

Policies to Support New Teachers

Joan Montgomery Halford

The specter of severe teacher shortages, coupled with the persistent public focus on the quality of education, is making keeping qualified educators in classrooms a priority for policymakers. To attract and retain better teachers, legislators generally identify two broad approaches: (1) increasing teacher salaries and (2) addressing inadequate support for novices. The latter is gaining currency with voters—and induction programs to support new teachers are becoming a popular platform for elected officials.

Induction Is an Electric Education Policy

Policies to establish teacher mentoring programs are sweeping the nation. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have instituted some form of mentoring.¹ These state efforts differ markedly in both the level of fiscal support for new teachers and the percentage of new teachers served. Ten of the states do not fund the programs fully and do not mandate school district participation. And, of course, the existence of state-backed programs to support new educators does not necessarily mean that novices are receiving the assistance they may need.

California, a bellwether state for many education policies, recently expanded its Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program to include all schools districts in the state (see Olebe, Jackson, & Danielson, p. 41). This Golden State plan, which involves research that may be of national use, is the best funded in the United States. And as in several other states, California policymakers have formulated a program that essentially leverages significant district-level finan-

cial support for new teachers with state funding.

A number of other states are also funding initiatives to assist new teachers. Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, and Oklahoma have each dedicated more than \$1 million to mentoring programs. Beyond ponying up funding, legislators are also looking to other education initiatives to maximize the impact of this support. In several states, policymakers have paired state-funded mentoring with the efforts of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Experienced teachers who serve as mentors in these states receive significant stipends and recognition when they seek NBPTS certification.

The Federal Focus

As the 106th Congress addresses the reauthorization of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act, beginning with the emotionally charged debate over the future of Title I, policy discussions about the specifics of support for new teachers will be more common in state capitals. However, given the Clinton administration's class-size reduction and teacher-quality initiatives, the matter of retaining novice educators is far from dead at the federal level. Further, some pundits predict that Congressional Republicans will soon spearhead efforts to revamp preservice teacher preparation in universities. ■

¹ Hirsch, E., Koppich, J. E., & Knapp, M. S. (1998, December). *What states are doing to improve the quality of teaching: A brief review of current patterns and trends.* (Working Paper). Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.

Joan Montgomery Halford is Senior Associate Editor of *Educational Leadership* (e-mail: jhalford@ascd.org).

The Advocate's Toolbox

Telephone Calls: Convincing Conversation

Reaching out and touching policymakers—by telephone—continues to be a mainstay of education advocacy efforts. The following tips will help you make your calls to elected officials count:

- **Preparation.** The key to effective telephone calls is in the preparation. Before you lift the receiver, jot down a few talking points—and be prepared to leave a voice-mail message if necessary.

- **Conversation.** When you telephone a legislator's office, ask to speak with the legislative aide responsible for covering education issues. If the aide is not available, leave a clear message, including your name and address, with the person who answers the phone. You might begin by saying, "I'm Jane Educator calling from Anytown, and I'd like to leave a message for Congressperson Smith." State the issue you are calling about and what you want your representative to do. Be as brief as possible, recognizing that legislative offices are very busy.

- **Follow-up.** Be sure to thank elected officials for telephone conversations. A follow-up letter is a perfect opportunity to restate your position and include additional materials, such as a position statement or relevant articles.