

Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, and How to Fix It

Being a “rookie” is tough in any job, but it is especially tough for new teachers who are often left to navigate their first year alone — and when we consider the challenges that new teachers are facing this fall, the first year is even more daunting. State leaders have responded with policies and funding to support mentorship programs in which experienced educators are paired with new educators to provide feedback and guidance. While this is a step in the right direction, too many of these programs operate as little more than a buddy system.

Louisiana and Texas are leading efforts to improve district-based

mentoring programs. These states have intentionally focused on equipping mentors to engage in instructionally focused coaching while aligning the work of mentors to school and district initiatives. Both Louisiana and Texas approve training providers at the state level to ensure quality, and NIET has been approved to work with districts in both states.

Districts that have strengthened their mentoring programs with our support have identified strategies that are supporting new teachers to be more effective earlier in their careers — and in September, we released a new report to share these ideas.

By shifting the purpose of

mentoring and adopting these strategies, districts can better support new teachers. States play a role in elevating the importance and effectiveness of new teacher mentoring, concentrating resources on schools serving higher numbers of disadvantaged students and targeting mentoring on instructional improvement. If these strategies are embraced at the district and state levels, not only will more students have access to great teaching, but more new teachers will likely want to stay in the classroom — tackling a key issue we know is pressing right now. To read more, visit niet.org/research-and-policy.

Strategy 1

Focus mentoring on instructional improvement.

- Establish a clear purpose for mentoring: improving teaching and learning.
- Invest in mentoring through funding time, training, and the use of an evidence-based instructional rubric.
- Create a clear job description, define compensation for mentors, and select the right people for the job.

Strategy 2

Support mentors to be more effective by providing training, tools, and protocols for the role.

- Start by establishing trust and a growth mindset.
- Ground mentoring in student outcomes and the needs of the mentee.
- Use a cycle of coaching for continuous improvement.
- Create opportunities for mentors to collaborate.

Strategy 3

Align the mentoring program with district and school systems and goals.

- Support principals to integrate mentors in the school leadership structure.
- Connect mentoring to district and school priorities or initiatives.