Executive Summary

NCIPP Design Panel Meeting – June 24-26, 2009

Agenda and Summaries

Wednesday, June 24, 2009

Meeting Overview

Washington, DC, Quiz – Mary Brownell

Introduction to NCIPP – Mary Brownell & Paul Sindelar
Design Panel members were greeted and provided a brief description of NCIPP and its purpose. The NCIPP was established to inform special education teacher policy and practice leading to greater leading to greater retention and improved teacher quality.

Paper Findings – Erica McCray and Meg Kamman

State Policy Analysis reviewed all 50 states and reported that 48 states have an induction and mentoring policy, rule, or program. Additionally, the following seven factors were shown to be important to state policy governing induction & mentoring: mentor selection, mentor/mentee matching and assignment, mentor training, specificity for program delivery, program evaluation structure, and adequate resource provision. Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania were the only states that made any mention of special education provisions, with varying specificity. The team suggests policy sets the stage for induction and mentoring, but should be broad enough to tailor induction and mentoring to meet the unique needs of districts.

Induction and Mentoring emphasized the needs and concerns identified in the literature that beginning special education teachers discuss. Awareness of these needs and concerns assists professionals involved with beginners plan appropriate support structures. The literature and induction programs designed specifically to support beginning special educators suggests a: focus on mentoring as the primary beginning teacher support, support structure to include training, explicate the roles of mentors, individualize to meet the diverse needs of mentees, match mentors/mentees on personal and professional characteristics, incorporate weekly meetings to include goal-setting and follow-up assessment, provide release time, and provide quality Professional Development. E-mentoring is an emerging vehicle for providing support to beginning teachers and has the potential to solve dilemmas posed by contexts in special education.

Collaboration identified the following best practices for fostering a collaborative context: a distributed leadership structure, collegial and supportive environment, the building administrator's important role in fostering a school culture of collaboration, and professional learning communities that establishes and supports beginning teacher development.

School-University Partnerships emphasized: seamless teacher preparation with integrated course and field work, collaborative leadership structures, focus on high-needs schools, and use of alternative delivery formats. In light of the significant challenges to forging and sustaining partnerships, critical elements to successful partnership work include: formal/informal agreements, ongoing resource streams and allocation, a clear understanding of the needs and purposes for partnering, time and structures for re-distributing responsibility and problem solving, and specific expertise and skills. The team concludes that multi-level partnerships, distributed school leadership, and in-service teacher support for meeting role demands are essential to beginning SET development.

Gaps in Literature – Mary Brownell

Several gaps in the literature related to effective induction and mentoring for beginning SETs were identified. Specifically, we need to know more about:

1. The types of learning opportunities afforded beginning special education teachers through school-based collaborative learning arrangements, including beginning teacher mentor programs.
2. How learning opportunities in various collaborative arrangements, particularly mentoring, are responsive to the varying needs of beginning special education teachers.
3. The role that mentoring plays in negotiating and translating learning opportunities occurring in the broader professional development context available to beginning special education teachers.
4. The ways in which learning opportunities presented in the mentoring relationship influence key beginning teacher outcomes.
5. The strategies for selecting and training effective mentors; that is, those who are better able to afford beginning teachers successful learning opportunities.
6. The ways in which contextual factors support or hinder the success of mentoring relationships.
7. The resources that will be required to implement successful mentoring efforts.

Goals for the Design Panel – Mary Brownell

As a Technical Assistance and Dissemination center, our charge is to identify I&M policies and practices that effectively meet the needs of beginning SETs. In addition, we will develop evidence-based products for dissemination. We worked with Consultants and the Advisory Board to draft the agenda over several months. We developed a conceptual framework, evaluation questions, an evaluation design, potential measures, and potential products. Thus, a major goal of the Design Panel was to get feedback on the proposed agenda for the next two phases of work from experts in the field. In particular, we needed to: identify sources of credible evidence, solidify a feasible evaluation study design for collecting this evidence, and determine what products would useful for dissemination. .

Thursday, June 25, 2009
Discussion of Framework in Order to Gain Understanding and Identify Major Missing Pieces

Presentation – Mary Brownell and John McLaughlin

Draft Materials Provided: The conceptual framework was developed based on key factors that can be expected in any effective mentoring program. We chose to focus on mentoring because the literature showed (a) that mentoring is most often the central component of induction programs and (b) little specific information on how mentoring innovations can be developed to be effective and how mentoring innovations can be supported best. It is important to note that the framework was derived in the absence of any available and well-tested theory. Instead, knowledge of the literature related to professional development, instructional coaching, workplace commitment, and comprehensive school reform was relied on to develop a framework that would detail potentially important components of mentoring, as well as important contextual factors that are likely to support a mentoring innovation. The conceptual framework was intended to provide some guidance for developing research questions and a starting point for articulating a theory of effective mentoring. The following assumptions guided our thinking:

1. The mentoring relationship provides multiple social learning opportunities and the quality of these opportunities will depend on interactions between the mentor and beginning teacher
2. The quality of mentor, mentee interactions depends to a large degree on the mentors' knowledge and skills
3. Beginning teachers will enter the classroom requiring different types of assistance depending on their current level of teaching skill, psychological resilience, and the needs of the students they teach.
4. The ability of the mentor to be responsive to the entering teachers' needs will impact directly the effectiveness of the mentoring innovation
5. The amount of training and ongoing assistance mentors require will depend on the knowledge and skill they have for addressing the needs of their assigned mentees
6. The most successful mentoring efforts will exist in environments characterized by effective instructional resources (e.g., evidence-based curriculum and well prepared staff), effective professional development for all teachers, collegiality, and strong instructional leadership

Figure 1 suggested that the relationship between the mentor and beginning SET is reciprocal and that the quality of these interactions set beginning teachers on a path to developing the skills, knowledge, and commitment they need to become accomplished teachers. Additionally, quality workplaces or ready sites are viewed as essential for supporting an effective mentor/mentee relationship. High quality environments provide the type of professional development and collaborative support that enable mentors and mentees to work together successfully.

In **Figure 2**, the inputs into the mentor/mentee relationship were described. These inputs include the various knowledge and skills sets that the mentor teacher(s) and beginning SET possess. The knowledge and skill sets of mentor teachers are likely to vary according to several key contextual variables (see figure 4): (a) the mentor selection process that is employed by the district, (b) process for assigning mentors to beginning SETs, (c) number of mentors available compared to the numbers of mentors needed, and (d) quality of training provided to the mentors.

These are inputs in the mentoring relationship. We also recognize that beginning SETs enter the classroom at varying levels of skill and knowledge, and as a consequence have different needs. Thus, the individual beginning teacher is an input. Moreover, we understand that beginning special education teachers might require different mentors to meet their needs. For instance, they may need one mentor who assists their socialization into the school environment, and a second mentor that helps them work on serving the instructional needs of their students. Such a scenario is likely given the complex nature of special education practice and service delivery.

A description of how quality mentoring relationships facilitate the development of a beginning SET is represented in **Figure 3**. Specifically, we describe how mentors interact with SETs to improve their instruction and socialization into the workplace based on the SETs' needs, putting SETs on the path to becoming accomplished SETs. Mentors make a plan for supporting beginning SETs that is based on their knowledge of SETs' instructional skills, interpersonal skills, and affective needs. For the most novice SETs, mentors provide more explicit instructional coaching and more intense emotional support. As SETs become more integrated into the workplace and sophisticated in their practice, mentors move to collaborative coaching and lessen the degree of emotional support. At this point, the mentor establishes a more collegial relationship with the beginning SET. To determine a beginning SETs needs and evaluate their progress, the mentor collects both formal and informal information through a variety of mechanisms, such as informal conversations and classroom observations. This information is used in an ongoing way to adjust how the mentor responds to the mentee.

In **Figure 4**, the contextual factors that support a highly effective mentoring program are illustrated. Knowing that mentoring programs do not exist in a vacuum, healthy workplace environments, characterized by strong leadership and an emphasis on teacher learning, will be important for supporting effectiveness. In such environments, it is easier for mentors to facilitate mentees' entrée into the school context and culture. This assumes that the mentor translates information acquired from professional development efforts for the mentee so that information can be adapted to meet the unique needs of his or her special education students. Additionally, the mentor assists the mentee in navigating the complex school environment, helping them to develop better professional relationships with their colleagues and administrators and helping them to learn special education procedures. To masterfully accomplish these tasks, mentors must be carefully selected and prepared for their roles.

Discussion/Determination: After examining the figures that comprised the conceptual framework, the Design Panel members discussed the need to simplify the framework to be displayed as one figure. Key features they felt needed more explicit display included: specificity of features unique to meeting the needs of special education students and how to tailor what we know about mentoring to the needs of beginning SETs; policies and practices that need to be in place; the roles/responsibilities of building-level administrators and others in leadership; and anticipated outcomes leading to improved teacher performance and student achievement. Other considerations focused on identifying essential vs. desirable components and the degree of transportability from the effective programs and mentor/mentee relationships. Aspects of SET development that were discussed included understanding teacher beliefs, the role and ability of the well-matched, quality mentor to provide varied support, advocacy, and "space" to meet mentee needs. A discussion of anticipated outcomes from the evaluation study and acceptable forms of evidence provided initial thoughts on the study design. Some offered that thorough descriptions of effective mentoring programs and quality mentoring relationships would be a

viable contribution to the field understanding the purpose of the Center is TA&D rather than research. Possible acceptable forms of evidence included teacher retention in field, job satisfaction, workplace commitment, sense of teaching efficacy, and instructional qualities. However, careful consideration needs to be given to the resources available and the breadth and depth of the study and suitable tradeoffs. Desirable characteristics in identifying sites for study included variations for various service delivery models, levels and types of support provided, feasibility and transportability at the district and building level, and program evaluation data.

⇒ Revise conceptual framework
⇒ Determine credible evidence, outcomes, products

Understanding the "Whole Picture" of the Evaluation Study

Presentation of Outcomes and Design – Mary Brownell and Erica McCray

Draft materials provided: The evaluation design proposed follows Yin's (2009) case study approach involving mixed methods. At this point we viewed the design as flexible understanding that it would change based on adjustments to the work scope and evaluation questions. Design Panel members were given a graphic to display the proposed data sources and collection and analysis process. The research questions and aligned measures were outlined to address the nature of mentoring relationships and the contexts that support them. Thus, a multiple-case embedded design is appropriate. During the first phase of our work, we identified two mentoring programs, one program in the Midwest (the Special School District, St. Louis County, MO) that is uniquely designed for special education and another program in a mid-Atlantic state (Great Beginnings, Fairfax County, VA) that provides intensive support for special education teachers within a larger general program. These particular programs show promise in addressing our evaluation questions in ways that several other programs could not. However, The Center staff made it clear that other sites were still open for discussion if they would yield more credible, usable findings.

Discussion/Determination: Members discussed the general framework for the design and noted that a description of context needed to be more prominent in the display. This concern also included a need to represent building-level implementation and feasibility. Another contextual element was the overlapping features for special and general education I&M programs and why it is essential to capture special education specific needs that are less applicable or not addressed in general education programs.

⇒ Be sure design captures context at different levels of implementation and what is required at each level (administrators, levels/types of mentoring support, unique needs/roles of SETs)
⇒ Determine what data programs already collect
⇒ Collect data at a macro (contextual, program-level) and micro level (mentor/mentee pair level)
⇒ Start with the end in mind--think about what outcomes and products will be transportable and usable

Understanding the Rationale for Focus and Prioritizing Questions

Research Questions, Presented by Each Category – Paul Sindelar

The conceptual framework was used as a foundation for the evaluation questions posed. These questions were designed to support the main purpose of the evaluation study, which is to **identify and describe mentoring practices that lead to beginning teacher development and commitment to the work place**. Most importantly, we want to learn about **the content and process of effective mentoring for beginning SETs**, as it is evidence about mentoring that we desire to provide in the technical assistance phase of our study. However, we recognize that mentoring programs do not exist in a vacuum, and that districts will need information about how to develop contexts for supporting mentoring programs. Thus, we intend to access contextual variables in our evaluation study.

To more fully understand the mentoring of beginning special education teachers, we focused our initial evaluation questions on describing mentoring practices and then determining their influence. This approach was taken for two reasons: limited understanding of how mentoring programs are developed and implemented to meet the unique needs of beginning SETs; and no knowledge of the ways in which these mentoring programs are effective. We solicited the design panel's feedback on the following questions and to assist in determining a credible level of evidence and prioritizing the following evaluation study questions:

(Descriptive)

1. What are the different sources of formal mentoring in the school and district?
2. How are mentors selected?
    a. Who selects them?
    b. What criteria are used in selection?
    c. What problems do schools and districts have in recruiting enough competent and qualified mentors?
3. What are the program parameters?
4. How are mentors trained?
5. What kind of ongoing support and supervision do mentors receive?
8. To what degree is the mentoring program implemented with fidelity?
9. How do districts evaluate the quality of their induction and mentoring programs?

(Contextual)

7. What state and district policies are associated with successful induction and mentoring?
   What school context variables are associated with effective mentoring?
   How do school administrators support successful induction and mentoring?
   How do district administrators support successful induction and mentoring?

(Explanatory)

6. How effective is mentor training?
10. How are mentoring practices related to beginning teacher performance?
11. What mentoring practices are related to workplace commitment, retention, and principal satisfaction?
12. How readily can districts implement promising induction and mentoring practices?

DISCUSSION/DETERMINATION: The Design Panel members discussed the proposed research questions in small groups and suggested revising, combining, and adding based on relevance, potential measures, potential outcomes/products, and overall feasibility. The majority of the discussion about the questions focused on the mentors and mentees. Specifically, mentor selection, training and retention; mentor/mentee interactions and how they would improve mentee performance, retention, and workplace commitment; and what held value for the mentors and mentees. General program questions addressed fiscal and human resources, contextual variables, facilitators and barriers to implementation, and implementation fidelity and evaluation. Additionally, the feasibility regarding timelines and resources of the Center and feasibility of the mentoring program implementation were a constant part of the conversation.
Understandably, comments and questions related to measures and study design were raised during the discussion of the study questions. In particular, panel members suggested thinking about which questions could be addressed using minimal resources, as with a survey, existing program data, and interviews.

The following were recommended as potential new questions:

Group 1:

- What is going on inside of the mentoring process? For instance, what aspects of mentoring sessions are most helpful to BSPET?

Group 2:

- What are the struggles that administrators experience and how were they overcome?
- Sub-questions would involve asking about matching, supervision, evaluation, etc. Also, as if any changes were made to the initial prescribed program, and why?
- If the relationship is not working, how can partners get out, start over, get a new mentor, etc? For instance, what protocol do schools follow when they encounter relational problems between mentors and mentees? (suggested placing this under #3)

Group 3:

- What is the content of the mentoring program/support/influence, and how does it promote evidence-based practices of mentees? (It would be a clarification of #4B or it could be placed under #10)
- What are the difficulties with implementing mentoring program?
- Is there a protocol available for the mentor or teacher to seek recourse? (sub-question)
- What do mentors *do* with regard to the mentoring process?

DISCUSSION/DETERMINATION: At the end of this portion of the meeting, the list of preliminary questions was refined.

Understanding the Potential Design

Discussion of Measures – Paul Sindelar

The next step was to understand and prioritize the questions for impact considering the timeline, available measures, and overall feasibility. This discussion began with a presentation of the potential measures and continued the last meeting day.

Draft Materials Provided: The Design Panel was provided with a document that included potential measures aligned with corresponding constructs, proposed study questions, and readily available potential resources. Members were asked to rate each question in terms of feasibility and impact with the following questions in mind: (a) how would you rate our questions in importance? (b) how would you rate our questions in terms of feasibility? and (c) what kind of evidence will be most credible?

Friday, July 26, 2009

Linking Outcomes to Questions

Discussion of Measures, Timeline, and Feasibility
Results from the Impact and Feasibility Survey were presented.

Discussion/Determination: In discussing feasibility, design panel members mentioned the tradeoffs that may have to occur with some questions and measures being very feasible, but potential having low impact or credibility. The group reached consensus that there were still too many questions and products to address within the allotted time frame and there would need to be further paring down. The following outcomes were suggested:

- ⇒ Year 1 Products
  - Description of structure, context, and components of a mentoring program tailored to meet SET needs (including District/building level policy/practice for matching and assignment, curriculum, training, ongoing support)
  - Digest of findings from the research syntheses/policy analysis
  - Selecting/identifying mentor/mentee pairs for in-depth study of interactions and processes
- ⇒ Year 2 Products
  - Include use of evidence-based practices that will improve student outcomes (e.g., IEP development, post-school outcomes)
  - Description of how program and mentor effectiveness impact teacher performance
  - Descriptions of aspects of mentoring practices that lead to improved practice and retention
  - Descriptions of State/District practices that lead to improved programs

A focus on two questions was originally discussed, but then revised to only question 1.

1. What is it that quality mentors do to improve beginning SETs as defined in the framework?
2. How do you prepare quality mentors as defined in the framework?

Meeting Outcomes

The Design Panel members provided extensive feedback on the Evaluation phase of the work and insights into what types of products may be viable for immediate dissemination as well as throughout the data collection and analysis phases. The variety of expertise enriched the Project and helped to focus on essential needs and the feasibility of the work scope and timeline. The Project Evaluator solicited feedback on the content and process of the meeting from Design Panel members.

Evaluation Results

The external evaluator participated in the Design Panel and a summary of this meeting are found in Section 2 of this briefing book. The end-of-panel evaluation survey is summarized here. All panel members responded to the survey. All indicated that they had gained a sound understanding of the NCIPP mission and, while most new a lot about induction, they learned more through the meeting. Further, while they came already informed of the gaps in the research, their participation increased their awareness. All agreed they had ample opportunity to comment on the NCIPP conceptual framework, study sites, questions, measures, and timelines. When asked to rate the relevance of the NCIPP work all strongly agreed that the project addressed important problems faced by the field. All agreed that the processes that have been used and those planned are quite consistent with prevailing research and evaluation methodology. Although lower than ratings on other items, the mean rating of 4.2 (out of 5) indicated strong support for the utility of the evaluation approach for potential researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.

With respect to the meeting process one member would have liked more advance resource materials and reading to better prepare for the meeting. Most were very supportive of the process, with 5 members rating the meeting as highly organized. Four members, however, indicated that a few aspects of the meeting could have been better organized. Many sited opportunities to hear other points of view as being the highlight of the meeting. When asked to comment on possible improvements to the process as it moves forward, some commented on study constructs as well as data collection and interpretation. Individuals made comments, but there did not appear to be any theme to those comments. The following is a list of individual comments.

- Need to think more broadly about mentoring
- Provide descriptions for other available mentoring practices that are widely used, such as learning communities, networks, e-mentoring in rural communities
- If you want survey items on school context (especially collegiality) go to website of Chicago consortium for school research
- Work with T & A Centers to maximize how to deliver
- The qualitative component of documenting processes is critical
- Important to get some comparison data if possible