs served nearly 1,500 schools in 360 districts, mentored 4,400 first- and second-year teachers, and potentially affected approximately 220,000 students. The two INTC statewide co-coordinators work across Illinois, serving as mentors and support providers for the state funded induction and mentoring program leaders. They coordinate and facilitate activities focused on improving the quality and effectiveness of the grant-funded induction and mentoring programs.

Although progress has been made toward statewide support for induction, barely one third of all districts in Illinois receive state funding for this purpose. Thanks to continued support from ISBE, UIUC, and State Farm Companies Foundation, INTC continues to provide support for all induction and mentoring in Illinois. INTC's website and activities like its annual induction and mentoring conference and regional professional development sessions provide high-quality opportunities and resources for grant-funded and nonfunded programs alike. All INTC resources, personnel support, and activities continue to be cost free to users except for the annual conference registration fee.

CHALLENGE #2: SUPPORT FOR DISPARATE PROGRAMS AND MODELS

It soon became obvious that the mere existence of grant-funded programs would require special attention and action. Not only are the 66 programs located throughout the state, they also

represent a variety of demographics, size, and program structures. Programs reside within urban areas, metropolitan areas, suburbs, and rural locales. Some programs serve homogeneous school settings and staffs; other programs induct teachers and train mentors who work with very diverse racial and ethnic populations. Thirty-seven programs are run by school districts, and 29 are managed by consortia that serve multiple districts through a single grant. Although there are specific requirements for all programs (e.g., observations of new teachers, face-to-face meetings between new teachers and mentors), ISBE allowed each site to create a unique program. Some programs use full-release mentors whereas others rely on full-time teachers as mentors. Each program runs its own orientation and professional development program for new teachers. These differences create unique challenges and needs for each program.

RESPONSE #2: FORMING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

To support high-quality and effective induction and mentoring among all funded programs, INTC and ISBE took a number of strategic steps. In 2006, ISBE designated INTC as the administrative home of the grant-funded programs and provided financial support to hire a statewide coordinator to provide personal contact, answer relevant questions, conduct site visits, and provide resources, support, and professional development for those who coordinate local programs. With the growing number of programs being served, INTC hired a second statewide coordinator in 2008. These coordinators learn about the characteristics, trainings, workshops, and personnel of each program to communicate with and serve as a resource for the important work that occurs with new teachers and their mentors. They actively create positive relationships that lead to trusting, supportive networking. They are often viewed as resource people who can answer funding questions and consult about program goals and plans.

The co-coordinators believe that networking among funded programs greatly enhances group learning and individual program growth. Toward that end, they organize biennial regional meetings, held in six locations throughout the state, with 8 to 15 programs attending each meeting. To promote the goals of combined sharing and professional growth, these meetings are referred to as Professional Learning and Networking (PlaN) sessions. PLaNs were created to serve as professional learning communities within the context of induction and mentoring, and they reflect DuFour's tenet that "the basic structure of the PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work *interdependently* to achieve *common goals*" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. 3). PLaN meeting participants have agreed to work together toward continual growth and development of induction and mentoring programs in Illinois.

The regional PLaN meetings are held in the fall and the spring, hosted by one of the funded programs in each region, and attended by program coordinators, lead mentors, assistant superintendents, staff developers, and other program leaders. The INTC co-coordinators facilitate the PLaN meetings, and representatives from the funded programs bring specific information about individual programs such as the structures, personnel, workshops, topics, activities, and forms. The agenda at a recent meeting included demonstrations of the INTC Website and electronic tools used by funded programs. Spring meetings included sharing about program evaluation instruments and results as well as the concern about program maintenance within budget constraints.

The INTC Annual Conference has provided an additional venue for networking and sharing among the funded programs since February 2006. A preconference session is held exclusively for ISBE funded programs and provides structured activities as well as opportunities for informal sharing and collaboration. Our experience supports Danielson's (2009) assertion that "of all the approaches available to educators to promote teacher learning, the most powerful (and embedded in virtually all others) is that of professional conversations" (p. 5). All programs and stakeholders in Illinois are invited to attend the rest of the conference's presentations, keynote addresses, breakout sessions, and structured time for inter- and intraprogram planning and problem solving.

To create consistency in expectations of excellence in induction and mentoring, members of the IIPT developed the *Illinois Induction Program Standards*[1] that were approved by the Illinois Certification Board in 2008. These standards describe what all programs should have—such as well-trained mentors, supportive administrators, and ongoing program evaluation—without being overly prescriptive. Programs can reach the stated goals in multiple ways, allowing them to remain responsive to local issues and constraints. To increase the usability of the standards, the IIPT coordinated the collaborative development of an equivalent continuum document that includes specific criteria and descriptors for each standard at four levels of program implementation. This document, the *Illinois Induction Programs Continuum,* was introduced at the February 2010 INTC Annual Conference. It should increase the ability of induction and mentoring programs to assess themselves and to create action plans that will lead to increased program growth and development.

CHALLENGE #3: LACK OF INFORMATION ON ILLINOIS INDUCTION AND MENTORING PROGRAMS

After the first 10 pilot programs were funded in 2006, ISBE needed information on what the programs were doing, how well they were doing it, how cost-effective they were, and ultimately, how the use of grant funds for teacher induction affected retention, teacher quality, and student achievement. This information would inform future policy and funding decisions at ISBE. In addition, INTC staff needed these data to guide their work of supporting and encouraging ongoing program improvement.

RESPONSE #3: COMPREHENSIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Shortly after the first pilot programs were funded in 2006, INTC staff visited each of the 10 sites to learn about the programs' organization, goals, and activities. INTC staff members talked with the program administrator, a district or regional office administrator, and (when applicable) someone from the pilots' partner organizations. They also conducted separate focus group interviews with new teachers, site administrators, and mentors. The programs were also required to submit midterm and year-end self-reports. INTC staff used these data, along with the programs' initial funding proposals, to write its first report for ISBE in October 2007.

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[1]The Illinois Induction Program Standards are available online at http://intc.education.illinois.edu/page/Continuum.

In 2008, when the number of funded programs increased to 40, INTC needed a more stream-lined data collection process. In response, INTC staff created the Common Data Elements (CDE) reporting form based on the reporting requirements of the original midterm and year-end reports used the previous year. The initial version, which was rolled out in spring 2008, asked questions about beginning teachers (demographics, involvement, and professional development), mentors (demographics, selection, and training), administrator involvement and training, mentor/novice interactions, and a program summary. This instrument went through multiple iterations as follows:

- Spring 2008: The initial CDE was a multipage Microsoft Word document that programs could fill out electronically. Questions were not differentiated for different types of pro-grams (e.g., programs based in single districts and those run by consortia, such as regional offices of education), and the results were difficult to analyze because every question was open ended, and programs often interpreted the same questions differently.
- Fall 2008: The CDE was introduced in two versions: one for single-district programs, one for consortia. Many questions were converted into multiple-choice versions, which allowed for easier analysis and better fidelity to the intent of the question.
- Spring 2009: The CDE became an online form using Qualtrics online survey software. This software allowed for complete customization for different program types and made for easier analysis as all data could be downloaded directly into a spreadsheet.
- Fall 2009: CDE questions were reorganized around the nine Illinois Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs.

After each reporting cycle, INTC submitted a summary and recommendation report to ISBE and posted the report on the INTC Website.

Because INTC serves as the administrative home for the funded programs and has such a close relationship with program leaders, it would have a conflict of interest if it tried to con-duct critical or evaluative research or evaluate the effectiveness of various programs. Instead, the data it gathers are all descriptive or reflective as reported by program coordinators. On occasion, INTC subcontracts with outside researchers to conduct more in-depth studies. In 2008, a team of researchers from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign conducted interviews with the initial 10 funded programs and also analyzed questionnaires and INTC data. In 2009, INTC subcontracted with the Illinois Education Research Council to investigate the nature and extent of administrator involvement in induction programs. As an additional tier of evaluation, SRI International (SRI) provided ISBE with external evaluations of the Beginning Teacher Induction Programs during the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 school years (Humphrey, Wechsler, Bossetti, Park, & Tiffany-Morales, 2008; Wechsler, Caspary, Humphrey, & Matsko, 2010). SRI collected and analyzed detailed retention data and surveyed all novice teachers and mentors to discover their experiences with induction. In addition, SRI conducted case studies of a small sample of the funded programs.

Through its research, INTC has learned that providing induction is a developmental process; that the state grants allowed existing programs to make large-scale improvements, or allowed new programs to start from scratch; and that consortium-based programs (such as those run by regional offices of education) have greater intrinsic challenges than do single-district programs, but such programs are essential for rural and small-town districts. SRI's research (Wechsler et al., 2010) was able to note the mismatch between what programs thought their new teachers were

receiving and what the new teachers reported, and it suggested that a strong school context (e.g. supportive leadership and collegial relationships) was just as essential as induction in affecting beginning teachers' career trajectories.

CHALLENGE #4: CENTRALIZED SOURCE FOR INFORMATION AND NETWORKING

INTC leadership has always believed that a strong web presence could provide up-to-date information about induction and mentoring while also facilitating collaboration and sharing amongst participants. As administrative agent for the ISBE Beginning Teacher Induction Grant Programs, INTC needed a Website to provide relevant and up-to-date information useful for policy makers, as well as showcasing the efforts of individual programs. The Website INTC Online is now undergoing its fourth major reconstruction effort. Each iterative effort has been driven by ongoing challenges to build a critical mass of regular users, to maintain the site's content and relevance, and to organize the content and activities in a meaningful way for users. The challenge of development, design, and maintenance of INTC Online stems, in part, from the complexity of the Website's purpose and the varied needs of its many stakeholders (new teachers, mentors, administrators, induction program leaders, teacher educators, and policy makers). Each stakeholder's role in induction requires different types of information, resources, and topics for collaboration. As the number of funded programs increased, the process of updating and maintaining these pages became increasingly difficult, particularly as staffing changes resulted in fewer hours available for focused work on the Website. As an organization with limited financial resources and personnel, INTC regularly struggles with how to best address the complex needs of its Website while limited by reliance on free or inexpensive software and platforms that were not developed with INTC specifically in mind.

RESPONSE #4: CREATING A MEANINGFUL AND FOCUSED WEB PRESENCE

The Website INTC Online debuted February 26, 2007. The original version included a resource database of useful Websites and documents, a programs database, and restricted-access community rooms for online discussions and collaboration. In addition, INTC offered individual induction and mentoring programs the opportunity to set up and maintain their own restricted-access community rooms. Moodle became INTC's platform of choice for these user-driven activities. This open-source platform provides the ability to easily upload documents, to add text and images to a page, to maintain a calendar of events, and to facilitate online discussion forums and live chats. In addition, it allows flexibility in granting access to various portions of the site and providing varied levels of control over site content.

From its initial design through each new revision to the website, INTC staff depended on the collaboration and feedback of INTC's partners and friends. The resource database was initially populated by a committee of National Board Certified Teachers and other teacher leaders recruited by partnering teacher organizations. This database continues to grow and improve thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins' incorporation of INTC Online into her graduate course for induction leaders offered at Northern Illinois University (NIU) each summer. Students from this class also participated in the online discussion forums and provided substantive suggestions for INTC

Online improvements. The members of INTC's Partnership Board who served on the Technology Subcommittee also contributed feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Each new version of the Website sought to address as many of these suggestions as possible. However, each revision also needed to fit within the level of technology expertise available on INTC's staff and within INTC's budget. Without a programmer on staff, INTC collaborated with the information technology (IT) experts at the UIUC's College of Education to select the best-fitting prepackaged platform for our needs. However, INTC Online's unique needs and complexity have not yet aligned with the platforms that are available.

A programming contract with our information technology (IT) partners allowed for additional improvements to these platforms, such as the integration of funded program CDE data with the Drupal platform currently being used. However, INTC's complexity still prevents INTC Online from reaching its full potential. Thanks to funding from ISBE and State Farm Companies Foundation, INTC has recently hired a full-time programmer to specifically tackle INTC's unique data and Website needs.

Although we hope that improving the quality of the Website will increase the online participation of users, we realize that building a critical mass of users is more complex than this. A primary strategy for promoting INTC Online has been through guided tours of the Website during INTC's Annual Conference. Guided tour attendees consistently praised the Website and its potential. They indicated that they planned to return to the site and to share it with colleagues. The graduate students from NIU voiced similar intentions. In reality, however, only a few returned and their participation dwindled over time.

INTC has chosen to focus a greater proportion of energy toward encouraging ISBE-funded induction program leaders to make use of the online opportunities for collaboration with the hope of developing a critical mass of regular users. Illinois' current financial crisis is resulting in decreased budgets for the funded programs, yet ISBE does not want to lose the momentum that has begun for the ongoing development of high-quality and effective programs as models for the state. Online collaboration and sharing provide an inexpensive means of continued networking and learning opportunities. The statewide co-coordinators strongly encourage the use of these online opportunities as a means of continuing and expanding the discussions that begin during face-to-face opportunities. In the past year, program leaders began posting materials and resources to share with other program leaders such as PowerPoint presentations, newsletters, and participant surveys. In addition, an increased number of leaders now turn to the "Funded Programs Collaborative Corner" to access and download materials for coordinating their programs. We are hopeful that increasing online participation amongst the grant-funded program leaders will eventually lead to INTC Online becoming a self-sustaining, thriving, online community of practice.

CHALLENGE #5: CHALLENGES WITHIN INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS

In the first four sections of this article, we described how INTC, ISBE, and other entities met statewide induction challenges. This section describes the most common challenges faced by individual programs as they noted on their CDE survey responses and describes some promising practices programs use to meet the needs of their new teachers.

One challenge commonly reported by funded programs is the need for differentiated training for beginning teachers depending on grade level taught, subject area taught, and years of teaching experience. For example, programs reported that first-year teachers needed more professional development on topics such as classroom management and planning, whereas second-year teachers' professional development needs were in areas such as pedagogy, assessment, and analyzing student work. Differentiating beginning teacher training required more planning time, more training, and, for some programs, more money.

Program evaluation, which includes the collection and analysis of relevant data, has been an ongoing challenge faced by funded programs. In some programs, external evaluators were hired to aid in the program evaluation process. Many programs without external evaluators expressed the desire to use data to advance their work, yet identifying appropriate tools and having the time to analyze and reflect on data remained a barrier. Connecting professional development activities for mentors, administrators, and beginning teachers to improved teaching effectiveness and student achievement was a goal for each program, yet programs understandably struggled to do so.

Funding issues have been referenced regularly during every data collection cycle since 2007. Due to the funding cycle, programs do not receive their funding before mentor and beginning teacher trainings take place. Many programs have expressed concern with the reliability of future funding, especially with the uncertain economic state. The current economic situation may greatly impact teacher hiring, retention, mentoring, and induction.

RESPONSE #5: PROMISING PRACTICES AMONG THE PROGRAMS

Although many programs have reported that differentiation of training is challenging, CDE responses indicated emerging promising practices in this area. Program leaders described increased movement away from a one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring and induction. Programs paid closer attention to the needs of their second-year teachers and provided them with more advanced training sessions. More programs reported tailoring professional development opportunities based on the self-reported needs of beginning teachers, and more programs differentiated training based on grade level and subject matter taught.

Programs moved toward depending on data to drive decisions in their induction and mentoring programs and emphasized the importance of linking their work to teacher quality and effectiveness. They mentioned interest in designing data collection tools to examine program improvement and emphasized the value of using data to improve induction and mentoring.

Collaboration was a strength reported by many of the funded programs. As programs developed, some reported more networking between beginning teachers and experienced teachers. Sometimes this collaboration existed with beginning teachers and experienced teachers who worked in the same building, but often teachers collaborated with those working in other buildings. Programs also reported increased collaboration in leadership, which typically referred to administrators, teacher/mentor representatives, and union leaders working together to ensure that the induction program was designed to best meet the needs of new teachers, the district, and ultimately the students.

Budgetary concerns, another significant challenge, are largely out of the control of the funded programs, although several reported trying to decrease their reliance on state funding. Regrettably, the current financial crisis in Illinois has forced all programs to reduce their dependency on state funding. As a result, a number of programs have been forced to reduce stipends, to decrease the number of professional development activities offered, and to depend upon the willingness of participants to donate their time and energy with the knowledge that compensation is unavailable. During a recent brainstorming session focused on how to make the most of limited funding, participating funded programs described current efforts to increase the use of online tools such as Skype and web-meeting platforms to reduce travel costs and time. Another promising suggestion surfaced as multiple programs described how funding reductions resulted in a significant decrease in the amount of professional development they would be able to offer for new teachers, mentors, and administrators. The resulting suggestion, that programs share professional development opportunities across program boundaries, was a popular idea among participants in the brainstorming session.

CONCLUSION: UNRESOLVED/ONGOING CHALLENGES AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Wilkins and Clift (2007) wrote, "Our goal is to make the collaborative systemic and sustainable" (p. 31). Now, nearly 4 years later, the collaborative is still going strong despite leadership changes and evolving roles. We still have a long way to go toward achieving our goals. However, this unique collaboration of organizations with broadly different interests continues to work together in the name of beginning teacher induction.

The Illinois context today contains many unresolved and ongoing challenges. Perhaps the largest one involves the state budget. The state currently has unpaid bills totaling $5 billion, and tax revenue has fallen. The 2011 fiscal year is projected to be an even tougher year than any prior year. The funded programs were asked to dramatically reduce their budgets in order to get continuation funding. These cuts directly affect the services they are able to offer new teachers and the quality of the program organization. In response, INTC is working with individual programs on sustainability of mentor training, new teacher induction, and program improvement.

Technology also remains an ongoing challenge. The INTC Website still does not have much traffic, online conversations remain mostly dormant, and the goal of using the electronic CDE surveys to populate the Website is still not a reality. Getting new teachers, mentors, program leaders, and other stakeholders and service providers to use the website is an even greater challenge, and one that is not limited to INTC.

Across Illinois, not all new teachers receive induction and mentoring in their home districts—and even those who do could potentially benefit from networking with other new teachers from across the state. In June 2010, INTC hosted "Y2: Moving Beyond Survival," a one-day conference for a diverse group of 85 new teachers from across Illinois. The event was subsidized by the State Farm Companies Foundation and was free to all attendees. A task force of new teachers, mentors, administrators, and program leaders from across the state helped plan the conference theme, sessions, and activities.

The work INTC put into surveying Illinois school districts, regional offices of education, higher-education institutions, and other education-affiliated institutions in 2005–2006 never reached its full capacity and the information successfully collected is now out-of-date. INTC is planning for a new online survey that can be published and meaningfully searched on its Website, providing the ability for any induction program to showcase its work, regardless of whether the program is receiving grant funds from ISBE. The resulting database will provide information on what supports new teachers are receiving in which districts. INTC can use these data to provide targeted regional professional development. The information can also be used to help inform Illinois legislators and policy makers as they plan budgets and consider induction requirements. As Wang, Odell, and Clift (2010) noted, we need to know more about supporting and evaluating mentors, measuring the impact of general, as opposed to content specific, induction programs, and qualitative and quantitative ways of assessing impact. INTC is planning a new research agenda that will focus less on description of what programs are doing and more on measures of program impact, in collaboration with other agencies and using mixed methods data collection.

FINAL THOUGHTS, FOR OTHER STATES

Because teacher quality is the most important factor in student learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Futrell, 2008; Johnson & Kardos, 2008), induction must become widely accepted as a critical element in teacher education and development. Educators, legislators, parents, businesses, and citizens must understand that it is unlikely that academic achievement will increase without excellent teachers in every classroom. Standards-based induction programs that focus on student instruction can help ensure teacher quality. They ease new teachers' transitions into the profession, assist in their professional development, and help retain these teachers in the classroom.

In 1982, Peters and Waterman offered the metaphor "ready-fire-aim" to capture the action bias of high-performing companies that they studied (Fullan, 2010, p. 17). Michael Fullan has applied the metaphor to education and has determined that a number of important concepts contribute to the seemingly out-of-order actions. He believes that initially there does not need to be great emphasis on vision and evidence. Rather, he suggests creating new experiences, without threat, and building on the results. The work of INTC and the Illinois grant-funded programs has followed a similar sequence by beginning initiatives based on what we knew at the time. We then took the time to evaluate what is working, how we know it is or is not working, and the potential causes for these outcomes. The first cohort of funded programs is able to share experiences and knowledge with subsequently funded programs. Other states may wish to follow a similar pattern of action first trying to meet the immediate needs of today's novice teachers, and then analyzing what worked and how to improve.

In many ways, INTC is a unique organization. Its collaborative nature, structure, and functions create ongoing opportunities for educational stakeholders in Illinois to work together to further the quality and scope of induction in Illinois. The educational, political, and pecuniary realities in the United States today suggest the need for specific, shared goals for induction that lead to demonstrations of teacher excellence and substantiated impact on student achievement.

As other states consider strategies to affect teacher quality through beginning teacher induction, Illinois can take a strong leadership role. The statewide collaboration, the variety of programs existing in Illinois, state financial support, and accepted standards for induction are all resources that other states can emulate. We look forward to working with and learning from other groups in other states as we help teachers transition from being students of teaching to being teachers of students.

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