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Coaching Initiative for Beginning Teachers (BT): Lessons Learned from One District's BT Support Program

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Introduction

The constant "churn" of teacher turnover, whether through attrition (i.e., leaving the occupation voluntarily or involuntarily) or migration (i.e., intra- and inter-district movement from school to school), is costly and has long-lasting negative consequences and implications for the teaching profession as a whole, for schools in general, and for students' learning experiences in particular. From a resource perspective, districts across the nation are spending billions of dollars each year in teacher recruitment and induction expenses alone (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Moir, 2003). From an instructional perspective, high teacher turnover rates cause intangible effects that make it difficult to build learning communities, provide support, and sustain reform. Lower test scores, lower attendance rates among students, and increased disciplinary problems have all been documented results of high attrition and migration rates (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). According to NCTAF (2002), "The most serious long-term consequence of high teacher turnover is the erosion of teaching quality and student achievement" (p. 13).

Despite numerous strategies to recruit and retain, employment statistics consistently reveal an average annual "turnover" rate of 16 percent of US public school teachers either exiting teaching altogether as "leavers" (8%) or changing schools and districts as "movers" (8%). That 16% equates to more than half a million teachers in transition into, between, or out of schools from one year to the next (Goldring, Taie & Riddles, 2014). "Moreover, the data show there is an annual asymmetric reshuffling of significant numbers of employed teachers from poor to not poor schools, from high-minority to low-minority schools, and from urban to suburban schools" (Ingersoll, Merrill & May, 2014, p. 23).

As concerning as that is, perhaps more concerning is the fact that "attrition levels" alone among beginning teachers (BTs) have been and continue to be even higher (Ingersoll, Merrill,

Stuckey, & Collins, 2018). Once estimated to be close to 50 percent, recent studies using

national longitudinal data have more accurately documented that 45 percent of new teachers

actually leave the profession within the first five years of employment (Cooper & Alvarado,

2006; Headden, 2014; TNTP, 2012). And, as the number of teachers who are beginners actually

increases in the US (Ingersoll et al., 2018), so does the number of teachers who actually quit the

profession. Simultaneously, higher rates of BTs means less experience, greater challenges, more

instability, and lower rates of efficacy.

These trends are problematic, especially since studies have repeatedly shown that

teachers are the primary variable in determining student performance in the classroom (Chetty,

Friedman & Rockoff, 2014; Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005). As such, a number of

interventions, strategies, and policies have been enacted to address the proverbial "leaky

bucket/revolving door" and improve retention. Redesigned, high quality pre-service education

and preparation, creative mentoring and innovative in-service programs, monetary incentives,

and providing teachers with more collaborative and collegial atmospheres have all been proven

to have a positive impact on teacher retention, but still fall short of solving the problem in its

totality (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kaden,

Patterson, Healy & Adams, 2016; Maranto & Shuls, 2012; Munsch & Boylan, 2008; Petty,

Fitchett & O'Connor, 2012).

Because of beginner teachers' needs for extra support, the necessity for more formal

teacher induction strategies that are comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable over several

years has become very clear and critically important world-wide. Similarly, Park, Takahashi and

White (2014) claim that "Experts on teachers and teaching have identified high quality

feedback—feedback that leads to improvements in instruction and student learning—as a crucial

lever for driving professional growth and improving the likelihood that new teachers will persist in their careers" (p.2). As such, many districts are now embracing instructional coaches to provide such feedback to their beginning teachers via job-embedded, individualized, and sustained professional guidance (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009).

Instructional Coaches

Instructional coaching is a way to support classroom teachers in their efforts to provide high quality instruction across academic content areas. Coaching sessions may be one-on-one or small group informational sessions that act as a vehicle of transferring knowledge and skills to the teachers and into classroom practice. The use of coaches is typically incorporated as an additional support layer to introduce teachers and principals to new concepts, activities, and/or feedback (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Many envision coaching as a tool that allows teachers to learn, master, and apply new pedagogical practices while supporting student learning in the process (Kraft & Blazer, 2018; Kraft, Blazer & Hogan, 2018). Numerous studies indicate that weekly coaching sessions increase implementation of new instructional approaches (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Kraft & Blazer, 2018a, 2018b; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015).

Prior to 2001, coaching implementation varied widely. Rarely was much systematic consideration given to the most effective approaches. The implementation of research-based instruction and the encouragement of data-based practices led to more advanced applications for coaching (Kurtz, Reddy, & Glover, 2017). According to the New Teacher Center (2018a), instructional coaching "develops the expertise of teacher-leaders to support the professional growth of individuals or teams of teachers, with priority focus on content standards, social and emotional learning and diverse needs" (p. 1C). Russo (2004) explained that the goal of coaching is to provide educators with the necessary tools to monitor student performance and to adapt

classroom instruction based on students' needs. As coaching becomes more individualized, the

coach can ensure that professional development (PD) sessions reflect evidence-based teaching

practices directly linked to a teacher's areas of deficiency (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). For these

reasons and more, coaching holds great significance for working with beginning teachers and the

many challenges that they face. Creating teacher learning communities and accelerating the

development of a teacher's effectiveness can help reduce new teacher turnover. For this to

happen, the New Teacher Center has identified the following shifts in a number of important

coaching practices needed to reach goals and feel impact (see Table 1).

Table 1

Instructional Coaching Practices

Moving Away From	Moving Toward
• Choosing coaches without criteria or an explicit process (potential for selection to be based on availability or seniority instead of qualifications)	• Rigorous coach selection based on qualities of an effective coach (evidence of outstanding teaching practice, strong intra- and inter-personal skills, experience w/ adult learners, respect of peers, knowledge of PD)
• Insufficient PD and support for coaches	• Ongoing PD and support for coaches (high quality and ongoing training along with a professional learning community)
• Meetings happen occasionally or "whenever the coach and teacher are available"	• Sanctioned time for frequent coach-teacher interactions (1.5-2.5 hours per week allowed for rigorous mentoring and coaching activities)
• Support for first year and struggling teachers only	• All educators receive ongoing support via multi-year coaching (teachers should continue to receive coaching and feedback throughout their careers)
• Non-specific, emotional or logistical support alone (support lacking specific, detailed instructional feedback, i.e. "You're doing a great job! Keep it up!")	• Intensive and specific guidance moving student learning and teaching practice forward (continued attention to equity and academic growth)

• Informal and non-evidenced based feedback (informal conversations lacking structure and real-time data)	• Professional teaching standards and data-driven conversations (provide feedback that is grounded in evidence)
• Lack of training/communication with administrators	• Clear roles and responsibilities for administrators (PD for administrators and ongoing communication about needs of new teachers)
• Isolated programming and lack of alignment	• Collaboration with all stakeholders (strong communication and collaboration to create a culture of commitment)

(New Teacher Center, 2016a, 2018c, 2018d)

Methods

This initial exploratory study employed mixed methods to gain both qualitative and quantitative insights into one district's Beginning Teacher Support Program (BTSP). While the focus of the study was on the addition and impact of BT Coaches since 2016, the research team did review five years of prior data regarding the larger BT support program in an effort to identify earlier trends and provide contextual insights. According to Clover School District (CSD), the desired outcomes of their BT Coaching initiative are to 1) Improve the instructional effectiveness of BTs, 2) Increase BT retention rate, and 3) Promote a positive and optimistic perspective of the teaching profession. As such, the research team identified the district's theory of action for BT Coaches to be similar to that of Kraft, Blazer, and Hogan's (2018a, 2018b). In other words, the inputs of training, coaching and materials should impact the teacher outcomes of increased knowledge and effective behaviors which in turn will lead to better student outcomes of learning and achievement (see Figure 1):

Figure 1

Clover School District's Theory of Action for their BTSP

Training + Coaching + Curricular Materials =	Improved Teacher Knowledge & Behavior =	Improved Student Achievement & Development!
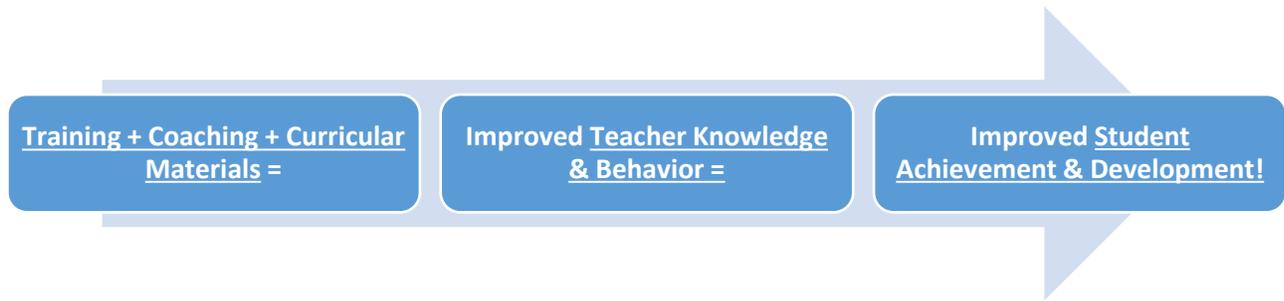
Research Questions

With this in mind, and with an understanding from research that the quality and focus of coaching are more important than the quantity of coaching (Ingersoll, 2012; NTC, 2019), the following research questions directed the investigation. While specific attention was paid to both espoused and enacted practices regarding "instructional effectiveness," this preliminary study did not actually measure instructional improvement. Instead, it focused on the "coach perspective" and searched for indicators of quality and focus.

1) Do CSD Coaches provide BTs' with intensive, specific instructional guidance moving both teacher pedagogical practice and student learning forward? If so, what and how?

2) Do CSD Coaches discuss and model research-based pedagogical practices and then help BTs incorporate these into their classrooms? If so, what and how?

3) What discrete skills (content-specific and general pedagogical) do CSD Coaches help BTs develop? How?

Study Site

Clover School District (CSD) is a pseudonym for a small, average performing school district of less than 20 schools (K-12) serving approximately 10,000 students from a broad range of racially and economically diverse backgrounds. At least 50% of the suburban, southeastern student population is proficient in reading and math, 87% of the students graduate, teacher experience is fairly evenly distributed across schools and grade levels, and more than 90% of the teachers are fully licensed. For the past decade, and, in accordance with state policy, CSD has provided support for their new teachers in a variety of ways, including reported evidence of 1) Systematic support for high quality induction programs, 2) Mentor selection, development, and support, 3) Mentoring for instructional excellence, 4) Beginning teacher professional development (PD), and 5) Formative assessment of candidates and programs (NCBOE, 2013c).

The BT coaching initiative was first implemented across Clover schools in the Fall of 2016 because district leaders believed that face-to-face interaction with experts in the field would help improve instruction, morale, and retention. During the year of the study (i.e., 2018-2019 school year), eight coaches worked with 58 BTs who were in their first or second year teaching for a total of 22 weeks from mid-October through the end of April, covering 15 of the district's schools. The district average of BTs per school was 14% with a range from 0% to 24%. The coaches worked an allotted two hours per week with each BT1 and one hour per week with each BT2. BT3s received support via mentors, not coaches. Any school classified "low performing" was allotted one additional hour per week per beginning teacher. The district paid each coach $22 per hour (Licensed Teacher) or $28 per hour (Licensed Administrator) and spent approximately $80,000 that year.

A September orientation to the role highlighted expectations, responsibilities, and an overview of the position. Coaches were encouraged to become familiar with district resources such as Literacy and Math Frameworks, Instructional Delivery Guides, Benchmark and Assessment Guides, and Teacher Portal Resources. See Table 2 for CSD's coach requirements throughout the year.

Table 2

CSD Requirements for Coaches

1) Attend and participate in three District BT Coach meetings.
2) Complete BT Coach Task Summary Log for each day worked.
3) Conduct initial meeting with BT to establish relationship and identify areas BT feels support is needed using BT Inventory as a reference.
4) Conduct informal check-ins with BT a minimum of 1 time per week.
5) Conduct a minimum of three classroom observations (30-60 minutes) and post-conferences using the 2018-2019 BT Instructional Feedback Form.
6) Conduct a minimum of three instructional walkthroughs (15-20 minutes) and provide written and/or face-to-face feedback using the BT Instructional Feedback Form.
7) Make arrangements for a minimum of one lesson delivered by the BT to be videotaped. Collaboratively review the lessons with BT to evaluate instructional considerations, and identify specific follow-up actions to be implemented.
8) Collaboratively observe with BT at least one teacher who is effective in area(s) BT demonstrates the need for growth (using Exemplar Teacher Scheduling Protocol and List). Following the observations, process with BT instructional considerations and specific follow-up actions to be implemented.
9) Review BT lesson plans and provide face-to-face and/or written feedback a minimum of five times.
10) Conduct demonstration/modeling lessons for BT as needed.
11) Provide written and/or face-to-face non-evaluative feedback to the Principal.
12) Additional miscellaneous activities (as determined by BT Coach and/or Principal).

Study Participants

Instructional coaches for Clover County Schools were primarily retired educators with prior teaching and administrative service in the CSD district. They were generally recruited and invited to apply for the role by LEA representatives. According to district personnel, **"Whenever**

possible, we try to assign BT coaches to schools that align with their professional backgrounds (i.e., match former high school teacher with high schools). However, that's not always feasible, so we make the most logical assignments possible, given the needs at each school and BT coach expertise that varies annually." Data presented herein represents six of the eight coaches who were employed during this exploratory study. All six interviewed were white females who attended and completed traditional teacher preparation programs in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Five of the Coaches were over the age of 60 and each had more than 30+ years teaching experience. Half of the Coaches had three or more years coaching experience. The fact that all of the Coaches who were interviewed were older white females who taught for years and who completed their own preservice programs almost 50 years ago stood out as interesting. Note that one African American Coach returned for the 2019-2020 school year but was not available to be participate in the study.

During the 2018-2019 school year, CSD employed 58 BTs who had fewer than two years teaching experience (i.e., 35 BT1s and 23 BT2s). These new teachers attended colleges and universities from across the United States but mainly institutions within the study state. The fact that the majority CSD's new teachers (53/58 = 91%) were White/Caucasian and that more than half (32/58 = 55%) were Lateral Entry stood out as interesting.

Data Collection and Analyses

To explore the actual outcomes of CSD's BT coaching initiative, various types of data were collected and analyzed from multiple sources between Fall 2013 and Spring 2019 (i.e., three years pre-implementation and three years post-implementation of coaching). For example, demographic information was collected from the BTs and the BT coaches, all BTSP resources and supporting documents were reviewed, teacher turnover data was analyzed at the state and

district level, end of year program surveys and teacher working conditions results were reviewed, observations of two coaching trainings were conducted, and interviews with six of the eight coaches and two central office program administrators were completed.

In addition, a comparison of CCS' BT Support Program with thirteen criteria discovered through analysis of current national coaching research was conducted to establish a type of baseline prior to the implementation of coaching. The thirteen tenets include components that successful, empirically-based beginning teacher support programs across the country include in their programs. These criteria were compiled after a full scholarly review and analysis of literature on new teacher support programs was conducted. In particular, the meta-analysis conducted by the New Teacher Center (2016a) entitled *Support from the Start: A 50-State Review of Policies on New Educator Induction and Mentoring*, combined with research by Bullough (2012) across four states and by Ingersoll (2012) in 15 BTSPs entitled *Beginning Teacher Induction Programs: What the Data Tells Us* served as the cornerstones.

Likewise, the work done by the New Teacher Center (2016b, 2018a, 2019) and by Kraft, Blazer, and Hogan's (2018) recent meta-analysis of the casual evidence of the effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement, served as the cornerstone for nine key criteria identified in successful, empirically-based instructional coaching programs. Each criterion was then compared to what CSD documentation and administrators claimed the district program was doing to what the BTs and BT coaches actually shared in survey and interview responses. Based on the comparisons the researchers created a ranking system to determine the extent to which CSD' BTSP was aligned with national criteria and scholarship regarding beginning teacher support and teacher coaching.

The rankings range from "Little Evidence" (LE = Criteria is either not ascertained at all or only small amounts are ascertained throughout program components) to "Evidence" (E = Criteria is ascertained to some degree throughout program components) to "Strong Evidence" (SE = Criteria is obviously ascertained and fully developed throughout program components). The analyses and triangulation of such data help bolster the validity of the findings. Note that, for this initial exploratory study, Beginning Teachers themselves were not interviewed nor were they observed, resulting in limitations of the methods and findings. A follow-up study is planned to delve deeper into BT instructional practices, effectiveness measures, and interactions with their coaches.

Findings

Crosswalk between CSD's BT Support Program and National Research

According to the literature, comprehensive Induction Programs that include a combination of mentoring, coaching, professional development, workshops, time for collaboration with peers and veteran teachers of same grade and content area, reduced workload, a focus on instructional growth, limiting after school responsibilities, frequent interaction with principals and administrators, and student support services improve teacher retention and instructional effectiveness. See Table 3 for study results and district rankings.

Table 3

CSD's Alignment with National BT Support Program Criteria and Subsequent Rankings

National Criteria	Reference	District Ranking
1) A multi-year program, spanning at least the first two years of teaching	New Teacher Center, 2016	SE
2) Sanctioned time for mentoring new teacher interactions	New Teacher Center, 2016	LE
3) Rigorous mentor selection criteria and training	New Teacher Center, 2016	E
4) Initial training and on-going professional development and support for mentors	New Teacher Center, 2016	LE
5) Pairing of new teachers and mentors in similar subject areas and grade levels	New Teacher Center, 2016	E
6) Documentation and evidence of new teacher growth	New Teacher Center, 2016	LE
7) Time for collaboration with veteran teachers	Bullough, 2012	E
8) Professional development opportunities specific to BT needs	Bullough, 2012	E
9) Frequent feedback on instructional practices	Bullough, 2012	E
10) Facilities (i.e., clean, safe, and well-equipped working environment essential to new teacher retention).	Bullough, 2012	E
11) Curricular support that is aligned and flexible	Bullough, 2012	LE
12) Principal Leadership that actively promotes teacher support and growth	Bullough, 2012	E
13) Comprehensive Induction Programs	Ingersoll, 2012 New Teacher Center, 2016	E

Based on the beginning teacher portion of the state TWC Survey of 2014, 2016, and 2018 and CSD's BT survey, all BTs in Clover County Schools reported participating in some form of beginning teacher support. BTs indicated that mentoring and peer teacher support were their most important asset for improving instruction and providing emotional support. Data indicated

that CSD had evidence and/or strong evidence of nine of the thirteen BTSP criteria. Sanctioned time with mentors, relevant PD, documented evaluation and curricular support were four areas lacking evidence. BTs reported that professional development often did not meet their needs in lesson planning, classroom management, technology use designed for their individual school, and/or ways to differentiate instruction for the diverse learners in a regular classroom. BTs stressed the need for more time with peers who teach the same subject and/or grade level. Additional concerns were in the area of analyzing student achievement data. The effectiveness of the existing BTSP was difficult to measure in the areas of student achievement and teacher job satisfaction and was beyond the scope of this study. The purpose of this initial analysis was just to establish program components prior to the coaching piece (i.e., focal point of this study) being added.

Crosswalk between CSD's BT Coaching Program and National Research

Table 4 provides a comparison of CSD' BT Coaching Program with the nine criteria discovered through analysis of current national coaching research. To avoid speculation about what each criterion looks like and/or means, the sub-sections following the table provide greater clarification. Most of the information below was compiled by the New Teacher Center (2016a, 2016b, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2019) and presented in their *High Quality Mentoring & Instructional Coaching Practices Resource Brief.*

Table 4

Comparison of CSD' BT Coaching Program and BT Coach Perceptions with Nine Criteria from Current Research

	National Criteria	CSD BT Coaching Program	CSD BT Coaching Program Perceptions	Ranking
1.	***Rigorous coach selection process** –* qualities may include: evidence of outstanding teaching practice, strong intra- and inter-personal skills, experience with adult learners, respect of peers, current knowledge of professional development New Teacher Center, 2016	Instructional coaches are primarily retired educators with prior teaching and administrative service in the CSD district. The coaches are generally recruited and invited to apply by LEA representatives. When possible, coaches are assigned schools that align with their professional background	The hiring process for the six coaches was not consistent. The one commonality was that all of the coaches were retired CSD employees. Four of the coaches were hired due to their familiarity with the district. The other two coaches were requested directly by a principal who knew them previously.	LE
2.	***Clear roles and responsibilities for administrators** –* professional development for administrators and ongoing communication with them about the needs of new teachers, and the nature of the program ensures that they partner to provide teacher support aligned to the school vision New Teacher Center, 2016	Principal and coach meet at beginning of year to discuss roles and responsibilities. Coach and principal establish communication plan for coach to share information with the principal. Principal supports coach in orientation to the building	The coaches and the Principal initially meet at the beginning of the school year to determine which strategies and teacher practices to focus on. Coaches claim to stay in contact with the Principal throughout the year through informal drop-ins and hallway interactions.	LE
3.	***Collaboration with all stakeholders** –*including administration, school boards, union/association	Coach provides written and/or face-to-face non-evaluative feedback to the Principal in accordance with the	Coaches meet with Principal at the beginning of the year. Periodic informal drop-ins and hallway	LE

leadership, and professional partners, creates a culture of commitment and ensures success 　　　New Teacher Center, 2016	schedule established by the Principal and BT Coach	interactions with the Principal help coaches stay in contact. Coaches attend regularly scheduled coaching meetings hosted by central office.	
4. *Comprehensive training* – high quality and ongoing training is needed to assist coaches in developing the necessary skills to identify and translate the elements of effective teaching to teachers. 　　　New Teacher Center, 2018 　　　New Teacher Center, 2019	Coaches are provided with a multi-hour orientation session where they are introduced to the role and provided information regarding serving their BTs. The coaches also meet several other times throughout the year (twice in 2018, five times in 2019) and are provided access to online resources that familiarize them with current frameworks utilized by the district.	All of the coaches attended a three hour orientation, which was hosted by the district. Coaches perceived their regular coaches meetings as professional development, but could not identify any specific training related to coaching skill and practice.	LE
5. *Individualized* – coaching sessions are one-on-one 　Kraft, Blazer, & Hogan, 2018 　　　New Teacher Center, 2019	Coaches meet one-on-one with their BTs. Beginning Teacher Inventory is used to establish a focus for the year. Data is gathered through the coaching cycle to inform coaching	The primary focuses of the coaching program according to the coaches are support, encouragement, and teacher growth. The support may look different from teacher to teacher depending on needs.	E
6. *Intensive* – coaches and teachers interact at least every couple of weeks	Coaches meet with BTs on a regular schedule with the following time allotted: BT1 = 2 hr/wk; BT2 = 1 hr/wk; BT3 = 1 hr/mo. District Support	Coaches cited that they meet with their teachers at least once per week. BT1s receive two hours per week of coaching and BT2s receive one	E

continued

Kraft, Blazer, & Hogan, 2018	Plan Schools are allotted one additional hour per week per BT.	hour. It is unclear if BT3s receive any support.	
7. *Sustained* – teachers receive coaching throughout a semester or academic year (i.e. between 18 weeks and 36 weeks) Kraft, Blazer, & Hogan, 2018 New Teacher Center, 2019	Coaching is provided for BTs for 22 to 25 weeks (per school year) from October through April. The coaching cycle takes place during BTs' first three years in the teaching profession (BT1, BT2, & BT3) [Program start date in October is unfavorable when compared to research suggestions. Research suggests an early start to the coaching cycle – as early as late-July]	Coaches are in their schools for 22 to 25 weeks. To alleviate any early BT struggles, the coaches suggest starting the coaching program earlier in the school year.	E
8. *Context-specific* – teachers are coached on their practices within the context of their own classroom, including subject content and level Kraft, Blazer, & Hogan, 2018 Ingersoll, 2012 New Teacher Center, 2019	Coaches conduct classroom observations w/ feedback, teach model lessons as needed, review lesson plans and provide face-to-face feedback, videotape BT's lesson and collaboratively review and provide feedback, observe w/ BT a minimum of one "effective teacher", conduct additional activities as needed	Meetings can cover pedagogy, resources, advice, or being a willing listener. In the classroom context, instructional guidance may be provided by: role-playing, co-teaching (minimal), formal and informal observations with feedback, observation of other teachers in the district. The coaches meet and/or observe the teacher in their classroom setting.	LE
9. *Focused* – coaches work with teachers to engage in deliberate practice of specific research-based	Desired initiative outcomes include: a) Improve the instructional	The coaches did not discuss any research-based skills that they incorporated with their	LE

| skills focused on instruction | effectiveness of BTs b) Increase BT retention rate c) Promote a positive and optimistic perspective of the teaching profession. During Coach Orientation information is provided on the following frameworks: | coaching. Multiple coaches expressed their unfamiliarity with the BT's subject as reason for not finding more resources. Multiple coaches referenced locating resources for BTs but implied that this was beyond what was actually expected. The coaches mentioned their orientation materials as the only professional resources they received from the district. |
| Kraft, Blazer, & Hogan, 2018 New Teacher Center, 2019 | K-5 Literacy Framework, K-5 Benchmark and Assessments, K-5 Math Framework, Science Kit Rotations, K-3 Formative Assessment, Rigor Levels – Depth of Knowledge and Bloom's Levels | |

Rigorous Coach Selection Process

Reminded by Ingersoll (2012) that the factors with the strongest link between beginning teacher support programs and their retention are "having a coach from one's subject area and having common planning or collaboration time with other teachers in one's subject area" (p.50), the selection process should be rigorous. The New Teacher Center (2016b) states that without this process coaches may be selected based more on availability or seniority rather than specific qualifications for engaging in meaningful coaching relationships with teachers. The coaches hired to work with CSD BTs were all retired educators from the district. All of the coaches were hired because of familiarity with the district or personal request by a principal. It is unclear how much consideration was given to the coaches' current knowledge of curriculum content and the instructional strategies necessary to improve student learning. (Rating: LE)

Clear Roles and Responsibilities for Administrators

National criteria recommends that administrators have clearly defined roles and responsibilities with regarding to coaches. The program should provide professional development opportunities for administrators to learn about the needs of new teachers. There should also be ongoing communication between coaches and administrators to ensure teachers are receiving support that aligns to the school's vision. CSD states that the Principal and coach should meet at the beginning of the year to discuss roles and responsibilities of all parties included in the coaching program. A communication plan should also be established at this time to share information. The CSD coaches did confirm that initial meetings with school administrators do take place. However, communication throughout the school year was informal in nature and included occasional hallway interactions and/or drop-ins to the Principal's office. (Rating: LE)

Collaboration with All Stakeholders

National criteria identifies a need for ongoing collaboration with all stakeholders throughout the coaching program. According to the New Teacher Center (2016b), such collaboration establishes strong partnerships and alignments between all parties who may be supporting BTs and/or providing them with information and materials. Without a strong partnership, "instructional initiatives can be undermined" which may lead to teachers receiving "mixed messages from varying support providers" (p. 2). Instead of supporting BTs, this situation could leave the teacher feeling overwhelmed or frustrated by all of the various forms of information. During the CSD coaching program, the majority of communication occurred between school level administrators, school curriculum coaches, and the BT coaches. Coaches

did attend a district led orientation session, however, the coaches identified no additional communication. (Rating: LE)

Comprehensive Training

National criteria concludes that for a coaching program to be successful there must be high quality, ongoing training provided for the coaches. Research documents that this training is needed to assist the coaches in developing the necessary skills to identify and translate the elements of effective teaching to teachers (New Teacher Center 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d; 2019). CSD coaches attended a three-hour orientation session prior to starting with their BTs. The coach orientation focused primarily on the requirements of the program (communication with Principals, etc.) and how to log coaching visits. The orientation session also informed coaches of the different digital information they needed to work with the BTs. When asked about prior and/or ongoing PD sessions, the coaches were not able to identify any specific training that was specific to coaching skills and practice. (Rating: LE)

Individualized

National criteria stresses the importance of coaching sessions that are individualized. By having one-on-one sessions, the coach may work with a teacher on their specific needs. This accommodation would not be possible in large group settings. The CSD program is designed for coaches to meet one-on-one with their BTs. The BT Inventory is supposed to be used to establish a focus for the year. Coaches mentioned that their primary focus when working with BTs was support, encouragement, and teacher growth. The support provided may look different depending on an individual teacher's needs. (Rating: E)

Intensive

To provide an effective experience, national criteria states that coaches and teachers should interact at least every couple of weeks. The CSD program allows for coaches to meet with their BTs as follows: BT1 = 2hr/wk; BT2 = 1hr/wk. Coaches working with BTs in District Support Plan Schools are allotted one additional hour per week per BT. Coaches are compensated based on this hourly allotment. (Rating: E)

Sustained

To reach maximum results, coaching should be sustained over an extended period of time. Nation research claims that teachers should receive coaching throughout a semester or entire academic year. This translates to roughly 18 to 36 weeks of continuous coaching. The coaches in CSD worked with their BTs for 22 to 25 weeks per school year. The coaches typically started in their schools in late-October and worked until April. Coaches suggested starting the program at the beginning of the school year to alleviate any early BT struggles. (Rating: E)

Context-Specific

National criteria addresses the importance of context within the coaching practice. Research claims that teachers should be coached on their practices within the context of their own classroom. According to Kraft, Blazer, and Hogan (2018) the context of the classroom goes beyond the teacher's pedagogical practices and also covers: "teacher-student interactions (e.g. relationships), student-content interactions (e.g., student-engagement), and the interactions among teachers, students, and content (e.g., classroom climate)" (p. 554). Because of this, NTC's (2016, 2018) research and experience indicates that the pairing of new teachers and mentors/coaches in similar subject areas and grade levels is critical to success and teacher retention. According to CSD, coaches were available to provide the following services to their

BTs: conduct classroom observations w/ feedback, teach model lessons as needed, review lesson plans and provide face-to-face feedback, videotape BT's lesson and collaboratively review and provide feedback, observe w/ BT a minimum of one "effective teacher", conduct additional activities as needed. According to the coaches, they met with their BTs to address pedagogy, resources, and advice. They were also available to be a willing listener and to provide emotional support. In regards to the classroom context, coaches may provide support via role-playing, co-teaching, observations, and observations of other teachers. However, limited acknowledgment of student-teacher relationships, pedagogical content knowledge, differentiated instruction, assessments, technology use, and classroom climate was provided by the coaches. (Rating: LE)

Focused

National criteria also concludes that the coaching that occurs must be focused. Coaches should work with their teachers to engage in deliberate practice of specific research-based skills focused on instruction. According to Kraft, Blazer, and Hogan (2018), coaching activities selected should 1) maintain a focus towards implementing curriculum and/or pedagogical frameworks or 2) should be used as the core development tool. The coaches had difficulty identifying any research-based resources or practices they used with their BTs. Multiple coaches expressed their unfamiliarity with the BT's subject content as a reason for not being more effective while others referenced assistance in locating additional resources but implied that this was beyond what was expected of the coaching role. The coaches mentioned their orientation materials as the only professional resources they received from the district. (Rating: LE)

Conclusion

Despite having a system in place for its BT coaching program, CSD did not appear to be aligned with national criteria and empirical scholarship regarding teacher coaching. When the

coaching program, along with CSD's coaches perceptions about the program, were compared to national research, only three (3) out of nine (9) categories showed evidence of meeting the criteria. These results do not indicate that the coaching program is inadequate. They simply show how CSD's program aligns, or doesn't align, with national research on the topic. In the following section the researchers provide a conclusion and potential recommendations regarding the CSD BT coaching program.

Discussion: Response to Desired Outcomes and Research Questions

An initial assessment of Clover County Schools' Beginning Teacher Coaching Program has yielded a few conclusions in response to the three desired outcomes that the district identified as the coaching program was implemented and the four research questions that directed the researchers' investigation. Specific attention was paid to both espoused and enacted practices regarding "instructional effectiveness."

Outcome #1: Improve the Instructional Effectiveness of BTs

This study did not statistically measure the instructional effectiveness of the CSD BTs to determine whether their practices improved as a result of coaching. However, depending on how instructional effectiveness is defined by CSD, there is substantial evidence of the positive impact of BT coaching on classroom management and organization for the BTs, both of which are necessary components of "instructional effectiveness." As a reminder, "NTC makes a clear and compelling case for coaching as a driver of instructional improvement," (2019, p. 4). However, despite positive feedback received from BTs on the TWC survey reflecting agreement that coaching improved their instructional practice, BT Coach interview responses actually revealed limited impact. The notion of "instructional effectiveness" is complex and involves multiple tools, techniques and strategies to optimize student learning via understanding of context, how

students learn, how they process information, what motivates them and what impedes their learning process. The researchers found evidence of BT Coach discussions regarding the "what" of teaching but little evidence of discussions regarding curriculum and the "why, when and how" of students' conceptual understanding, thinking and reasoning.

During their interviews, CSD's BT Coaches reported that "encouragement and support" were the primary focuses of the BT Coaching Program. However, according to the New Teacher Center (2019), "Sharing resources, providing emotional support and helping new teachers manage stress is important, but…discussing instructional strategies, observing and discussing lessons, and modeling instruction is critically more important [with an] intentional and intensive focus on advanced standards-based knowledge and skills" (p.7). The latter were practices mentioned less frequently during BT and Coach interactions. For example, competencies, behaviors and consistency in the gradual blending of structured and independent learning-oriented teaching strategies, in the enactment of active, experiential learning and student engagement, and in instructional planning that sequences correctly, differentiates, questions effectively and anticipates misconceptions were never mentioned. Likewise, the systematic and integrative presentation of content assumed necessary for mastery, including lower and higher order objectives and opportunities, were also absent from responses.

Beginning teachers need coaching in understanding assessments, in using data, in monitoring student understanding, and in connecting data to appropriate instructional strategies. Cognitive activation (e.g., strategies that encourage students to think more deeply in order to find solutions and to focus on their methods instead of just the answer), pedagogical content knowledge, and meta-cognitive strategies (e.g., helping students understand the way they learn, processes designed for students to think about their thinking) are all critical components of

"instructional effectiveness." Unfortunately, little evidence was offered during this study to support an affirmative response to BT Coaches actually improving the "instructional effectiveness" of BTs. Likewise, there was a lack of evidence (via data collection strategies) of rigor, data disaggregation, differentiated instruction and/or digital learning for both BTs and Coaches.

Outcome #2: Increase BT Retention Rate

Although CSD desired to see an increase in its BT retention rate as a result of the Coaching Program data actually supports a decrease in this rate. Between 2013 and 2018, CSD employed an average of 100 BTs each year (with a range of 94 to 104 BT1s, BT2s, and BT3s). This included traditional beginning teachers as well as lateral entry teachers who were new to the profession. The turnover rate for BTs during that same timeframe actually increased from 14.71% in 2013-14 to 18.56% in 2017-18 (with a range of 13.83% in 2016-17 to 19.23% in 2015-16). On average, CSD loses approximately 17 "new" teachers each year and their turnover rate has been consistently higher than the state average for the past three years (17.21% versus 13.10% for 2015 to 2018).

A closer examination of CSD data does indicate a slight decrease in BT turnover rates when the data is analyzed "before" 2016 and "after" 2016 when CSD implemented the BT Coaching Program. For example, from 2013 to 2016, CSD' BT turnover rate was 17.25%. From 2016 to 2018, the rate decreased to 16.20%. Additional trends indicate that CSD is hiring significantly more Lateral Entry (LEs) teachers than they had previously (with an increase of 13 in 2013-14 to 35 in 2017-18) and those LEs are actually being retained at higher rates than traditional BTs (e.g., 11.43% turnover in 2017-18 versus 23.08% turnover in 2013-14).

For those BTs who remained in the district, their decision to remain at their schools was best supported in their responses to the TWC survey question which asked whether "Overall the additional support I received as a new teacher has been important in my decision to continue teaching at this school." In 2014, 2016 and 2018, the overwhelming majority of responses to this question by CSD BTs was either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" with an average of 74% in agreement each year.

Outcome #3: Promote a positive and optimistic perspective of the teaching profession

CSD supports the promotion of a positive and optimistic perspective of the teaching profession for its BTs through its BT Support and Coaching Program initiatives. According to survey results (average completion rate of 67%), the majority of beginning teachers felt that "the BT Coach support received during the school year was beneficial." The percentage of BT1s and BT2s who either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement was reported at 82% in 2016-2017, 52% in 2017-2018, and 97% in 2018-2019. Based on 2018-2019 BT Survey results, when asked to rate the impact of the BT Coach Program on their overall effectiveness as a teacher, 90% of the BT respondents claimed that coaching had a "Significant Positive" or "Positive" impact, while only 10% believed that coaching had "No Impact" on their effectiveness as teachers.

These sentiments are interesting in that they seem to indicate the "promotion of positive and optimistic perspectives of the teaching profession" via CSD's BT Coaching Program but the retention data does not verify that claim. This begs the question of why the data points are misaligned. As noted earlier, CSDs' BT Coaches provided a lot of "support and encouragement" but not necessarily a lot of specific tools, techniques and/or supportive opportunities for BTs to communicate clear goals, acknowledge responsibility for student learning, and actually help and

enable students to reach desired outcomes. All of these components are necessary for "instructional effectiveness" and for teacher efficacy!

Response to Research Questions

According to the New Teacher Center (2018a), instructional coaching "develops the expertise of teacher-leaders to support the professional growth of individuals or teams of teachers, with priority focus on content standards, social and emotional learning and diverse needs" (p. 1C). Despite a range of focuses, when it comes to producing change in practice, Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) point out that the most valuable learning opportunities are "situated within the context of teachers' work, sustained over time, include support for on-going learning, and focus on matters of instruction, specifically, pedagogical skills and content knowledge" (p. 182). Related to this, effective coaches often have the autonomy to plan and facilitate detailed, content specific PD that is designed for their BTs' specific content areas, instructional frameworks, and evaluation systems (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Unfortunately, little evidence was found to suggest that CSD's BT Coaches are in fact engaging in many of these empirically-based effective practices to move both teacher practice and student learning forward. The only evidence obtained through Coach interviews and BT surveys to support the development of general pedagogical skills was uncovered in the area of classroom management. This discrete skill was referenced numerous times by Coaches as a focal point for BT meetings and instructional guidance. Otherwise, there was little evidence of other intensive, discrete BT skills and instructional guidance being nurtured and/or modeled by Coaches. Based on these findings, the following recommendations have been made for the CSD BT Coaching Program (see Table 5). These recommendations represent only a snapshot of the strengths of the program and suggested areas in need of further focus in direct response to data collected and analyzed.

Table 5

Recommendations Based on What's Working and What Could Be Improved

What's Working?	What Could Be Improved?
Sound BTSP in place (structurally and logistically), including Coaching for BTs	Fidelity of implementation of program goals based on empirical research and scholarship
Database for sharing related resources between BTs and Coaches (e.g., portal, website, document links, etc.)	Ongoing PD for BTs and Coaches in technology, especially in digital learning
Various forms of data collection (e.g., walkthroughs, observations, instructional feedback form), along with feedback opportunities identified by the CSD district	Response rates on feedback tools could be improved if required rather than optional; encourage honest feedback and use of observation data to improve instruction and monitor progress
Encouragement and support elements of the program	Improve and deepen Coach's role to have a more rigorous and lasting impact on BT instructional practice rather than primarily for emotional support
Recognition of communication between administrators and BT Coaches as important	Communication between program coordinators and administrators and BT Coaches could be more structured
Responsiveness of Program Coordinators to requests and feedback from BTs and Coaches (e.g., program start date earlier, lengthened the program, more Coach meetings, training sites at schools not all at district office, etc.)	Start program earlier and increase the length of the program; acknowledgement and support of BTs' "phases of first-year teachers' attitudes towards teaching" (NTC); offer PD sessions regarding instructional and curricular competencies and behaviors
Emphasis on classroom organization and management	Emphasis on the complexity of "instructional effectiveness," including multiple tools, techniques and strategies to optimize student learning via various routes and processes
Program alignment with district goals	Alignment of Coaches with common grade levels and content areas (should be strategic, not just convenient); evaluation of program requirements and implementation of them

Equitable distribution of resources across district and schools	Address disproportionately large percentage of BTs in all three district middle schools and a few select elementary schools
Small BT-to-Coach ratio (low numbers of BTs assigned to each Coach)	No real support for BT3s although original CSD plan states that it is a 3-year program
Structure in place for BT Coach requirements, yet flexibility in implementation for Coaches	Amount of flexibility (along with lack of rigor and assessment) in implementation of coaching requirements
Selection of BT Coaches based on proximity and familiarity with school	Selection of BT Coaches based on expertise "match" regarding grade level and content; diversify BT Coaches hires to align with district demographics

Conclusion

Clover County Schools has developed a standards-aligned, goal-driven, teacher-centered program to support and encourage its beginning teachers. Research supports CSD' primary focus of providing support to BTs through its Coaching Program, yet places much more emphasis on modeling, discussing, and analyzing instruction with an intensive focus on advanced standards-based skills for development of the most effective coaching programs. By revisiting the district's commitment to fidelity in implementation of program goals based on research and literature, Clover County Schools has the potential to solidify itself as a frontrunner in the state's initiative to improve student achievement through instructional effectiveness of all of its teachers, including BTs.

In their 2019 report *Evidence-Based Coaching: Key Drivers of Scalable Improvement District-Wide*, the New Teacher Center (NTC) makes a clear and compelling case for coaching as a facilitator of instructional improvement. Having said that, NTC found that many districts

across the country that already have some type of coaching program in place do not always implement their programs in ways that lead to success. For example, one of NTC's major findings is that "coaches spend little time actually coaching, and time spent coaching is not instructionally focused" (p.4). This study found the same thing. Without a laser-like focus on instruction, the impact on achievement is limited. Sharing resources, providing emotional support and helping new teachers manage stress is important but, according to NTC, discussing instructional strategies, observing and discussing lessons, and modeling instruction is critically more important. "Intentional and intensive focus on advanced standards-based knowledge and skills" (p.7) is at the heart of the NTC model and, given limited time, is "essential for the continuous, career-long professional learning and support that every teacher requires and deserves" (p.7). "more intentional leadership practices that promote and develop an aligned and coherent instructional vision supported through coaching" are necessary (p. 3) to "drive instructional improvement, build collective efficacy, and transform school culture" (p.13).

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