ISSN: 1934-9726

Under a "Torrential Wave of Expectations and Requirements": An Ecological Investigation of New Teacher Well-being in District Support Systems

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Numerous organizational factors strain teacher wellness. Through a Research-Practice Partnership, this ecologically-framed study examines how a central office team in a large, urban school district in California strove to address teacher wellness and retention challenges through implementing system-wide programming and mentoring for new teachers. Findings reveal that new teachers named overwhelm as the major barrier to their well-being. Moreover, professional pressures on new teachers created an environment where even well-intentioned wellness interventions risked being perceived as additional tasks that intensified overwhelm and were barriers to wellness. Leaders addressed these barriers by creating programming that directly met new teachers' stated needs by expanding access to teacher leaders through PD and mentorship. However, these efforts were ultimately constrained by multilevel structures. These insights are critical for policymakers and leaders seeking to support new teachers effectively.

Keywords: Teacher Wellness, teacher well-being, new teacher support, district support systems

Introduction

Teacher shortages have reached critical levels across many parts of the United States. Most teachers have less than five years of experience, and a growing number of un(der)credentialed teachers have entered the workforce (Learning Policy Institute, 2024). Given this, programmatic support—often leveraging mentorship by teacher leaders—has become critical to supporting new teachers' development and well-being.

This study responds to scholars' calls for more nuanced research on teacher well-being and stress at the intersection of context and policy. By centering the experiences of new teachers and their mentors in partnership with leaders tasked with programming support, we aim to understand the challenges that new teachers navigate along with their well-being and retention. In contrast to traditional conceptions of teacher wellness that emphasize individualized stress management and learning, we take an ecological approach, exploring structures and barriers across multiple levels (e.g., micro, meso, macro) that fundamentally shape teachers' experiences (Spratt, 2017). This provides a contextual understanding to inform leaders' efforts to address new teacher well-being, as connected to flourishing and fulfilment (Spratt, 2017).

To better understand both possible solutions and constraints to the urgent issue of new teacher wellness, we ask:

1. What do new teachers and teacher leaders identify as the major challenges and needs facing new teachers?
2. What forms of support did leaders provide in response to those needs?
3. What barriers or challenges arose at the interactional, organizational, and policy

levels?

Relevant Literature

A Focus on New Teachers' Wellness and Needs

Teacher wellness scholarship lacks a universal shared definition. Still there is a shared understanding that most teachers find their work stressful and navigate limited access to personal, environmental, and structural resources that would increase well-being (Gearhart et al., 2022). Furthermore, these challenges may be particularly acute for new teachers. Teachers with more experience and more autonomy over their schedule or job report higher levels of well-being (Dreer, 2022; McCallum, 2020), conditions that are less likely for new teachers.

Sense of self-efficacy and relational factors impact teacher well-being. However, supports for, or challenges to, well-being are also shaped by ecological context, such as social identities and political dimensions, not just individual dispositions (Spratt, 2017). For example, teachers with minoritized identities may struggle within traditional educational structures that privilege dominant beliefs and identities (Hong et al., 2024); studies have found that Black teachers report lower job satisfaction (Griffiths et al., 2024). Furthermore, prevalent neoliberal policies emphasizing accountability and technocratic approaches can conflict with known wellness factors (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). Likewise, organizational factors, like administration, can strain teacher well-being and affect turnover (Scallon et al., 2022). While all teachers face these strains, those who might be most critical to keep in the profession may face greater strains, as teachers who critically advocate for marginalized students may experience higher levels of stress (Bradley-Levine & Bender, 2023)

Mentoring: A Potential Key Site for Support

Mentoring is among the best-researched interventions for improving the wellness and decreasing stress of new teachers (Boyle et al., 2023; Dreer-Goethe, 2023). Although mentoring can take many forms, we define mentoring as regular and sustained mentor-teacher meetings, opportunities to engage with problems of practice, formative assessment, and organizational support (Hong et al., 2019). New teacher mentoring can offer both personal and *educative* support, centering explicit visions of good teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Sometimes, the formal aspect of new teacher induction programs (e.g., the curricular focus and required documentation) can inadvertently generate an individualistic orientation to new teacher learning, well-being, and support rather than a collective responsibility. Additionally, it can obscure the ways that cultural and organizational dimensions mediate the quality of mentors' impact. For example, school site resources mediate the effect mentoring has on teacher stress. Notably, teachers who perceive their school sites as better-resourced are more likely to indicate that their mentoring relationship decreased their stress levels (Mosley & McCarthy, 2023). Additionally, higher levels of administrator engagement, clear expectations for mentors, and mentors who have familiarity with their school site are helpful (Kutsyuruba, 2020). A sense of disconnect can be exacerbated if induction programs are not integrated into school improvement and district professional learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2010).

The Role of Teacher Leaders

In addition to supporting new teachers, mentoring programs can develop teacher leadership (Fairman & Mackenize, 2012). Well-designed mentor professional development (PD) can improve mentors' own teaching, foster leadership skills, and contribute to the improvement

of the school community (Clarke et al., 2013). Strong programs can give mentors sustained opportunities to deepen both their instructional and relational leadership expertise (Dozier, 2007), ultimately better enabling them to support teachers' emotional and professional needs.

Mentoring alone does not make a difference, but rather quality mentoring (Hobson et al., 2009). Thus, the design, training, and support within mentoring programs matter. However, programs vary greatly across schools and districts, and so they may vary in their effect on teacher wellness (Squires, 2019). Taking a multi-level ecological to understand the role of the leaders who design programs, match dyads, and serve as mentors may help illuminate how these programs can be improved and the constraints behind their design.

In this paper, we focus on how a robust new teacher mentoring program can contribute to teacher well-being through the mentorship of teacher leaders. We take a qualitative approach, attending to the multilevel possibilities, limitations, and tensions of such programs, extending the historically quantitative examination of new teacher support and retention efforts.

Conceptual Framework

We investigate topics relating to teacher well-being and the experiences of leaders seeking to support them (both mentors and program leaders) from a multi-level framework captured in Figure 1. This allows us to examine factors contributing to the support, limitations, and tensions of teacher well-being within the induction program as shaped by multilevel dimensions. This framework follows recent moves in critical education policy literature toward a more ecological understanding. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological framework of child development, this approach posits that educational problems, such as concerns around teacher well-being, are influenced by the micro, meso, and macro environment. For this paper, we locate the *micro* level at the school site and label interactions between teachers and their site administrators and colleagues as "micro-interactions." We place the district office at the *meso* level, while state-level boards and the policies they create and carry out make up the *macro* level. While the adoption of interventions at any given level may make some systemic improvement, we must engage across multilevel systems, and incorporate institutional, practitioner, and political dimensions (Lenhoff et al., 2022).

Methodology

Research Design

This project came about through a larger Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) with Hillside School District (HSD) focused around supporting needs and opportunities identified by district leaders.[1] BED partners and researchers co-designed research questions and data collection methods, collaboratively interpreted initial findings, and prompted the application of insights to district practices and policies.

Site Description and Context

A large district, HSD comprises over 50 schools and almost a quarter of classroom teachers are uncredentialed. New and uncredentialed teachers are often clustered at certain sites, usually those with the highest turnover. The BED office is a subdivision of Human Resources and comprises a team of program directors and several teachers on special assignment housed at

1 All participant names in this study are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

the district level. The BED office is responsible for providing differentiated professional learning, wellness, and community building to all new teachers.

California policy offers three possibilities for those seeking a teaching credential. Individuals without prior experience and who are not enrolled in a concurrent training program can apply for an *emergency credential,* valid for a maximum of two years. Teachers who are enrolled in a concurrent training program and who have completed at least a summer training program before entering the classroom are considered *interns.* Teachers within these two categories (intern and emergency credentials), are considered "uncredentialed." Finally, *induction teachers* completed traditional teacher education programs, including student teaching, are designated as holding a preliminary credential that needs to be "cleared" within 2 years through documented participation in a formal induction program. Teachers in intern and induction programs are required by state mandate to receive mentoring, including weekly meetings and the completion of an inquiry cycle. Teachers working to complete or clear their credentials have a variety of other requirements as well, including completing the EdTPA (a standardized, performance-based assessment of teaching) and several credentialing tests.

Data Corpus

We draw primarily on surveys distributed to new teachers (n=348) and mentors (n=117) in our analysis. This survey was co-created as part of the RPP and was part of the BED's office's focus on understanding the needs of new teachers in order to better meet them. Teacher surveys included closed-ended and open-ended questions, focusing on the experiences with mentoring, curriculum, credentialing, and support. Mentor surveys addressed their experiences with mentees and their perceptions of support (both for themselves and teachers). We also draw from focus groups (n=3) with new teachers, and semi-structured interviews with new teachers (n=5) and program leaders. Focus groups took about 120 minutes and followed up on interview themes, with additional attention to classroom culture, student relationships, and coordination between sites and the central office. Next, new teachers were selected as a purposeful sample based on a follow-up semi-structured interview to gain further insight into their experiences. Teachers who wanted to share more during their focus groups comprised this sample, along with teachers who had wanted to join a focus group but whose schedule could not be accommodated. Individual interviews lasted between 50-60 minutes each (see Appendix).

After initial data collection and preliminary coding, we conducted interviews with program leaders, focusing on emerging themes of teacher wellness**,** lasting between 50-60 minutes each. These interviews, conducted in December 2024, allowed researchers to follow up on the ways information found in the survey, interviews, and focus groups was used, and for questions about BED's philosophy and practice to be discussed in detail. Interviews and focus groups were initially transcribed using Temi and revised by hand. Supplemental data for this article comes from related artifacts and member checking.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took a flexible, inductive, and deductive multi-stage coding approach. In the first stage, the first author completed concept coding of open-ended survey questions in collaboration with RPP partners to attend to the bigger picture of respondents' experiences (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were then combined and collapsed to form major themes, including overwhelm, feelings of under-preparedness, and the new teacher experience. Next, findings from both surveys, focus groups, and interviews were triangulated to enhance validity and reliability.

In the second stage, collected data were re-analyzed by both authors through the lens of our conceptual framework. Together, authors designed and conducted semi-structured interviews with BED program leaders, focusing on emerging themes as they related to teacher well-being. Major themes emerging from these interviews included experiences with mentorship, classroom practice, and barriers to accessing supports. After the final analysis, we met with RPP partners for member checking.

Limitations

Our study design has multiple inherent limitations. First, although surveys were anonymous and only the themes of findings were shared with leaders, participants may have withheld criticism out of a concern that it would reach district officials. Second, most participants were new teachers, but our data collection included a small number of un(der)credentialed teachers who had been teaching for multiple years. Finally, data collection spanned multiple years, with survey data from 2022-2023 and supplemental data collection spanning 2022-2025.

Findings

New teachers named organizational understaffing, the combined workload of classroom teaching and completing credentialing requirements, along with inadequate compensation as factors that most impacted their wellness. These factors spanned micro, meso, and macro levels, reflecting decisions made at the community, state, central office, and school site levels. While BED leaders adapted programming and expanded access to teacher leaders in response in an effort to foster teacher wellness, these supports were constrained, and some were experienced as burdens.

Major Challenges and Needs of New Teachers

New Teachers' School Site Experiences

New teachers, specifically those without prior classroom experience, named overwhelmed related to under-preparedness to manage day-to-day classroom dynamics. One teacher, describing her ideal PD for new teachers, asked for a PD course titled “Simple Basic Things 101.” Another teacher shared,

> As a new teacher, there's a lot of emergencies. There's a lot of incidents, and I just really feel like a lot of my anxiety comes from like, what if a kid gets hurt? What if they run off campus? And I just, I never really was taught how to be an adult in a school.

This feeling—of being given responsibility for a classroom of students without adequate training—was a theme throughout data. New teachers named their fellow educators and teacher leaders as major sources of support. Out of 325 responses to a survey question about what new teachers found most supportive and helpful, 184 responses mentioned mentoring. These leaders were often unavailable due to understaffing.

Understaffing was an issue across the district that strained teachers’ well-being. New teachers reported that at some schools, the teacher leaders charged with supporting new teachers

were often pulled from their role to substitute. This left new teachers without help them during their first years of service, despite organizational intent. Some new teachers described their school sites as "not having enough [support] to go around."

One new teacher described an experience where no one at their site answered their call for in-the-moment behavior support. He recounted, "I had to call, call for help and, no one came for help because my school site is understaffed … [be]cause of the teacher shortage." The experience of feeling abandoned and unsupported while at the same time being responsible for students was incredibly stressful for this new teacher. BED leaders, along with mentors, acknowledged both the reality of understaffing and its impact, specifically on new teachers. In response, BED created centralized PD sessions designed for new teachers led by teacher leaders, which we detailed in the following section.

Both teachers and teacher-leaders named the insufficient availability of designated mentors and coaches, unfilled department head positions, and administrators' lack of availability to support instruction or credential requirements. When asked about what support at the school level would most help their mentees, one mentor responded: "It's [the] luck of the draw in terms of whether teachers are supported within their sites and/or by their instructional coaches having the time and skill set to be of significant help." While all new teachers would benefit from regular access to an experienced leader with information about their site context and contentlevel knowledge, some new teachers went without.

Surveyed teachers without sufficient access to teacher leaders or administrators who could provide them with curriculum or behavioral support reported feeling lost when it came to adapting teaching materials as well as creating classroom culture. One new teacher explained that,

> I really like my induction mentor, but since he also has to teach full time and we only meet over Zoom, and he doesn't have much context for what teaching at [school site] is actually like, so there are limits to how helpful these meetings/this program [is].

Despite, the useful and positive relationship, many mentees indicated that the good relationship did not always ensure material support that responded to new teachers' urgent questions.

Credential Compliance and New Teacher Workload

New teachers reported high levels of stress and overwhelm in their day-to-day individual experiences. In response to a question regarding the most stressful part of teaching, over a third of survey respondents referenced an "overwhelming" workload. Uncredentialed teachers, those who had not completed a teacher education program and student teaching, seemed to experience the workload related to credentialing as more burdensome than induction teachers. Teachers still working towards completing licensure requirements on top of a full teaching load reported particularly high stress levels.

As one uncredentialed teacher stated, "Most of my challenges are related to staying in compliance with the torrential wave of expectations and requirements of my credential program." This wave metaphor captured this teacher's sense that there was always another task awaiting them to be completed, and they were struggling to stay afloat. Based on survey, focus groups, and interview data, the combination of classroom teaching and credentialing tasks and the expectation of completing those tasks at sites without adequate administrative or mentor support were the greatest barriers to wellness.

BED Leaders Use Their Meso-level Position to Meet New Teachers' Needs

In response to teachers' expressed needs and strains on their well-being and their mentors' insights, BED made changes to their program structure and offerings. BED responded to the sources of stress reported by new teachers in data collected through the RPP in three main ways: maximizing mentor access, offering racial affinity matching between mentors and mentees, and designing new teacher PD.

Expanding Access to Mentors

First and foremost, BED strove to support teachers' well-being through the best possible mentoring experience for the greatest possible number of new teachers. Over half of the new teachers identified their formal BED mentor as the single most impactful support they experienced throughout the year. One way BED used their resources and meso-level positioning was by putting in substantial effort to follow research-backed evidence around the value of shared school-site mentor-teaching matching (Harrington & Walsh, 2020). HSD itself also moved to expand access to mentors. Per macro-level state policy, the district was only required to provide mentors for new teachers who require a mentor to observe and support them in the completion of their induction program. However, through the combined efforts of many central office leaders, including BED staff, Hillside expanded its mentorship offerings to all new teachers, regardless of enrollment status.

Racial Affinity-Based Mentor Matching

Second, in addition to striving to match teachers with on-site mentors, BED offered racial affinity-based mentor matching. To support district efforts to support teachers of color, BED leaders committed to meeting the request of all new teachers who named a racial/ethnic affinity as an important criterion in their mentor matching. This entailed intentionally recruiting more mentors of color and asking new teachers if such matching was desired.

Because racially minoritized teachers navigate different racial dynamics with peers, parents, and students than white teachers, research has found benefits from PD structured as racial affinity spaces (Bellinger & Mosley, 2022; Kohli et al., 2024). Some participants who identified this as an area of importance echoed the importance of such matching. For example, one educator noted, "My mentor and I have a common experience as BIPOC educators that allowed us to have a greater understanding [of the induction process]." Another commented on "the instant connection of being Black teachers within HSD." BED leaders honored the unique experience of new, minoritized teachers by doing what they could to create affinity mentor matches.

New Teacher PD: Additional Support without Additional Burden

BED began offering district-wide new teacher PD during contract hours. Historically, school sites offered their own PD weekly during an early release day for their teachers with nonstandardized topics that were site-driven. BED advocated for and designed district-wide, newteacher specific PD specifically focused on areas of concern identified within surveys and feedback. Sessions covered various topics, from specific curriculum to classroom management and credentialing requirements (largely taught by teacher leaders), to drop-in hours with many different experts and supports, staffed by a mix of both. This design ensured that new teachers at sites lacking department heads or with unavailable administrators still received relevant support from teacher leaders and academic department leads.

BED Constraints

Teacher leaders and BED leadership attempted to meet new teachers' needs to adapt their programming. Yet ultimately, BED's efforts were constrained by their position and resources.

Micro-Level Constraints

Overwhelm was a major theme through both focus groups and interviews. When surveyed about their ideal PD, eighty-one of 325 new teachers asked for time to focus on their primary responsibilities. As one teacher wrote, "This [PD visioning] can get tough because I would say the biggest obstacle to accessing wellness for me was overwhelm." Instead of another program, teachers asked for time "back."

In response to a survey question about their greatest challenge, one new teacher wrote, "The biggest issue is there is no coordination between BED and site admin to let new teachers have any extra time for the BED stuff." The teacher identified that having the time to both meet classroom teaching obligations and new teacher credentialling requirements would be beneficial for their well-being. However, this was something that BED was ultimately unable to enact given the limited aspects of the new teacher experience they could control. New teachers expressed their appreciation for the support BED staff and mentors provided. However, the same teachers described being administratively burdened day-to-day by navigating the many support offerings in HSD. As one teacher shared, "Honestly, I feel like I have so much work to do, trying to do more feels impossible." Even a well-run and efficient session with a mentor might be experienced as "more work," and thus a barrier to well-being.

Teacher leaders also identified these tensions at the micro level. In a question about beneficial professional learning posed to mentors about their mentees, 43 out of 171 mentor responses mentioned cutting back on support for new teachers in favor of protecting time to plan or from work responsibilities altogether. As one mentor wrote,

> I think there are a lot of requirements for new teachers, who are 1) already overloaded and 2) just came out of a preparation program, making the requirements feel a little redundant. I am in favor of lightening the load for new teachers in order to avoid early burnout.

Like others, this mentor explicitly linked protecting the time of new teachers to lower rates of teachers leaving the profession and increased teacher wellness.

Meso-Level Constraints

In addition to not being able to provide more time, BED leaders were constrained by organizational norms and design. Hillside School District prioritizes site autonomy, and thus, as BED leaders offer district-wide support, they are constrained by the level of buy-in they can garner from site leaders. As one BED staff member explained,

> If we really wanted to attend to new teacher wellness, we would structure the job differently. They wouldn't be given a full teaching caseload, …if we're saying that lesson and curricular planning is as important as teaching—which it is—then we would give them time to do that planning that is paid and adequate enough for them to arrive prepared to teach their lessons effectively. We would give them time to learn and apply [that learning], and kind of gradually build their capacity for a full teaching load. BED

> leaders had ideas for structural shifts to support new teachers, but making these adjustments were often outside what they could affect at the meso level. Not a part of contract negotiations, BED could not change compensation for teachers or change the supports available at school sites.

BED leaders defined their scope of control as "on the edge" of other meso-organizational entities, mainly school sites. One leader in BED explained that new teachers "are having this core experience, and we're not ultimately controlling their core experience," which was set by site leaders and state credentialing policy. As mid-level central office leaders, there is little BED could do about the work requirements of new teachers that contributed to their persistent feelings of overwhelm.

BED'S Meso-Level Solution: Targeted New Teacher PD

The new teacher-centered PD that BED organized, (co)-led by teacher leaders, centered on two buckets: basic classroom management (e.g., routines and procedures) and curriculum implementation, both topics teachers named as overwhelming. Additionally, the PD timing was very intentional, offered during contract hours. Participating teachers were invited to attend this PD instead of their concurrent site-PD, thus avoiding "adding on" to their time commitments and working to "repurpose time that's already built into their contract," as one leader explained.

However, the PD was constrained as well. BED staff do not determine what responsibilities new teachers are given by their site. As the leader went on to explain,

> There's a million examples of things that new teachers have to know and do and learn that we can't just take off their plates solely as BED. Those are decisions that are being made by their site [and] other central teams.

That made standardizing new teacher supports complicated. As the leader explained, "There's still a lot of autonomy at sites, which makes it that much more difficult to institute any standard practice."

Related to this constraint, the leader noted that the impacts of understaffing at school sites on teachers' well-being was outside of BED's control as well. At a large level, the processes that impact pipelines for teachers are beyond BED's scope, as are the contract negotiations that might impact the recruitment and retention of school leaders. In these ways, despite intentions, to support new teachers' wellbeing, its ability to protect new teachers from the consequences of understaffing and other major stressors is severely limited. Overall, from their position inside the central office, BED is both responsible for new teachers' experience and unable to change the most fundamental aspects of it.

Macro-Level Constraints

Finally, in addition to micro and meso level limitations, macro level policy context deeply shaped new teachers' experiences and strains on their well-being. While BED leaders and mentors acknowledged this context, they were ultimately unable to change the major ways that it impacted teacher wellness. In response to a question about improving teacher wellness, a BED staff member rhetorically asked,

> Are you, are you paid enough to be able to live near the school? There's a discrepancy right there, it's very hard to feel a sense of wellness when you're commuting from [far away]. I can't do anything about setting housing prices.

BED staff were acutely aware of the ways the lack of nearby affordable housing impacted new teachers, a growing challenge in the area.

Teacher-leaders also acknowledged the ways the teachers were impacted by macro-level policy and how it shaped micro-level resources at the site level. Recognizing the widespread "teacher shortages," one mentor noted how this created challenges for new teachers in their day-to-day.

> The teachers I'm working with are not credentialed—there's a lot they don't know yet. Their classes are also overfilled and sometimes understaffed. Most teachers are not getting lunch breaks-so they are working for 5 hours straight. They are exhausted and saying they feel like they don't know how to do their jobs.

Overall, new teachers and their mentors shared recurring themes about barriers to wellness, spanning from micro-level interactions at individual school sites, to meso-level district programs, and even up to macro-level state education policies. Uncredentialed teachers and those working at or mentoring teachers working at understaffed sites reported feeling especially overwhelmed by their intense workload. To meet new teachers' needs, the BED office implemented new programs, utilizing teacher-leaders' expertise and their unique meso-level position to increase and improve mentorship and provide targeted PD to increase teacher wellness. Because these supports added to, instead of removed, tasks from new teachers, they were sometimes perceived to be burdensome.

Discussion

Our study captured the barriers to wellness experienced by new teachers that were the result of multilevel forces, as well as the ways a district-level program worked to alleviate those barriers. New and un(der)credentialed teachers were overwhelmed. The resources that might best address this burden—experienced and knowledgeable mentors and colleagues—were often unavailable due to chronic understaffing. Aware of this dynamic, BED leaders made the programmatic changes they could to alleviate teachers' overwhelm in the service of increasing well-being, primarily increasing access to teacher leaders through mentorship and PD. However, BED's position limited their ability to lighten teacher workload, increase compensation, change the state-level policies that create such intense burdens for the least prepared educators, or increase available mentors with relevant training for new teachers.

By employing an ecological framework, we offer insights into teacher wellness and the strategic roles school and teacher leaders can play in supporting educators. Specifically, our analysis furthers understanding of macro-level policy impacts on both micro and meso-level actors. Situated within an examination of policy impacts on teachers and their teaching (Good et al., 2017) and honoring educators as policy actors who make daily decisions, shaping implementation (Heineke et al., 2015), our goal is to complicate ideas about wellness and leaders' actions. This departs from a focus on individuals to attend to the whole system, situated within multilevel structures (Farley & Chamberlain, 2021) and the ways that these structures impact both teacher wellness and the latitude leaders are given to meaningfully address it. Focusing on a single aspect that might impact teacher wellness—such as classroom challenges,

compensation, or credentialing requirements—obscures the image of the system as a whole and limits possibilities for structural change. For new teachers in HSD, access to teacher leaders was appreciated, but teacher leaders cannot be tasked with teacher well-being their own. Rather, meaningful improvement in new teacher well-being will most likely come from coordinated changes across all levels.

Future Directions for Research

This study's situated nature limits its generalizability. However, its nuanced perspective prompts reflective considerations for other settings. First, our ecological framework elucidates the gap between educational leaders' responsibility and control. While teacher wellness was BED's central responsibility, alone, they had little control over new teachers' material experiences. While HSD prioritizes site autonomy, future work might examine the affordances and constraints of prioritizing district-wide coherence. Additionally, it might also examine how meso-level leaders made sense of and used their discretion in implementing a wide variety of teacher induction policies. It might also examine how new teachers experienced the decisions made by teacher-leaders are more or less supportive of their well-being, and what conditions impacted those experiences.

Ecological approaches to policy research do not create easy solutions. However, it provides meaningful insight into mechanisms for change, particularly through research partnerships (Lenhoff et al., 2022). We suggest districts place teacher wellness—and the leaders responsible for supporting it—in the center of multilevel decision-making. Site leaders could prioritize protecting new teachers' time, providing them with opportunities to plan in collaboration with teacher leaders instead of adding meetings or "supports" that detract from planning time. In that new teachers cited their mentors as immensely supportive of their well-being, administrators and policy makers might consider protecting and increasing that time.

While focusing on teacher education pipelines remains critically important, it is likely that districts across the U.S. will continue to hire a notable number of un(der)credentialed teachers and that some districts will do so at higher rates than others. Districts that can offer higher salaries with fewer demands (and more resources to help teachers meet those demands) will be able to attract credentialed candidates, while districts with less funding will not (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This exacerbates inequities between schools and districts with varying levels of trained teachers and between students who attend a well-funded school and those who do not.

Policymakers may want to consider the ways that multiple leveled requirements that fall on new and un(der)credentialed teachers and consider the impact on students when teachers are so immediately overburdened. While mentorship from teacher leaders can be a major form of support, policymakers might consider adjusting the timeline for induction requirement completion, partnering with universities, and easing the stress for individual teachers. Instead of creating a compressed timeline for credentialing, policymakers could also think about how to better support districts with a significant percentage of un(der)credentialed teachers, within more broad considerations of equitable funding approaches. Adequate compensation is another area policymakers may want to consider as they respond to the need to increase recruitment and retention.

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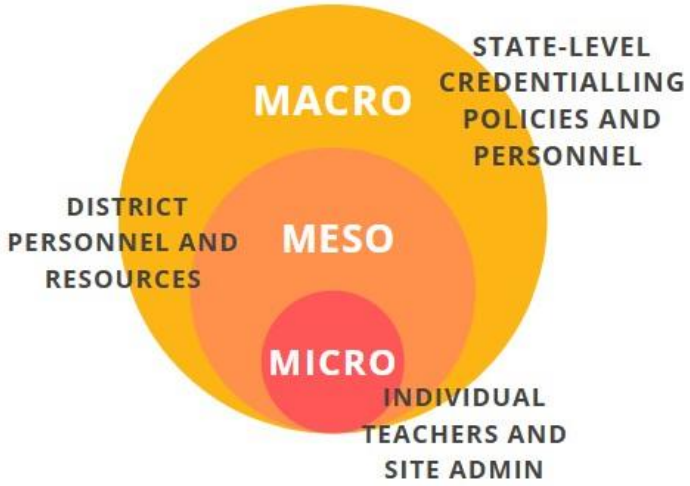
ISSN: 1934-9726

Figure 1



ISSN: 1934-9726

Appendix A

Focus Group Protocol

- What do HSD staff/the district/your site understand about the experience of a new teacher?
- What do HSD staff/the district/your site not understand/ miss about the experience of a new teacher?
- Tell me about a time when engaging in professional learning resulted in a significant shift in your practice?
    - What made this so effective?
- What is one thing you wish you had learned sooner as a beginning teacher in HSD? I'm going to ask some questions that were on the survey. We wanted to give time to go deeper into your responses and get into detail.

- In your ideal world, what would professional learning look like for new teachers in HSD
- In what ways has the professional learning you've been a part of in HSD lived up to this vision
- In what ways does it fall short?
- The district wants to understand barriers new teachers might have to accessing or connecting to professional learning. Was there a professional learning experience you wanted to access but ultimately did not? What stopped you?
- How do you decide who to ask for what kind of support?
- Who is your 'first stop'?
- Anything else I should know?

ISSN: 1934-9726

Appendix B

Table 1.
Sample Codebook Excerpt of Major Themes

Parent Code	Subcode	Memo
Major Needs & Challenges	Lack of support (people)	Absence of support from district or site officials (e.g. admin)
	Classroom support/needs	Inclusive of classroom "management" (behavior and routines) and meeting needs of students (e.g. newcomer students)
	Lack of Structural Support	Working conditions, e.g. low pay, lack of admin, lack of materials
	Credentialing requirements Workload	Balancing responsibilities
Major support for well-being	Mentor/coach	Knowledge of mentor in content area, school-site level, or skills that mentor saw as a support
	Professional development	Both formal and informal spaces for professional supports
	Site specific support	Supports that originate at the site and are for staff just at that site
	Broad District Programming	Supports that all teachers in the district can access
Impact of Mentor Support	Classroom relationships	Relationships with students and families, student behavior
	Content/Lesson Planning	Making use of curriculum, teaching materials and assessments
	Personal Affirmation	Encouragement, 'pep' talks, affirmation that struggle is productive