

Cincinnati Public School District

Overview

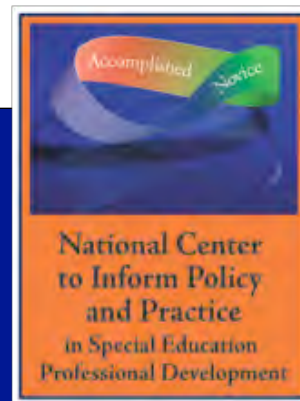
The Cincinnati Public School District (CPS) provides a one-year induction and mentoring program for beginning teachers. Beginning teachers are assigned a consulting teacher (CT) who acts as both an evaluator and a mentor during the beginner's first year in CPS. Beginners are also invited to attend frequent professional development sessions designed to help teachers align the district's standards to specific content and grade levels.

What makes Cincy tick?

- Focused mentoring conversations
 - ~ Build upon observations
 - ~ Allow for individualized goal setting and recommendations for improving practice
- District-wide use of a teacher evaluation instrument
 - ~ Establishes common expectations
 - ~ Facilitates communication among novices, mentors, and administrators
- Regularly scheduled professional development
 - ~ Targets novice special education teachers
 - ~ Provides opportunities to collaborate with general education teachers

Program Rationale

The CPS induction program was developed in 1985 to ensure a high quality teacher workforce by supporting and evaluating beginning teachers.



“I think the way that we have structured support and appraisal in this district is fair ...

It is respectful both of the role of the administrator and of expert teachers in the classroom.

I have great respect for the teachers that are selected for the CT position and for the hard work they do.”

-Principal



“First and foremost I see the consulting teacher’s role as supporting beginning teachers in their professional development by providing them with resources, exemplary sets of behaviors, and all instructional tools they need to be successful at their job.”

- Principal

District Context

CPS is Ohio’s third largest school district with 58 schools across a 90-mile area. This large, urban district currently serves approximately 34,680 students from pre-school through 12th grade. The district is largely African-American (68.8%) and Caucasian (23.7%). Approximately two-thirds of enrolled students receive free or reduced lunch. CPS currently provides special education services to approximately 7,800 students, or 22% of the total student population. The district has a strong teacher union and collective bargaining that ensures collaboration between the district and teachers.

Program Goal

All teachers reach a minimum of basic quality requirements on each of the district teaching standards.

Components

CT evaluation and mentoring is the foundation of the program, providing beginning teachers with the majority of assistance they receive. CTs observe beginners a minimum of four times, completing two informal and two formal evaluations. Beginning teachers are also invited to attend a practicum designed by CTs. The practicum is a series of professional development meetings focused on classroom practice and teaching standards.

Evaluation and Support of Beginners

The CPS induction and mentoring program centers on a high-stakes teacher evaluation. CT evaluations of new teachers inform hiring decisions and contract renewals. Mentors typically arrive in a novice’s classroom unannounced for observation to provide the CT with an authentic view of the teacher’s instructional skills.

The evaluation instrument is based on fifteen standards, adopted from Charlotte Danielson’s research on teacher evaluation. Danielson worked as a consultant with CPS for several years and helped design the district’s *placemat*, a rubric containing standards that teachers are expected to meet in four domains: planning and preparing for student learning, creating an environment for learning, teaching for learning, and professionalism. During observations, CTs rely on the placemat to guide evaluations of beginning teachers. Each standard is scored as *distinguished* (4), *proficient* (3), *basic* (2), or *unsatisfactory* (1). Beginning teachers are required to obtain scores of at least ‘basic’ on all standards, by the end of the year while teachers new to the district with four or more years of experience are required to obtain scores of at least *proficient* on all standards. CTs observe beginners and rate teachers on each of the





fifteen standards. If any standard area is rated below the required level, CTs are required to give recommendations for improvement. Beginners who are unable to meet the basic level in all fifteen areas by the end of the year are non-renewed.



Consulting Teachers

CPS assigns a CT to each beginning teacher. CTs are full-time mentors responsible for a maximum of 14 new hires each year. CTs provide orientation to the district and help beginners refine their teaching skills. CTs are matched as closely as possible with beginning teachers in both area and discipline. Beginning special education teachers are guaranteed a CT with special education experience, and reasonable efforts are made to match a beginner and CT with similar experience in grade level, content, and disability area.

Consulting Teacher Selection

To apply for a CT position, a teacher must be classified as a lead

teacher, the highest level on the Cincinnati teaching ladder. To become a lead teacher, teachers must undergo a rigorous application process that includes a written application, a classroom observation, and an interview. Teachers become eligible to apply for lead teacher status when they have scored in the distinguished level on all teacher evaluations. Applications for lead teacher include nine essay questions, which approximately 40% of applicants pass. Teachers are also required to list six references, four of whom are contacted. A Peer Review Panel is used to select and oversee lead teachers applying for mentoring positions. According to the district's program director, many teachers apply for lead teacher status several times before being accepted.

Once teachers achieve lead teacher status, they may apply for a CT position. Potential CTs provide recommendations and are interviewed by the program director. When hired, CTs are released from classroom responsibilities for up to 3 years in order to concentrate exclusively on mentoring and evaluation responsibilities.

Consulting Teacher Training

CTs attend a 10-day district training in the summer. The teacher evaluation system serves as the focus of the training. Experienced CTs help beginning CTs practice

“My role is to assist beginning teachers in their areas of need based on the placemat. I’m not just looking for random things, I’m looking for the domains that we’ve outlined on the placemat because that’s the way we observe them. Then we can assist them based on best practices and the way they should be implementing them.”

-Consulting Teacher



assessing teachers in videotaped lessons and live classes. New CTs must pass two assessments. The first involves gathering evidence; the second is based on determining performance levels. Finally, CTs are required to pass a certification test to ensure reliability among evaluators. CTs are also required to participate in bi-weekly “norming sessions.” During these sessions, CTs work together and learn from one another. To strengthen their teacher assessment skills, CTs discuss the CPS placemat and rubric language in detail. These sessions also provide a forum for addressing CTs’ mentoring challenges and developing increased understanding of specific topics and disability areas.

Consulting Teacher Mentoring Sessions

During the first half of the year, consulting teachers meet at least one time per week with beginning teachers. The placemat rubric provides the primary context for mentoring sessions. Teachers are encouraged to use the rubric standards as a guide for planning and implementing their lessons. Performance on evaluations drives the focus of subsequent mentoring sessions. For their contract to be renewed, beginning teachers must receive scores of at least 2 (basic) across all of the placemat standards. Beginning teachers who receive unsatisfactory scores are observed

an additional four times and given specific recommendations to improve their ratings prior to contract renewal. CTs may also provide assistance to beginning teachers in obtaining or arranging for classroom materials, reviewing the curriculum, suggesting and discussing teaching and classroom management techniques, record keeping, teaching or co-teaching, and planning for instruction. On average, CTs spend between 40-100 hours a year with each beginning teacher. CTs communicate with beginning teachers utilizing various forms of communication, including email, phone, and face-to-face contact.

Practicum

All new teachers are invited to attend a practicum class two times per month in the fall, and once a month in the spring (a total of 11 sessions). Practicum sessions are taught by CTs and are broken down by grade level and content area.

For beginning special educators, sessions are tailored to their specific needs and broken down by grade level, content, and disability. Specifically, CTs focus on assisting beginning special educators in applying the placemat rubric to their classroom contexts. Practicum sessions also give beginners a place to share concerns and ideas with their peers. Beginning teachers have

the option of also attending general education practicum sessions to collaborate with their general education peers and improve teaching skills in the content areas.



“I could call my consulting teacher at any time and ask her anything, and she always offered to meet with me. She would come in and work with the kids with me, she would come in and observe me in different settings, she observed science, math, pullout--she pretty much hit every area.”

-Beginning Teacher



Funding and Sustainability

The CPS induction program has been functioning continuously for 25 years. This long-term sustainability is partially a result of a strong teachers' union influence in the district. Included in the district's teacher contract is a provision that incorporates mentoring support for all beginning teachers in their first year. As a result, the induction program is seen as an important support in the district. The CPS induction program is funded through district monies. CTs work full-time, are released from the classroom for 3 years, and receive \$6,500 stipend per year for their efforts.

Program Evaluation

CPS does not conduct a program evaluation or collect teacher retention data. However, researchers in two separate studies established a positive relationship between teachers' evaluation scores and student achievement growth in math, reading, and science (Milanowski, 2004; Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten, 2009). Unfortunately, while these studies included special education teachers in their sample, the researchers did not report separately on special education teachers. It is unknown if the teacher evaluation in CPS also predicts student achievement for students with disabilities.

Challenges

For the past 25 years, CPS has recognized the importance of incorporating an induction and mentoring program. Beginning teachers are ensured a full-time mentor committed to assisting them achieve a basic level of teaching skills. This commitment can be seen in CPS acknowledging challenges they face in supporting beginning special education teachers and actively working to create solutions.

District Evaluation

While several outside organizations have evaluated the program, the CPS induction and mentoring program currently has no formal internal program evaluation

process. CPS would like to construct an evaluation including retention rates and satisfaction of beginners, CTs, and building administrators.

Hiring Special Education CTs

Because CTs must be classified as lead teachers, the pool of qualified special educators is limited. Principals in the district are reluctant to recommend their best special educators to serve as CTs, because they have difficulty filling vacant special education positions.

Coordinating Co-teaching

With the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom, CPS has implemented more co-teaching classrooms. General and special education CTs often have differing views of the roles and responsibilities of teachers in a co-teaching classroom. These differences create conflicts for beginning teachers in co-teaching contexts. CPS would like to provide professional development and collaboration for the general and special education CTs to understand multiple viewpoints and present more cohesive support for all beginners in co-teaching settings.

Closing

CPS offers a unique look at combining mentoring and evaluation of beginning teachers. The district's tight concentration on the placemat focuses mentoring conversations and aligns expectations for teacher performance. The strict qualifications for proven high quality teachers ensure the best teachers are mentoring beginners. Due to the high-stakes nature of the evaluation, mentoring recommendations are direct. The optional practicum sessions offer special educators specific assistance in applying the placemat to their classroom contexts and provide opportunities to collaborate with general education peers. Many state policies expressly forbid mentors from participating in the evaluation of their mentees. We understand the logic of such policies, but we also believe that CPS offers an example of a program in which mentors successfully perform both roles.