

Committee
Findings and Recommendations

Beginning Educator Support and Training Program

Approved December 18, 2007

Legislative Program Review
& Investigations Committee

Introduction

The Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program was developed as the state's teacher induction program during the late 1980s by the State Department of Education (SDE) in conjunction with input from educators throughout the state. The program provides a combination of support for and standards-based assessment of teachers who are at the start of their teaching careers in Connecticut (referred to throughout this report as beginning teachers). Changes to the program's support and assessment components have been made over the past two decades. The overall purpose of BEST, however, has remained the same since its origination: to ensure public school students in Connecticut are taught by teachers who have been determined competent in accordance with the teaching standards approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE).

At the same time, the department has promoted the BEST program as a process from which beginning teachers learn about effective teaching practices contained in the state standards and strengthen their overall teaching skills, with the goal of having the teachers teach according to the state standards throughout their careers. Consistent with this approach, the BEST program is most appropriately viewed as one component of Connecticut's educator continuum structured to ensure teacher effectiveness. Although the program is supposed to familiarize new teachers with and assess them on their knowledge and application of the state's teaching standards, BEST should be neither the teachers' first introduction to those standards nor their last experience with them, as recognized by SDE.

The Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee believes that if the state expects its teachers to teach according to the principles contained in Connecticut's teaching standards and measured through the BEST assessment, three critical components must be coordinated. First, teachers need to be instructed in the standards and the BEST assessment starting during their teacher preparation. Second, the BEST program – in both its support and assessment components – must ensure teachers learn and use effective teaching practices as embedded in the state standards. Third, teachers must be held to those same standards for the rest of their careers in Connecticut.¹ Although the educator continuum was not part of the original focus of this study, there is agreement among SDE personnel, program staff, administrators, and teachers' union representatives that more than just the BEST program must be strengthened if Connecticut expects its teachers to fully learn and consistently implement the state's teaching standards.

Study Focus

The program review committee's study of the BEST program focuses on the program's overall effectiveness in achieving its intended objectives of supporting beginning teachers in

¹ This component does not deal directly with the BEST program, unlike teacher preparation or the actual program, and so was outside the scope of this study.

Connecticut and assessing their overall teaching skills and knowledge through the BEST assessment, which currently is in a portfolio format.

Answering the question of whether the BEST process – in particular the portfolio, because it is intended to be a culmination of what is learned through teacher preparation and support – is effective, however, is difficult and depends on which measures are used for evaluation. For example, do the standards continue to be appropriate for beginning teachers? Second, are teachers receiving a consistent level of *quality* support? Third, is the assessment method to evaluate beginning teachers based on the state standards appropriate and reliable? Fourth, even if the assessment method is appropriate and reliable, is it necessarily the most effective way to assess beginning teachers' knowledge, skills, and competencies? And fifth, is there a more effective way to assess beginning teachers that would improve their understanding of the state's teaching standards and ability to implement them? The committee addresses these questions in this report. A key question that remains, however, is whether the state is prepared to adopt the necessary policies and devote adequate resources to ensure the state's teacher induction program receives the support needed to fulfill its goals.

Advocates of BEST believe it is properly designed for supporting and assessing beginning teachers. Through the program, beginning teachers are provided support at the local school district level and via state efforts. At the same time, the teachers are properly evaluated through an assessment proven valid and reliable to ensure they meet minimum competency standards set by the state. Opponents, however, maintain the assessment process is overly onerous for teachers generally beginning their careers. They also question the overall efficacy of the evaluation instrument used in Connecticut to assess beginning teachers. Despite disagreement over the assessment, most advocates and critics concur that BEST gives insufficient support at varying levels to beginning teachers.

During the course of this study, including testimony received as part of the committee's public hearing on this topic, numerous, and often conflicting, ideas were offered about how to improve BEST. The committee gave careful consideration to the comments, concerns, and ideas expressed through interviews, surveys, and testimony received as this set of findings and recommendations was developed.

This report finds the area in most need of attention is the level and quality of support for beginning teachers. A key goal of the support component of BEST is to familiarize beginning teachers with Connecticut's teaching standards, which are the foundation of the BEST assessment and describe how all the state's teachers are supposed to be teaching. For most beginning teachers in Connecticut, however, this level of meaningful support is not reached. Consequently, the BEST assessment often is not perceived by all beginning teachers as a useful and appropriate exercise that fully captures what they have learned about effective teaching in their teacher preparation, through classroom experiences, and from their mentors during the initial years of teaching in Connecticut.

The report also finds the portfolio – as an assessment method – is a valid and reliable instrument. The portfolio assessment generally meets the program’s key goal of ensuring all beginning teachers are at, or above, the minimum level of competency as measured against the Common Core of Teaching standards using the BEST portfolio. There is a low percentage – usually ten percent annually – of beginning teachers who do not pass their portfolio assessments on the first attempt, and only one to two percent ultimately fail after three attempts. It stands to reason that the higher the pass rate, the stronger the indication that teachers meet at least the minimum standards for effective teaching established in Connecticut.

The committee’s recommendations attempt to balance the state’s efforts to ensure beginning teachers meet a specific level of standards for teaching by addressing areas of the current support and assessment processes in need of improvement. Several recommendations aim to transform the overall preparation and support for beginning teachers into stronger tools for building knowledge about teaching and developing effective teaching practices according to the state’s standards. Additional recommendations strive to enhance the process used to assess beginning teachers based on those standards. The committee believes, with the proposed recommendations, the BEST support component should provide beginning teachers with more consistent and substantive support that builds up to the portfolio. Enhancements to the portfolio process should make it a more effective and comprehensive assessment. Taken together, the recommendations have the ability to positively impact and advance the skills of Connecticut’s beginning teachers.

Methodology

A variety of information sources was used for this report. Extensive interviews of various constituencies associated with the BEST program were conducted, including staff from the State Department of Education, representatives from the state’s two teachers’ unions, BEST representatives from each of the six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) in the state, education faculty from the University of Connecticut, and staff from the association representing boards of education in the state. Committee staff also attended additional training sessions beyond those mentioned in the September briefing report, at which conversations with mentors, administrators, and beginning teachers were held. An extensive literature search was conducted, and information about programs in other states was collected.

Key sources of information for this report were the results of several surveys conducted by the committee. *All* teachers who completed their first year of teaching in Connecticut during the 2006-07 school year were surveyed to receive their input regarding the support they received as part of BEST. Surveys also were sent to *all* teachers who completed their second year of teaching in the state during the 2006-07 school year and submitted BEST portfolios in May 2007 in order to receive their feedback regarding the portfolio process. In the final analysis, the responses for both surveys had very similar distributions of teachers according to District Reference Groups² (DRGs), and for the teacher survey, portfolio scores to the overall populations of teachers. All BEST district facilitators were surveyed electronically to collect

² District Reference Groups is a classification system developed and used by the State Department of Education that measures certain characteristics of families with children attending public schools. Districts that have students with similar socioeconomic status and need are grouped together.

information about local school district practices and policies regarding beginning teachers. A full description of the survey methodologies and copies of the surveys sent to teachers are included in Appendix A.

Report Organization

This report is organized into three sections, each containing analysis and the committee's findings and recommendations. Section I provides an overview of BEST in relation to teacher preparation programs in Connecticut. Section II discusses the support component of the BEST program, while Section III details the program's assessment component. The appendices include: the methodologies used for the surveys sent to beginning teachers and district facilitators; a listing of districts according to their DRG groupings; analysis of portfolio scoring reliability; the licensure assessments used in other states; the written response provided by SDE to the committee following the committee's September public hearing; a sample portfolio feedback report for a failing portfolio; and the methodology used in the committee staff's regression analysis of portfolio scores.

Section I: Teacher Preparation

The educator continuum begins with teacher preparation programs. The key purpose of the programs is to train prospective teachers and instruct them in how to become effective educators. In Connecticut, there are 20 teacher preparation programs. Sixteen of the programs are part of higher education institutions, while four are Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) programs. However, each category of programs contains variation. Higher education programs include: traditional programs that offer an education concentration during an undergraduate course of study; programs that require participants to attend an extra fifth year of study, often culminating in a master's degree in education; and programs that consist of a two-year master's degree in education. ARC programs are run by several different types of organizations: the state, a higher education institution, a Regional Educational Service Center (RESC), and Teach for America.³

All teacher preparation programs must meet the following regulatory requirements:⁴

- admit only students who have a cumulative grade point average of at least a B minus, and have met or exceeded the state's minimum Praxis I basic skills test⁵ score;
- require participants, called teacher candidates, to successfully complete at least 10 weeks of full-day student teaching;
- instruct teacher candidates in: how to teach both about and how to avoid the effects of drugs and acquired immune deficiency syndrome; computer and information technology; literacy skills and second language learning; and
- require all teacher candidates to study special education for at least 36 hours, and require candidates in certain fields to take particular courses (e.g., each elementary school candidate must complete a survey course in United States history).

The programs are to demonstrate candidates know the state teaching and learning standards and can demonstrate the competencies contained therein. In addition, teacher candidates who have completed their course of study must meet or exceed the state's minimum Praxis II⁶ score to

³ Teach for America is a nationwide program providing selected college graduates who generally did not complete a teacher preparation program with some training before placing them into urban schools.

⁴ ARC programs must meet these same broad requirements but are not held to the same duration aspects. For example, ARC participants may complete student teaching in one month.

⁵ Praxis I is a test conducted by Educational Testing Service (ETS) designed to measure potential teacher candidates' reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Candidates whose SAT, ACT, or Graduate Record Examination scores meet certain benchmarks may apply to have the Praxis I requirement waived. ETS is a private, nonprofit organization located in Princeton, New Jersey devoted to educational measurement and research primarily through testing.

⁶ Praxis II, also conducted by ETS, is designed to measure teacher candidates' content- or subject-specific knowledge.

demonstrate content area competency. Beyond these requirements, the programs may design courses and other aspects as they wish. The requirements vary somewhat for the ARC programs, due to their condensed timeframe.

Upon successful completion of the requirements and acquisition of bachelor's degrees, the programs recommend the teacher candidates to SDE for the initial educator certificate. This certificate is the first tier of Connecticut's three-level certification system. The initial educator certificate allows the graduates to teach at any public or state-approved non-public school for up to three years. Upon receiving initial educator certificates, beginning teachers must participate in BEST. Teachers may continue to the next certification tier only after successfully completing the BEST program, including passing a formal assessment.

Approval Process

Only teacher preparation programs that have been accredited by the State Board of Education and the Department of Higher Education Board of Governors may recommend graduates for initial educator certification. In July 2003, Connecticut adopted the accreditation standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which is the professional accrediting body for teacher preparation programs. Because of this step, Connecticut programs now may apply for either state-only accreditation or joint state-NCATE accreditation. NCATE accreditation involves an application fee and a more thorough review of the program, but is more prestigious than state accreditation. Five Connecticut programs currently hold joint state-NCATE accreditation: the University of Connecticut (UConn); Southern, Central, and Eastern Connecticut State Universities; and the University of Hartford.

Any new program must obtain accreditation before accepting any students. In addition, each existing program is evaluated every five years for continuing accreditation. Before the 2003 reforms, the continuing accreditation process occurred every seven years.

Integration of State Standards and BEST

Teacher preparation programs in Connecticut are where most of the state's new teachers are first instructed in the pedagogy of teaching, which is the art and/or science of being a teacher and the strategies or style of instruction. The programs need to ensure their candidates have knowledge about the state standards as delineated in the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT) and are starting to apply the teaching methods embedded in the CCT. The CCT describes how teachers are expected to teach and the standards against which their performances will be judged when they complete the BEST assessment.

The State Board of Education recognized the importance of instructing teacher preparation participants in the state standards by requiring this through regulation.⁷ The preparation programs must demonstrate students know the CCT, the Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs), the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), and the codes of professional responsibility for teachers and administrators. The programs also must ensure participants

⁷ R.C.S.A. Sec. 10-145d-11

demonstrate the current Connecticut licensure competencies as defined through regulation (currently the BEST program's requirements) and the CCT. These requirements were adopted simultaneously with the move to adopt the NCATE standards for state accreditation purposes in the late 1990s. Together, these changes signal the state's intention of linking the instruction of prospective teachers to state teaching standards.

Program compliance with the requirements to integrate the teaching standards and BEST program is checked during the program accreditation visits. A visiting team, which must include at least one representative each from higher education institutions, SDE, K-12 districts, the Department of Higher Education, and another state's education system, draws on the information provided by the institution and interviews to determine whether the program is aligned with Connecticut's standards. There is no particular way in which the program must demonstrate it is aligned. These visits, which occur every five years for each program, on a rolling basis across programs, are the only times at which programs are assessed regarding integration of the state standards.

There has never been a comprehensive, point-in-time review of all the Connecticut teacher preparation programs by SDE or any other organization to understand to what extent compliance with the regulation requiring alignment with the teaching standards (R.C.S.A. Sec. 10-145d-11) is occurring across the system. It is unclear how fully teacher preparation programs integrate the state teaching standards into their curricula.

SDE staff, mentors, and cooperating teachers believe the programs are beginning to more closely align their programs with the state standards. Whether the programs are shifting fundamentally to become aligned or simply complying with the regulation at a minimum level, to retain accreditation, is not known. For example, most, if not all, teacher preparation programs require their candidates to complete a portfolio of their student teaching. Some programs cite this as an example of integrating BEST into the curricula. However, the extent to which those portfolios require students to apply and document the use of the concepts of effective teaching, which are at the core of the BEST portfolio, may vary.

The committee recognizes teacher preparation programs value the characteristics that make them unique; state regulation, however, requires accredited programs to instruct candidates according to the state's teaching standards and competencies. The rationale for this requirement is logical: without instructing teacher candidates in how to teach according to the standards, it is unreasonable to expect beginning educators to teach according to the standards, let alone demonstrate how to do so in a formal, state-administered assessment centered on such standards, as required for certification purposes under BEST.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education undertake a comprehensive review of the alignment of all the accredited teacher preparation programs with the state's teaching standards as contained in the Common Core of Teaching. The review should also examine how the program approval process can be used by the department of education to ensure teacher preparation programs fully align with the state's teaching standards.

SDE attempted several years ago to assist teacher preparation programs in aligning with the teaching standards through organizing an effort to create a universal student teaching evaluation matrix (i.e., rubric) closely based on the CCT. This work was funded by a federal Teacher Quality Enhancement (Title II) grant. Most preparation programs participated in the instrument's development and finalization, but only eight currently use the rubric to assess candidates during student teaching. Whether the remaining 12 teacher preparation programs evaluate their teacher candidates during student teaching using state standards as outlined in the student teaching evaluation rubric is not known.

Student teaching is a prospective teacher's closest experience to teaching in one's own classroom. During student teaching, each teacher candidate should be expected to demonstrate knowledge and initial application of the state standards in order to prepare for what will be expected of him or her, as a full-fledged teacher in Connecticut. The program review committee believes the developed student teaching rubric is a valuable tool in ensuring candidates are well-prepared to become teachers who meet Connecticut's state teaching standards.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education require teacher preparation programs to use a standards-based student teaching rubric. The department of education should require each program to either adopt the rubric already developed, adding on to it if desired as currently is permitted, or to submit its own rubric for approval or rejection. If a program's own rubric is rejected by the department of education, the program should be required to use the standards-based rubric until a sufficient rubric is submitted and approved.

Portfolio Performance of Graduates

Between two sets of recent, combined portfolio cycles – 2003 and 2004, and 2006 and 2007 – most teacher preparation programs saw the percent of their graduates failing the portfolio decline, as depicted in Table I-1. It is possible the declines are evidence the teacher preparation programs have begun to better align their curricula with the state standards and to improve their candidates' preparation for the BEST portfolio. Other reasons for the declines also are possible, such as better provision of support during graduates' initial years of teaching or simple chance, due to the short timeframe under examination.

In general, there are not statistically significant differences in the rates most programs' graduates fail the portfolio. The portfolio failure rates of different preparation programs vary, but only four programs had failure rates for the combined 2006 and 2007 cycles that were significantly different (either higher or lower) from the overall rates (see Table I-1). Sometimes programs with low failure rates across the portfolio categories – Quinnipiac University, St. Joseph College, and UConn – had too few portfolio submissions in particular categories to make these low rates statistically significant.

An examination of the performance of out-of-state program graduates reveals this group's failure rates also have dropped, falling below (although not significantly) the overall failure rates in two of the three portfolio categories. This is a change from previous years, and portfolio failure rates of Connecticut teacher preparation programs are no longer lower than those of out-of-state programs.

Table I-1. Percent of Portfolios Scored “1” (Failing) by Teacher Preparation Program: 2006 and 2007				
Teacher Preparation Program	Number of Portfolios Submitted	Percent of Portfolios Scored “1” in 2006 and 2007 (percentage point change from 2003 and 20004)		
		Elem. Literacy	Elem. Numeracy	Non-Elementary
Central CT State Univ.	506	9.3% (-2.2)	11.1% (-6.4)	11.3% (-1.4)
Connecticut College	25	---	---	---
Eastern CT State Univ.	244	4.3% (-5.0)	13.2% (-3.8)	12.1% (-3.1)
Fairfield Univ.	78	---	---	5.3% (-5.3)
Mitchell College	4	---	---	---
Quinnipiac Univ.	168	4.8% (NA)	1.6% (NA) *	4.5% (NA)
Sacred Heart Univ.	549	8.4% (-1.9)	13.9% (-3.1)	9.9% (-1.3)
St. Joseph College	228	3.0% (-6.9)	6.2% (-3.8)	8.2% (+1.2)
Southern CT State Univ.	727	9.3% (-0.9)	9.5% (-8.4)	13.8% (+3.8) **
Univ. of Bridgeport	507	12.8% (+3.0) **	14.7% (+1.5)	7.1% (+0.4)
Univ. of Connecticut	304	0.0% (-9.1)	4.2% (-3.4)	4.8% (-0.7) *
Univ. of Hartford	132	14.0% (+1.8)	14.0% (-5.1)	6.5% (-2.5)
Univ. of New Haven	290	9.4% (-1.4)	14.5% (+1.2)	9.5% (-7.8)
Western CT State Univ.	153	6.1% (-7.9)	13.0% (-11.4)	8.6% (+8.6)
Yale Univ.	14	---	---	---
Total for “standard” CT programs ^a	3,929	8.2% (-1.9)	11.3% (-4.2)	10.0% (-0.2)
ARC programs	311	---	---	12.7% (+2.3)
Out-of-state programs	1,095	5.9% (-8.4)	12.3% (-3.6)	9.5% (-4.7)
Total for all programs	5,335	7.7% (NA)	11.5% (NA)	10.2% (NA)

Note on statistical significance: In general, statistical significance is determined by examining the probability value, denoted by “p-value.” The p-value indicates the chance that the observed finding (in this case, a program’s failure rate) would have been observed, if it had truly been no different from what was expected to be observed (in this case, the overall failure rate). A p-value equal to or smaller than a given number – usually 0.05 – means the difference between what was observed and what was expected, is statistically significant or meaningful. As the p-value becomes lower, i.e., approaches zero, the chance that the difference is due to chance grows ever smaller.

For example, the *chance* that the rate at which Quinnipiac University’s graduates failed the elementary numeracy portfolio (1.6%) is *not* actually different from the elementary numeracy portfolio failure rate of all the other programs combined, is equal to or less than 1% (p = or < 0.01; alternatively written, “statistically significant at the 0.01 level”). Because this p-value is very small, we can reasonably conclude that the difference between Quinnipiac graduates’ and the overall failure rates for this portfolio category is meaningful.

*The difference between this preparation program’s graduates’ portfolio failure rate and the average failure rate of all the other programs’ graduates was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, for this portfolio category.

**The difference between this preparation program’s graduates’ portfolio failure rate and the average failure rate of all the other programs’ graduates was statistically significant at the 0.01 level, for this portfolio category.

^a“Standard” CT programs” includes all non-ARC programs in Connecticut. The “standard” CT programs listed total 15 because no graduates of Albertus Magnus College, the 16th program, completed the portfolio in 2006 or 2007.

---Fewer than 20 portfolios were submitted.

(NA): Data for 2003-2004 was not available; therefore, the change between the series of years could not be calculated.

Source of data: SDE

Section II: Support

Graduates of teacher preparation programs who pass the Praxis II exam are recommended for initial certification. Those who obtain teaching positions in Connecticut are immediately entered into the BEST program, along with college graduates who have not yet completed a teacher preparation program but are teaching under Durational Shortage Area Permits (DSAPs).

Once in the BEST program, participants are to receive mentoring support from their local school districts for one year, along with support provided at the state level. ARC graduates and teachers working under DSAPs receive two years of mentoring and other support. The State Department of Education is responsible for overseeing the support component of BEST. Providing BEST support for beginning teachers is a statutory requirement that aims to integrate them into the profession as high-quality teachers and prepare them for the BEST assessment.

Rationale for Strong Support Programs

Recent research has shown strong support programs confer benefits on beginning teachers to the extent that net cost savings result. The savings are the product of two program effects: 1) beginning teachers' lower attrition due to a higher satisfaction level, and 2) their improved effectiveness from the induction assistance they receive. There also is some initial evidence that a strong induction program can positively impact student achievement.⁸ This seems logical, since a strong support program should improve teacher quality, and research shows higher teacher quality is associated with higher student achievement.

The Alliance for Excellent Education defines a strong induction program as having substantive mentoring, ongoing professional development, common planning time with colleagues, access to a peer network outside the new teacher's school, and standards-based assessment.⁹ Using these criteria and based on survey data, program data, and interviews, the committee finds *Connecticut's induction program, BEST, currently is not a strong induction program.* A standards-based assessment is the only high-quality induction program component experienced by all BEST participants; the other components are not offered to or meaningfully experienced by most beginning teachers in Connecticut.

New teachers leave the profession at a steep financial cost to districts. Generally, experts estimate the cost of replacing a beginning teacher who leaves at about 30 percent of salary plus benefits, as well as termination, vacancy, hiring, and training costs. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) estimated in 2007 that in Hartford, the district's annual cost of new teacher turnover was \$4,462,500.¹⁰ In a study of several of the state's

⁸ "Is Mentoring Worth the Money? A Benefit-Cost Analysis and Five-Year Rate of Return of a Comprehensive Mentoring Program for Beginning Teachers," Anthony Villar and Michael Strong, *ERS Spectrum: Journal of Research and Information* 25(3): 1-17, Educational Research Service, Summer 2007.

⁹ *Tapping the Potential; Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers*, Alliance for Excellent Education, June 2004.

¹⁰ *Policy Brief; The High Cost of Teacher Turnover*, Thomas Carroll, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, June 2007.

districts, the Connecticut Center for School Change calculated the average district loses at least \$14,862 for each beginning teacher who leaves.¹¹

The amount spent on replacing teachers can be cut by reducing teacher turnover through well-developed induction programs. A noted study on attrition and induction¹² found that nationally, after one year of teaching, 20 percent of new teachers left the profession and 21 percent switched districts, for a total attrition rate of 41 percent. A strong induction program, however, decreased the combined attrition rate to 27 percent. The strongest type of program resulted in an overall rate of 18 percent. In contrast, a weak induction program, with only mentoring (of unspecified quality) and some supportive communication from an administrator, resulted in no significant attrition change. The study demonstrated the importance of offering a strong system of support that combines induction components. Offering solely one or two types of support did not reduce attrition.

Additional research further indicates strong induction programs produce large, significant, positive effects on retention. California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) programs incorporate most of the elements of a strong induction program. As such, its participating schools showed an attrition rate of 9 percent over five years – about one-fourth the rate of those who did not participate in a similar program.¹³ School districts in two large cities – Seattle and Rochester, New York – saw their teacher attrition rates drop by more than half when they adopted strong programs modeled after one long used by the Toledo district, which focuses on providing assistance through full-time mentors.¹⁴

Another recent study¹⁵ found that a strong induction program both saved money and improved student achievement. In the only cost-benefit analysis of induction programs to date, researchers found the program of a California district returned \$1.66 for each \$1 invested in the two-year program, over five years. Most of the benefit was due to the higher effectiveness of participating new teachers, as demonstrated by student achievement test gains; savings through higher teacher retention composed the remainder of the benefit. Nearly all states and districts, including Connecticut, lack the ability to connect student achievement test scores to individual teachers for the most part. This makes it impossible to judge the effects of most induction programs on student achievement. Connecticut is progressing toward such a system, however.

¹¹ *In Search of Quality: Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Teachers*, Robert Reichardt and Michael Arnold with Kelly Hupfeld, Connecticut Center for School Change, 2006.

¹² "What are the Effects of Induction and Mentoring on Beginning Teacher Turnover?" Thomas Smith and Richard Ingersoll, *American Educational Research Journal* 41(3): 681-714, Fall 2004.

¹³ *Qualified Teachers for All California Students: Current Issues in Recruitment, Retention, Preparation, and Professional Development*, Chloe Ballard, California Research Bureau, August 1998.

¹⁴ *Issue Brief: Mentoring and Supporting New Teachers*, Bridget Curran, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, January 2002.

¹⁵ "Is Mentoring Worth the Money? A Benefit-Cost Analysis and Five-Year Rate of Return of a Comprehensive Mentoring Program for Beginning Teachers," Anthony Villar and Michael Strong, *ERS Spectrum: Journal of Research and Information* 25(3): 1-17, Educational Research Service, Summer 2007.

Studies in Tennessee, Boston, and Dallas also indicate the quality of teaching impacts student achievement. For example, the Tennessee study¹⁶ found that, despite beginning at the same percentile, children with the least effective teachers for three years in a row had achievement test scores more than 50 percentile points lower than their peers who had the most effective teachers during the same period. The study also found that the effect of teaching quality is cumulative over time but not compensatory. In other words, one low-quality teacher can impact a student's achievement for many years, regardless of the quality of subsequent teachers.

The National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Governors Association, The Education Trust, and the Alliance for Excellent Education all agree: teacher quality is one of the most important factors impacting student achievement. *Strong induction that moves beyond emotional support for beginning teachers to help improve the quality of teaching has the potential to positively impact student achievement.*

Determining the effectiveness of induction programs' support components, as a whole, is difficult, because the programs vary substantially. States, districts, and universities have developed a wide range of supports for new teachers since the movement gained momentum in the 1980s. As research was published showing the benefits of strong programs, more programs – albeit of varying quality – were developed and offered. In 1984, eight states reported having a support program. By 1992, 34 states had one, with half mandating participation in a statewide program.¹⁷ Currently, about 30 states have required programs; it is unclear how many provide funding for implementation of support.¹⁸ (Connecticut discontinued directly funding mentor support in the early 1990s.) The programs vary in components, duration, intensity, purpose, oversight, and lead organization. Therefore, they cannot be lumped together for one definitive statement or study on the degree to which induction programs are effective.¹⁹

Generally, research consistently finds that strong, multi-year support programs for beginning teachers produce positive results. There is little, if any, sound research showing positive results of basic induction programs with short-term or infrequent support. The best published, quantitative studies of particular programs, which found positive results, uniformly involved only strong, intensive initiatives.

¹⁶ *Research Progress Report: Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement*, William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, November 1996.

¹⁷ "Beginning Teachers Programs: Analysis of State Actions During the Reform Era," Carol Furtwengler, *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 3(3), February 1995.

¹⁸ "Teacher Induction Programs: Trends and Opportunities," Alene Russell, *Policy Matters* 3(10), American Association of State Colleges and Universities, October 2006.

¹⁹ *The Impact of Mentoring on Teacher Retention: What the Research Says*, Richard Ingersoll and Jeffrey Kralik, Education Commission of the States: Research Review, Teaching Quality, February 2004. See also: *A Review of Literature on Beginning Teacher Induction*, Elizabeth Whisnant, Kim Elliott, and Susan Pynchon, Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, July 2005.

Support models. Despite variations in induction program components, most have mentoring as their central focus. There are three mentoring models, although the details of the mentoring – for example, how frequently mentors and beginning teachers are expected to meet, and topics they are supposed to explore together – vary somewhat within any particular model.

The first is Connecticut’s model. Mentors most often are teachers with full-time classroom teaching duties who work with beginning teachers whenever they can. Some programs, including Connecticut’s as required by state regulation, also include a provision for release time a few times each year from classroom duties to facilitate mentoring.

The second model is being disseminated by the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz. This model involves releasing teachers from their classroom duties for at least two years to devote all their full-time hours to mentoring a caseload of beginning teachers. The model is used in New York City and Alaska (in close cooperation with the New Teacher Center); Seattle; Rochester, New York; and Toledo, which pioneered the concept in 1981.

The third model is defined by granting mentors part-time release from their classroom duties so they may devote the remainder of their time to mentoring. This model is followed in Syracuse.

BEST Support and Overview

The primary goal of the BEST support component is to provide all beginning teachers with substantive assistance that integrates them into the profession and prepares them for the BEST standards-based assessment, as ways of improving teacher quality. Like most other induction programs, the BEST program support component is centered on mentoring (i.e. assistance from colleagues). Each beginning teacher is required to meet periodically with an assigned, trained mentor or mentor team members,²⁰ who generally have full-time classroom duties. Beginning teachers also may be supported by administrators, the BEST district facilitator who is charged with overseeing the program at the district level, and other teachers. Mentoring currently is required only in the beginning teacher’s first year under SDE’s established policies; except for ARC graduates and those teaching under DSAPs, the duration of mentoring is not mentioned in statute or state regulations, but is considered a State Board of Education policy.

Inequities in support have been cited frequently by multiple constituencies and acknowledged by SDE. These assertions have never been fully quantified by a party that is not connected to stakeholders in the BEST program, and could not be substantiated because *there is no statewide systematic data collection and analysis system for mentoring*. Consequently, program review committee independently surveyed *all* beginning teachers who had just completed their first or second years to acquire information on support they received. District facilitators also were surveyed to better understand the range of support offered at the district level. (See Appendix A for more detailed information on the surveys).

²⁰ A mentor team is composed of a trained mentor and other educators. The goal of a mentor team arrangement is to provide assistance relevant to the beginning teacher’s building, content, and grade level, as described in committee staff’s September briefing report.

The surveys conducted by the committee confirmed BEST support and satisfaction with it varies across the state, with beginning teachers working in the poorest urban districts (as represented by the District Reference Group (DRG) designation of “I”²¹) reporting the lowest level of satisfaction with support. Sixty-nine percent of all Year One respondents were “satisfied” with the overall level of support they received, but less than half (48 percent) of those who taught in DRG I districts were “satisfied.” Indeed, in almost every aspect covered by the survey, teachers in the poorest urban districts reported receiving significantly less support than their peers in wealthier districts, as shown in Table II-1. District facilitators who responded to the survey confirmed the diversity in support and oversight of mentoring given at the district level, but not necessarily according to the district’s DRG.

Table II-1. Key Indicators of BEST Support for Beginning Teachers			
Support Indicator	A-H Districts	I Districts	All Districts
First Year Teachers			
Had an assigned mentor***	97%	91%	95%
Satisfied with overall support***	77%	48%	69%
Satisfied with mentor support***	74%	57%	69%
Met with mentor within first two months of starting to teach***	91%	82%	88%
Satisfied with principal support***	75%	52%	69%
Satisfied with state-level support	71%	65%	70%
Second Year Teachers			
Had an assigned mentor***	89%	61%	83%
Satisfied with mentor support***	70%	53%	65%
Satisfied with principal support***	61%	46%	58%
Satisfied with state-level support	78%	68%	75%
Indicates the difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.001 level, using Kendall’s tau-b correlation statistic, for this support indicator. Differences between the A-H and I districts were not statistically significant for those support indicators not followed by “.”			
Notes: The numbers of responses (i.e., sample sizes) vary both across columns and within columns (across individual response items). In addition, the percents in the “All Districts” column reflect all responses received, including the responses of those who did not indicate their district and therefore could not be grouped by DRG.			
Source: PRI staff analysis of teacher surveys			

Mentoring, which is the focus of BEST support, is not given in a meaningful way to most beginning teachers. Although a majority of new teachers indicated they were satisfied with their mentors, further examination of survey results showed the majority received little or no substantive support. Substantive support is specific assistance that teachers can use throughout their careers to become better teachers and/or to perform well on the BEST portfolio. Examples of key types of specific support, which were included in the survey, are: 1) help plan lessons; 2)

²¹ The DRG I districts are Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham. Appendix B gives the membership of each DRG.

understand the BEST portfolio; 3) refine or learn teaching techniques; 4) make aware of program resources; and 5) understand the state’s teaching standards. Fifty-nine percent of all Year One teachers who responded – and 80 percent of those in the poorest urban districts – received either one type of or no substantive assistance from their mentors, as shown in Table II-2 below. This analysis shows *the BEST support component is not meeting its basic goal of providing substantive support to all beginning teachers, particularly in DRG I districts.*

Teachers might have indicated they were satisfied with their mentors, despite not receiving substantive assistance, because emotional support or help in becoming familiar with the school or district was provided. Although beginning teachers may value this non-substantive assistance, that type of guidance may not impact either their teaching quality or performance on the BEST assessment.

Table II-2. Substantive Support Provided to Year One Teachers in BEST			
Substantive Support	A-H Districts n=498	I Districts n=167	All Districts n=717
Had no assigned mentor*	3%	9%	5%
Of those assigned a mentor:			
Received no substantive support***	26%	42%	31%
Received only one type of substantive support	21%	29%	23%
Total percent received no or one type of substantive support***	47%	71%	54%
Total percent of Year One teachers received no or one type of substantive support***	50%	80%	59%
*Indicates the difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, using Kendall’s tau-b correlation statistic. ***Indicates the difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.001 level, using Kendall’s tau-b correlation statistic. Notes: Differences between the A-H and I districts were not statistically significant for the type of substantive support not followed by at least one “*.” The numbers of responses (i.e. sample sizes) for columns “A-H Districts” and “I Districts” do not sum to the number of responses for “All Districts” because “All Districts” includes the responses of those who did not indicate their district and therefore could not be grouped by DRG. Source: PRI staff analysis of teacher survey			

The above analysis shows discrepancies in the overall level and quality of support provided to beginning teachers within DRG I districts in comparison with beginning teachers in other DRGs. The committee believes the reasons for such discrepancies should be examined in more detail and recommendations should be made to strengthen the overall support beginning teachers in DRG I districts receive.

The State Department of Education shall examine why disparities exist in support for beginning teachers in school districts within District Reference Group I (as designated by the education department) compared to other school districts throughout the state and report its recommendations for addressing the disparities to the legislature’s committee(s) of cognizance by February 1, 2009.

SDE has emphasized BEST's assessment element to the detriment of overseeing the support component. Since state funding cuts of the early 1990s, which caused the elimination of the state-funded mentor stipend, SDE has had little role in the mentoring structure. Implementation and tracking of the support component, to the extent it occurs, largely has devolved to the EastConn RESC, which holds a contract for implementing parts of BEST. The education department's focus on the assessment component for licensing purposes is somewhat understandable because the state has a larger, more direct, role in that aspect of BEST. The state organizes and oversees the assessment, while support is given mostly by local mentors.

SDE's focus on the assessment, however, has filtered down to the local level, leaving the support component to be perceived by many as less critical. The interviews and surveys conducted during this study revealed that, to many beginning teachers and their administrators, *"BEST" is synonymous with "the portfolio," not with an induction program encompassing both support and assessment.* Further, the level at which BEST support is provided to beginning teachers varies across and within districts. Many educators attribute the variations in support to differing levels of administrator commitment at the district and individual school levels.

Although SDE has attempted to measure whether the assessment affects a broad range of indicators, *the BEST program has not systematically measured whether Connecticut's support initiative, as one component of the program, has produced any positive results, including cost savings through reduced teacher attrition or higher teacher effectiveness measured by improved student performance.* The program review committee believes that, given the varied implementation of support to beginning teachers, such a study would not find the current support component reaps consistent, meaningful, and lasting benefits for beginning teachers or their students.

Key changes, as discussed below, could strengthen the BEST support component into a more effective tool in providing beginning teachers with more consistent, meaningful mentoring over a longer period of time than is currently required. As the national research indicates, greater and more effective support to beginning teachers would result in cost savings and increased student achievement. Furthermore, if Connecticut is going to continue to have a formal state assessment tied to licensure of beginning teachers, a state-supported, consistently high-quality support component must be in place to assist new teachers in learning and practicing the skills they need for the assessment and their careers. The support component must also be measured at the state level to ensure it is achieving the desired results.

Oversight of Mentoring

Neither the quality nor the substance of mentoring is effectively monitored by SDE. The education department lacks a formal, systematic tracking system that would allow an analysis of whether the program is meeting established performance indicators, which also are not in place. EastConn, which keeps some SDE data on mentor matches, is required only to provide BEST trainings; full oversight of mentoring is not part of its contract.

SDE has made two efforts to collect information on mentoring. First, all beginning teachers submitting portfolios are required to turn in completed surveys regarding the quality of support and teacher preparation, as well as the usefulness of the portfolio. Because the teachers

must write their Social Security numbers on the survey and submit it as part of their portfolios prior to scoring, the committee questions the overall candor and validity of the resulting data. In addition, the department does not use the portfolio survey information in any substantive manner on a regular basis. Second, SDE contracted with UConn in 2005-06 to conduct and analyze the results of a one-time survey in spring 2005 of all types of educators involved in BEST, including beginning teachers. SDE does not systematically gather or analyze information on BEST mentoring in any other way.

It is unclear to what extent mentoring is tracked or analyzed by most district-level BEST personnel. Three-quarters of the district personnel in charge of BEST at the district level, called BEST district facilitators, who responded to the committee's survey systematically check whether mentoring is occurring. This may seem a high percentage, but as the only direct link between SDE and the districts, the facilitators have the primary responsibility of ensuring mentoring is occurring at the school district level. If mentoring is not systematically checked and reported by all facilitators, then SDE cannot be fully assured mentoring is occurring.

Further, some district facilitator respondents reported contacting both beginning teachers and their mentors, while others responded they contact only one group. The committee believes this inconsistent oversight is insufficient, due to the fact about one in three survey respondents were not satisfied with their mentors (31 percent of Year One teachers and 35 percent of Year Two teachers). In addition, a small group of beginning teachers (about 5 percent) reported they did not receive required mentoring support at all.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education develop a data collection and evaluation system for accurately monitoring the mentoring component of BEST. As part of the data collection system, the department should require the name(s) not only of the mentor, as is currently expected, but also, when assigned, of mentor team members to be submitted by the district as part of the beginning teacher's staff file within SDE. The data collected should be used to improve the quality and relevance of mentoring required under BEST.

The committee also recommends the State Department of Education keep its mentoring monitoring efforts separate from any surveys or documents relating to assessment submitted by the beginning teachers to their mentors and/or to the department.

Currently, only the name of the beginning teacher's individual or primary mentor – called the “mentor of record” – must be submitted as part of the teacher's staff file. Requiring the mentor team members to also be listed will facilitate two goals. First, the role of the mentor team members will be formalized and, therefore, perceived as important by all involved parties. Second, SDE will better understand and be able to fully analyze the types of mentoring beginning teachers are receiving. This will aid the goals of improving mentor matches and understanding what types of support are provided.

The committee supports SDE's efforts to seek input from Year Two teachers on their BEST experiences through an annual survey but believes SDE needs to make sure the information acquired from the survey results is valid and therefore useful. This goal can be reached through keeping a survey separate from the BEST assessment. The department might

consider periodically collecting information from Year One teachers, as well, to better understand the support they receive and how it could be improved.

Substance of Mentoring

Lack of oversight has contributed to varying levels of mentoring across districts. The majority of Year One teachers does not receive comprehensive, substantive support from their mentors. As mentioned previously, a majority of beginning teachers (59 percent) and a larger portion of teachers in the poorest urban districts (80 percent) received either little or no substantive assistance from mentors in the following key areas mentors currently are trained to cover with their new teachers: 1) help plan lessons; 2) understand the BEST portfolio; 3) refine or learn teaching techniques; 4) be made aware of program resources; and 5) understand the state’s teaching standards.

No single type of substantive support was given to an overwhelming majority of Year One beginning teachers who responded to the committee’s survey, as shown in Table II-3. Most notably, only 16 percent of beginning teachers in all districts and only 8 percent of those in DRG I had mentors who helped them understand the state’s teaching standards, which are the foundation of the BEST portfolio’s components. The table also shows new teachers in the poorest urban districts were significantly less likely than their peers in other districts to receive each type of substantive mentoring assistance.

Table II-3. Types of Substantive Mentoring Assistance Given to Year One Teachers in BEST			
Type of Assistance	A-H Districts n=497	I Districts n=166	All Districts n=715
BEST resources (e.g., websites)*	35%	20%	31%
Connecticut’s Common Core of Teaching (state standards)*	19%	8%	16%
Lesson planning*	43%	27%	39%
Portfolio assessment*	33%	16%	29%
Teaching techniques*	56%	16%	52%

*Indicates the difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.001 level, using Kendall’s tau-b correlation statistic.
 Note: The numbers of responses (i.e., sample sizes) for columns “A-H Districts” and “I Districts” do not sum to the number of responses for “All Districts” because “All Districts” includes the responses of those who did not indicate their district and therefore could not be grouped by DRG.
 Source: PRI staff analysis of teacher survey

Year One teachers want more information that is relevant to their teaching duties. More than a third of those who responded to these survey items agreed that more relevant information in both the school or district’s orientation and in the BEST orientation would have improved the support they received. About 40 percent believed support would have improved if they had received higher quality mentoring.

The committee's survey results on beginning teachers' satisfaction with the quality of mentoring are corroborated by the 2005 UConn survey, which found 23 percent of Year One and 35 percent of Year Two respondents were not satisfied with their mentors. In addition, the UConn survey analysis indicated Year One teachers who wanted guidance in particular topics often did not receive pertinent assistance. This finding was especially pronounced regarding the use of student assessment information to modify instruction – which is one of the key state standards and a BEST portfolio component – and the preparation of the portfolio. For example, 66 percent of new teachers reported wanting support on the use of student assessments to modify instruction, but less than two-thirds (62 percent) of those who wanted this sort of help, received it.²²

SDE has made some efforts to improve mentoring. Through EastConn, mentor trainings are reviewed and updated at least once each year. The RESC field staff recently made available a guide for mentors, which the field staff continues to refine. The committee believes this document is a productive step toward guiding mentors. However, it is insufficient given the scope of the problem. A more structured mentoring system, based on the key elements of the state's teaching standards, would better ensure beginning teachers receive the substantive, instructional support they need. Such structured mentoring also should enhance new teachers' abilities and understanding of the BEST portfolio requirement.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education create and implement a collection of sequenced support modules, based on the state standards contained in the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching, effective teaching methods, and beginning teachers' needs, through which mentors will guide their assigned new teachers. Starting no later than the 2009-2010 school year, the department should require mentors and beginning teachers to use the module system and to submit proof of its completion to their appropriate building-level administrators. Each school district should submit annual statements to the department certifying the progress of its beginning teachers in successfully completing the mentoring requirements.

A module system of mentoring based on the state standards, addressing student learning and beginning teachers' needs, will ensure mentors understand the types of instruction and assistance they need to provide their assigned new teachers. The system simultaneously will ensure beginning teachers understand what they must learn during their initial years of teaching in Connecticut as the foundation for their careers and assist them in preparing for the state's certification assessment.

There is some national precedent for a structured mentoring program. The Pathwise system, developed by ETS, is used in several states, including Ohio, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Vermont. (California also has its own recommended structured mentoring curriculum.) From a review of the Pathwise materials, the committee does not believe the Pathwise system is based on Connecticut's teaching standards or that the amount of paperwork it requires is necessary. The concept of structured mentoring, however, must be implemented in a way suited to this state, in order to substantially improve mentoring across and within districts.

²² *BEST Program Impact Survey Results: Results from Spring 2005*, A Collaborative Project of the Connecticut State Department of Education and the University of Connecticut Teachers for a New Era Project, Draft, December 2006.

In developing the modules, SDE is encouraged to work with the RESC field staff, along with other constituencies as determined by the department. Each module should be focused on one topic (e.g., “Planning a Unit”) and include key concepts and practices the beginning teacher must learn. With the conclusion of each module, beginning teachers should produce some evidence of their learning for review by the mentor and building administrator. Examples of evidence could include: a short reflection paper; a brief write-up of lessons learned at a relevant professional development workshop or other seminar, and how the teacher will apply those lessons; a research paper; or any other activity as determined by SDE. This evidence of learning should show the new teacher has received instruction, has reflected on it, and understands how to apply the acquired knowledge to his or her own teaching.

The purpose of the building-level administrator review of the evidence’s completion, authenticity, and content is three-fold. First, the review will ensure the beginning teacher appropriately and thoughtfully completed the mentoring modules. Second, the review will require administrators to take an active role in overseeing support to beginning teachers. Third, the information could be used within the beginning teacher performance evaluation and professional development plan.

Time for Mentoring

There is general consensus among researchers and educators that high-quality mentoring requires a substantial time commitment by mentors. In studies, the programs that show the best results are those that reduce the classroom teaching duties of mentors in part or completely. Alaska’s new support program and several districts – including, most recently, New York City – have these policies.

Anecdotal information suggests some of the best mentor prospects in Connecticut decline to mentor due to time constraints caused by their teaching workload and other school-based activities. Many potential mentors are considered leaders in their schools, who typically serve on multiple committees, lead extra-curricular activities, and teach full-time. Reducing a mentor’s classroom workload would give the mentor time to observe, meet with, and guide the beginning teacher. *Numerous constituencies in Connecticut agree, and written testimony corroborates, that giving trained veteran teachers sufficient time to mentor would both increase the quality of mentoring and boost the supply of willing mentors.*

Currently, mentors are required only to receive periodic release time from classroom teaching duties. *Formal release time for mentors and beginning teachers is required by law, but it is neither uniformly described within SDE documents nor consistently applied among districts that have release time policies.* There is inconsistency among the state regulations, internal policies and procedures, and BEST program publications regarding the amount of release time from classroom duties mentors should receive and the activities for which release time may be used as noted in the committee’s September briefing report. All sources are consistent, however, in that the total release time for mentors and beginning teachers, combined, must equal four days and be used, at least in part, for observations.

Information from interviews conducted during this study indicated some mentors do not or cannot take advantage of the mandated release time. Mentors generally are hesitant to take advantage of the required release time to work with beginning teachers, in part because they do not want their students to lose learning time, as many believe happens when substitute teachers fill in. In some areas, mentors are not offered release time due to a shortage of either substitute teachers or district funding to pay for them.

Data from the committee's survey of Year One teachers shows a need to give mentors time to facilitate interactions with beginning teachers. Over half (52 percent) of Year One respondents never were observed by their mentors, an activity that is required by the state regulations. On a more basic level, more than one-quarter (26 percent) of Year One respondents who had co-curricular duties²³ were unable to find common time to meet with their mentors.

The committee's survey of district facilitators shows the inconsistency of release time policies across school districts. A strong majority (86 percent) of facilitators reported their districts allow mentors and beginning teachers to observe each other; less (61 percent) stated their districts allow release time to be used for mentoring meetings. A small percentage (7 percent) reported their districts provide time for mentors to use productively as they wish. Although release time is allowed by nearly all (94 percent) districts of the respondents, less than half (46 percent) have a formal policy of granting BEST release time to either mentors or beginning teachers.

Reducing mentors' classroom teaching workloads would provide them with dedicated time to observe and work with beginning teachers on implementing the recommended structured support modules. In addition, the need for release time, and the inconsistencies in applying release time across districts, would be eliminated.

Because mentoring is a formal function of the BEST program, the state should assist districts with a portion of the costs associated with mentoring. At the same time, districts should be expected to provide some funding since national research has found districts benefit from strong mentoring, due to improved retention and effectiveness of beginning teachers.

The program review committee recommends C.G.S. Sec. 10-220a be amended to require a reduced classroom teaching workload for BEST mentors as determined by the school district. Those mentors who simultaneously teach part-time must have a substantially lower caseload. The workload reduction shall be structured to coincide with a beginning teacher's daily preparation time. Districts may choose to provide full-time mentors, instead of, or in combination with, mentors who have a reduced classroom teaching workload. Districts shall be required not to exceed a caseload of 15 beginning teachers per full-time mentor.

The state shall provide funds to districts to reduce their costs of: 1) hiring additional personnel to fill classes for mentors who are currently employed as teachers; and/or 2) the salary or hourly wages for those educators hired solely to be mentors. Mentors who are employed simultaneously in another capacity shall receive their same salary.

²³ Co-curricular duties include rotating responsibilities, such as monitoring lunch periods or study halls, as well as responsibility for student activities, for example leading clubs or coaching athletic teams.

The committee further recommends C.G.S. Sec. 10-220a be amended to allow not only current teachers, but also retired teachers, retired administrators, teachers on leave, and education faculty from the state's various colleges and universities to become mentors.

The committee also recommends the State Department of Education work collaboratively with local school districts, Regional Educational Service Centers, and other constituencies associated with BEST to identify, recruit, and train an expanded pool of mentors.

SDE is encouraged to reach out to organizations, districts, and state(s) that have implemented or advocated for a reduced classroom teaching workload for mentors in order to formulate the details of the state's new policy. Their knowledge and experience can help SDE formulate a feasible and effective policy.

The program review committee believes a wide range of educators have the potential to become high-quality mentors. This belief was shared by the 2005-06 BEST Advisory Committee and by program staff and administrators in interviews. The proposed changes above will allow districts to draw on the expertise of approved current and retired educators, filling the need for mentors, and to facilitate the building of a larger mentor pool.

The committee recognizes this policy change will require a fiscal commitment to mentoring that will need to be fully determined as the program is developed. Sharing the cost between the state and district levels will not reduce the overall amount of resources needed to implement a reduced classroom teaching workload for mentors. The committee believes the investment in a stronger mentoring system will result in more consistent benefits for beginning teachers, mentors, and students – perhaps resulting in cost-savings through lower attrition and improved student achievement – than the current policy. A model of reduced or no classroom teaching duties for mentors will fully ensure mentors and beginning teachers have the time together needed to engage in substantive mentoring.

Release time. Under the new reduced classroom teaching mentor model discussed above, state-mandated release time for mentors no longer will be necessary. If the legislature decides not to implement and fund a policy of a reduced classroom workload for mentors, then release time policies should be changed so they are more consistent across the state, with accompanying state funding and monitoring.

Mentor release time is required by law, but is not uniformly offered by school districts, as described above. Ensuring release time is given and used would be critical to improving the quality and consistency of mentoring, in the absence of a new policy of reduced classroom teaching duties for mentors. A standardized amount of release time should be available to all mentors, in every district. In addition, mentors should receive a clear message that they are expected to use the release time to observe their new teachers, as required by law. With a policy of release time should come state funding to help districts offset costs associated with providing release time for BEST mentors.

Release time for beginning teachers to engage in induction-related activities is part of the overall release time requirement. The committee survey data, however, revealed 16 percent of

Year One teachers received no release time, and an additional 16 percent received release time only once or twice. Beginning teachers specifically are required by law to observe their mentors or other teachers; over one-third (35 percent) of Year One teachers did not observe anyone, as determined by cross-referencing survey responses. Release time received for specific BEST activities is depicted in Table II-4.

Table II-4. Release Time Received by Year One Teachers for BEST Activities			
Type of Release Time Received and Used	A-H Districts n=489 to 492	I Districts n=165 to 166	All Districts n=707 to 710
Beginning teachers			
Observed mentor teaching*	37%	27%	35%
Observed other teachers teaching	58%	56%	58%
Worked with mentor**	21%	11%	19%
Attended professional development	63%	62%	63%
Mentors			
Received and used time to observe new teacher teaching	49%	42%	48%
*Indicates the difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, using Kendall's tau-b correlation statistic. ** Indicates the difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.01 level, using Kendall's tau-b correlation statistic. Notes: Differences between the A-H and I districts were not statistically significant for those release time uses not followed by at least one "*." The numbers of responses (i.e. sample sizes) for columns "A-H Districts" and "I Districts" do not sum to the number of responses for "All Districts" because "All Districts" includes the responses of those who did not indicate their district and therefore could not be grouped by DRG. In addition, as noted, the numbers of responses (i.e., sample sizes) vary both across columns and within columns (across individual response items). Source: PRI staff analysis of teacher survey			

Similarly to release time for mentors, release time for new teachers should be available to all, across all districts. This will ensure beginning teachers have equal opportunity to learn from their mentors and colleagues.

Frequency of Mentoring

The guidelines regarding how frequently mentoring should occur differ across state resources and school districts. State regulations require weekly meetings, which are also recommended in the manual for BEST district-level personnel. Several other program publications recommend biweekly meetings, as described in the committee's September briefing report. This inconsistency has led to confusion at the district level, reflected in district facilitator survey results portrayed in Table II-5. Mentoring support cannot be fully implemented across and within districts without consistent guidelines.

Mentoring Frequency	Percent of Respondents
As-needed	12%
Monthly	0%
Once every two weeks	37%
Weekly	36%
Multiple times per week	10%
Not yet asked by BEST participants/does not know	5%
n=74 Source: PRI staff analysis of BEST district facilitator survey	

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education standardize the frequency with which beginning teachers and their mentors/mentor teams are required to meet. The standard should take into consideration the frequency necessary to enable mentors and beginning teachers to successfully complete the mentoring module system recommended above.

Length of Mentoring

The duration of mentoring also varies at the district level. *Many school districts already provide two years of mentoring, although there is not consistency statewide.* Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the district facilitator survey respondents indicated second-year mentoring currently was required in their districts; an additional 16 percent noted such support was strongly recommended. These results were corroborated by the committee’s beginning teacher survey responses: 83 percent of all Year Two teachers – but only 61 percent of those in the poorest urban districts – received mentoring in their second years. Beginning teachers without the benefit of a second year of formal mentoring, particularly in the DRG I districts, may be at a disadvantage in building their skills.

Mentoring support in the second year is strongly desired by beginning teachers and district facilitators. Eighty-nine and 93 percent of first and second year teachers who responded to the survey, respectively, believe mentoring should last at least two years. Nearly all (96 percent) district facilitators surveyed agree.

Initial national research indicates beginning teachers and their students greatly benefit from more than one year of substantive mentoring. The cost-benefit study cited earlier, which found substantial benefits to intensive support, was based on a two-year mentoring program. Another study, which examined three districts with varying levels of Year Two mentoring, found that the students of teachers who had more intensive Year Two mentoring had higher achievement test gains over the course of that second year.²⁴

The program review committee recommends C.G.S. Sec. 10-220a be amended to require beginning teachers to receive formal mentoring during their first two years in the BEST program upon receipt of their state initial teacher certification.

²⁴ *Does New Teacher Support Affect Student Achievement? Some Early Research Findings*, Michael Strong, New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Research Brief Issues #06-01, January 2006.

This recommendation recognizes and codifies the current policies and practices of the vast majority of school districts, and will help ensure basic consistency in mentoring support across the state. Further, in accordance with this recommendation, the mentoring module system recommended earlier should cover two years of teaching. There also is precedent for requiring two years of mentoring in Connecticut: it is mandated for both ARC graduates and those teaching under DSAPs.

Selection and Supply of Mentors

The process and ease of selecting teachers to become mentors varies across districts. The process of selecting mentors is outlined in state regulations. A BEST district committee is to review and recommend mentor nominees, who are then approved by the local school board. Only 30 percent of the BEST facilitator respondents' districts use district committees for this role. Instead, generally the district facilitators or their delegates are heavily involved in both recruiting and selecting mentors. About half of facilitators reported that principals also are involved in the process.

Recruiting quality mentors is difficult in some districts, although not for most. About one in four (24 percent) BEST facilitators reported they have trouble recruiting a sufficient number of mentors. Data provided by EastConn on the numbers of beginning teachers and recently trained mentors²⁵ in each district indicates about 18 percent of districts experienced mentor recruitment or matching difficulty last school year.²⁶

Another indicator of recruitment is the precision of a mentor-beginning teacher match. Twenty-eight percent of Year One teachers were assigned either no mentor or to a mentor in neither their school nor content area, according to EastConn's mentor match data. By this measure, too, some districts are experiencing difficulty in recruiting mentors. Drawing on a larger pool of mentors, as recommended above, while having an approval process to ensure quality, may alleviate mentor recruitment difficulty.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education develop guidelines requiring any potential mentor to first be approved by: 1) his or her current district, for those who are employed, certified teachers; 2) his or her last school district, for those who are retired certified administrators or retired certified teachers; or 3) his or her current supervisor, for those who are employed or retired university professors specializing in education.

The person who actually assigns mentors to beginning teachers varies across districts. About three-quarters of district facilitators reported principals played some role in mentor matching. Overall, one-third of matches were completed solely by principals. In 21 percent of

²⁵ Although having attended recent training is not a guarantee of quality, it may be a proxy for dedication to mentoring, and it inherently indicates an opportunity to acquire knowledge on mentoring, two factors that may reasonably be assumed to improve the quality of a mentor.

²⁶ Eighteen percent of districts have a beginning teacher/recently trained mentor ratio that is high. Ten percent of districts had a beginning teacher/mentor ratio of 0.9 or higher. (In other words, these districts had one recently trained mentor for every 0.9 or more beginning teachers). Another eight percent of districts had a ratio of 0.7 to 0.89.

respondents' districts, however, district facilitators alone matched mentors to beginning teachers. A few districts delegated the task to department chairs and deputy superintendents.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education require the beginning teacher's building-level administrator to assign mentors and, where necessary, mentor team members.

The building-level administrators, as the beginning teachers' ultimate supervisors, should have the best understanding of which mentors would be best for the new teachers. Furthermore, placing the responsibility of mentor matching on administrators will obligate them to become more involved in the BEST program. If mentors or mentor team members with content or grade level expertise cannot be located within the beginning teachers' buildings, the administrators should be responsible for working with personnel in other schools or at the district level to find appropriate mentor team members.

Training for Mentors

All educators selected to be mentors are required to complete a three-day initial mentor training workshop in order to be assigned to beginning teachers. Currently, mentors only need to complete initial training once. SDE *recommends* all mentors subsequently attend a single-day mentor update training (or another initial training) every four years.

EastConn, at its own initiative, analyzed the limited SDE mentor match data to which it had access, for this study. The data on mentors for the 2006-07 school year reveal that many lacked recent training. A majority of those who were still teaching and considered eligible mentors (59 percent) had not been trained within the last four years. Over one-third (35 percent) of this group, which represented 20 percent of all eligible mentors, had not attended initial or update mentor training since 1997-1998, about ten years ago. In other words, one-fifth of all mentors had not been trained since before the portfolio was implemented and the state's current teaching standards were adopted.

There is general consensus that all beginning teachers should be mentored by recently trained mentors. Beginning teachers should not be mentored by teachers who are unfamiliar with the state's teaching standards, or with the current BEST support or assessment methods.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education adopt the following mentor training requirements: 1) mentors who received initial or update mentor training up to three years ago must complete an update training; 2) mentors who received initial or update training more than three years ago must complete an initial mentor training; 3) all mentors should be required to complete a mentor update training every third year since their last initial or update training; 4) all mentor trainings, initial or update, should be provided by the State Department of Education in conjunction with the Regional Educational Service Centers, and should be focused on instructing mentors in how to work through the new mentor module system (as recommended above); and 5) anyone who fails to complete these training requirements no longer will be considered eligible for assignment to a beginning teacher, until another initial mentor training is completed.

The program review committee believes full implementation of the mentor module system will require all mentors to receive substantial instruction in the system. At the same time, the training should not be so lengthy as to become a burden to either mentors or trainers. SDE is encouraged to offer training in a series over multiple days, if necessary.

In developing the new update and initial mentor trainings, the department and the RESCs are encouraged to work closely together to ensure the trainings are based on developing mentors' coaching skills. The trainings also should instruct mentors in how to sufficiently work through the mentor module system.

Mentor-Beginning Teacher Matches

The overall quality of mentor-beginning teacher matches varies among and within districts. As previously described, some districts and content areas have an insufficient supply of trained mentors to work with beginning teachers. Due to this shortage, mentors are assigned to beginning teachers in different content areas or buildings, which may not be the most beneficial or effective matches. There are differences, however, at the district level regarding which characteristic takes precedence when a mentor of the same content area and building is not available, according to the results of the district facilitator survey. Statute does not clearly define whether mentor assignments must be based on a new teacher's content area, grade level, or building.

Based on available mentor data from EastConn, presented in Table II-6, half of beginning teachers who were assigned mentors had mentors in the same content area and building. When a content match was not available within the school, beginning teachers most often were assigned to a mentor from a different content area, in the same building.

Table II-6. Beginning Teacher-Mentor Matches: 2006-2007	
Match Characteristics	Percent of Beginning Teacher-Mentor Matches
Content area	
Same	55%
Closely related*	18%
Building	
Same	91%
Different, in-district	9%
Different district	<1%
Overall match	
Same content and building	50%
Same content, different building	4%
Same building, different content	40%
Neither content nor building	5%
n=2,538 (beginning teacher-mentor matches for Year One teachers)	
*An example of a closely related match is a pair composed of a beginning teacher who is certified in elementary education and a mentor who is certified in kindergarten education.	
Source of data: EastConn	

The committee's beginning teacher survey results further confirmed the variation in mentor matches and district personnel's preference for a same-building match. The survey results also indicated mentor teams did not give new teachers better total matches. The percent of new teachers whose teams contained at least one member of the same content area, grade, and building, was about the same as the percent of new teachers with an individual mentor who matched on all three characteristics.

The program review committee recommends C.G.S. Sec. 10-220a be amended to require each beginning teacher to be supported by a mentor or mentor team member who has recent experience or expertise in either: 1) the same, precise content area as the beginning teacher, for a new teacher not in elementary education; or 2) the same, precise grade level as the beginning teacher, for a new teacher who teaches elementary education. If such a match is not feasible, the beginning teacher shall be supported by a mentor who has recent experience or expertise in: 1) a similar content area, for a new teacher not in elementary education; or 2) a similar grade level, for a new teacher who teaches elementary education.

The committee believes a strong mentor understands how to coach a beginning teacher in applying the foundational skills of effective teaching outlined in the state standards: planning, instructing, assessing, and reflecting. At the same time, the committee recognizes that how these skills are implemented is different between, for example, a middle school science class and a high school civics class. Similarly, instructional techniques can vary within a general content area, depending on the precise subject and grade. This is especially true for elementary education, where a first grade teacher will use different teaching techniques from a fifth grade educator. The recommendation proposed above will enable beginning teachers to get support from both well-trained mentors from similar content areas, and colleagues in the more precise areas. As a result, beginning teachers will experience more beneficial mentoring and mentor matching will be facilitated.

District Facilitators

District facilitators are in charge of implementing the BEST program at the local level. They are supposed to organize and monitor BEST activities, especially regarding support. Nearly all district facilitators are full-time district employees in other capacities. About half (57 percent) of survey respondents are district-level administrators, mostly focused on curriculum; the remainder is nearly evenly split between teachers (16 percent) and principals (20 percent). Few facilitators (5 percent) only have BEST facilitator duties. Using survey questions regarding median hours worked on BEST and other duties, facilitators spend about 6 percent of their overall working time on the program.

The BEST duties performed by veteran²⁷ district facilitators are not uniform across districts, with some facilitators taking very active roles and others not. Nearly all district facilitators perform basic, required duties, including organizing a BEST orientation for new teachers and making sure each Year One teacher has an assigned mentor. However, beyond these duties, there is wide variation in tasks, as shown by Table II-7. It is possible the size of

²⁷ This statement and the percents shown in Table II-7 rely on what those district facilitators who held their same BEST position last year, report that they actually did last year.

districts and volumes of beginning teachers may impact the BEST activity levels of district facilitators.

On average, district facilitators performed 9.5 BEST-related duties, of the 14 common duties listed on the survey. The number of activities ranged from three to 15 (an option was provided to fill in other duties), with one-quarter of facilitators completing seven or fewer. Those who completed relatively few BEST activities may have been fulfilling the primary requirements of the facilitator position. Essentially these requirements are to ensure beginning teachers have mentors, check that mentoring is occurring, and organize a BEST orientation.

Table II-7 Percent of BEST District Facilitator Respondents Accomplishing BEST Activities^a	
Activity	Percent
Made sure each new teacher was assigned a mentor	96%
Held/organized BEST orientation	94%
Met with Year One beginning teachers	79%
Met with Year Two beginning teachers	71%
Held portfolio workshops for Year Two teachers	24%
Was primarily responsible for coordinating video equipment for BEST portfolio requirement	7%
Met with groups of mentors	52%
Met with or called individual mentors	78%
Systematically checked to see whether mentoring was occurring ^b	68%
Recruited mentors	86%
Recruited master mentors ^c	26%
Recruited portfolio scorers	70%
Arranged in-district BEST trainings	56%
Arranged for RESC field staff member to speak at administrative meeting	25%
^a Includes only facilitators who both were facilitators in 2006-07 and had beginning teachers in their districts. ^b This item is a cross-referenced combination of two separate survey items: checking with mentors to see whether mentoring was occurring, and checking with beginning teachers for the same purpose. ^c Master mentors are experienced mentors who are trained to take an active role at the district or school levels in working with mentors, and sometimes with beginning teachers. Most districts do not have master mentors. n=65 Source: PRI staff analysis of BEST district facilitator survey	

The variation in facilitators' activities contributes to de facto differences in the support resources beginning teachers may access. It also likely contributes to differences in how helpful beginning teachers believe the facilitators are. Beginning teachers in a district whose facilitator checks to ensure mentoring is being provided and organizes beginning teacher meetings have more opportunities for support than those in a district whose facilitator perceives the primary duty as assigning a mentor to a beginning teacher. About half of all beginning teachers (48 and 56 percent for Years One and Two teachers, respectively) were satisfied with their facilitators.

The differences in district facilitators' performances are partially caused and perpetuated by a lack of clear guidance from SDE. There is no organized training to familiarize facilitators with their duties, as described in the committee's September briefing report. The vast majority of the facilitators (84 percent) who responded to the survey believe training would be beneficial. District facilitators receive three types of guidance currently. First, they meet as a group, twice a year, but it is unclear to what extent those meetings provide specific guidance on what activities they should be performing. Second, they receive a manual for the position, which is a good resource, but does not sufficiently stand in for initial training. Third, starting this year, RESC field staff is contacting all facilitators to better understand each district's induction activities and to provide additional guidance, also as noted in the briefing report. The committee believes training will provide guidance that better enables BEST facilitators to understand their duties so beginning teachers in their districts receive sufficient assistance.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education offer district facilitators training to enable them to understand and carry out their full scope of BEST duties. The department should work with the Regional Educational Service Centers in developing and offering the training.

Administrators

There is general consensus among constituencies interviewed during this study and testimony received by the committee that the quality of mentoring and overall level of support given to beginning teachers depends in large part on administrators. District and building administrators have great influence in determining the extent support is facilitated through crafting beginning teacher and mentor schedules, deciding whether to positively recognize mentors, and shaping school culture. Administrators also decide whether to personally support beginning teachers through meeting with them, making them feel comfortable approaching them with questions, offering an orientation, and facilitating attendance at workshops.

The importance of administrators to induction is corroborated by survey results. All BEST district facilitators who responded to the committee's survey agree administrators have a "strong" (74 percent) or "moderate" (26 percent) impact on the level of support provided to beginning teachers; none believed administrators do not affect overall support.

National research has confirmed administrators play a large role in teacher satisfaction levels and employment decisions. Dissatisfied teachers cite poor administrative support as their top complaint, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.²⁸ Similarly, teachers who change schools reported administrator support as one of their key reasons for leaving, second only to receiving a better teaching assignment.

SDE began to recognize the important role administrators play in induction and teacher satisfaction in the early 2000s. In response, the department developed and launched specific trainings a few years ago. The three-day "Administrator Institute" and the three-hour "New Teacher Induction: A Principal's Role" workshops have had at least 254 and 287 total attendees, respectively, over the years. For context, there are about 3,500 administrators in Connecticut, as

²⁸ *Policy Brief; The High Cost of Teacher Turnover*, Thomas Carroll, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, June 2007.

noted in the committee's September briefing report. In addition to offering trainings, the RESC staff wrote and disseminated a guide for administrators that summarized key points of the trainings.

Although administrator support for new teacher induction has risen, not all administrators are providing or facilitating sufficient support. RESC field staff, administrators, and mentors generally agree that attention some administrators give to induction is not at expected levels.

These impressions are confirmed by the committee's survey data, which provide information on beginning teachers' satisfaction with their principals and district-level recognition of mentors. A significant portion of beginning teachers was either "dissatisfied" with or received "no support" from their principals. Year Two respondents were about equally dissatisfied with (18 percent) and more frequently received no support from (23 percent) their principals, compared to Year One respondents (21 and 11 percent, respectively). Principals were not generally a source of support for Year Two teachers who lacked mentors; they gave assistance to only 12 percent of those teachers. In comparison, 29 percent of Year Two teachers without mentors reported receiving support from the BEST district facilitator. It is unclear why Year Two respondents were less satisfied with principal support. For new teachers at both stages, however, principal support varied by DRG, with those in wealthier districts receiving more support. Interestingly, those beginning teachers who were satisfied (or not) with their principals were also satisfied (or not) with their mentors and other teacher colleagues, a result which could support the hypothesis that principals can influence the overall level of support.

The support district-level administrators choose to give mentors through recognition also varies. A portion of districts gives financial compensation to mentors, outside the collective bargaining agreements, as previously mentioned. Approximately half the districts that do not give stipends to mentors recognize mentors in other ways, such as giving them a reception or formally recognizing them at a local Board of Education meeting. About 13 percent of districts do not formally recognize mentors in any way, according to the district facilitator survey results.

Department and RESC staff, administrators, mentors, and beginning teachers noted in discussions with committee staff that some administrators continue to be unaware of the importance of supporting new teacher induction or of how to provide support. *Administrators are not obligated to complete training in how to support new teacher induction.* There is precedent for requiring administrators to complete a certain type of training. Like teachers, administrators must earn a certain number of professional development credits every five years to retain certification. At least 15 of the required 90 hours must be in teacher evaluation, yet there is no requirement for any type of training in how to support new teachers.

The program review committee recommends C.G.S. Sec. 10-145b(l)(1) be amended to require administrators acting in an administrative or supervisory capacity at least 50 percent of their assigned time to complete a certain number of hours of training, as determined by the State Department of Education, in new teacher induction during each five-year certification period.

This requirement will compel all administrators to recognize the importance of new teacher induction and the trainings will instruct them in concrete ways to support beginning teachers. Building administrator review and approval of the mentor modules also will improve administrators' understanding of and involvement in support.

Section III: Assessment

Overview

Connecticut's standards and licensure requirements for public school teachers are intended to protect the public from non-qualified personnel entering or continuing in the teaching profession. The public interest is served, theoretically, because the state licensing structure and standards for teachers are designed in a way to ensure only those teachers having specific knowledge, skills, and competencies may become and remain licensed teachers in Connecticut. If the underlying premise is accepted that a state teacher licensure system based on specific standards serves the public interest, it also should be accepted that some form of assessment of teachers is necessary to ensure they meet those standards. Otherwise, the standards are rendered meaningless.

During this study, there was wide consensus among various constituencies, including teachers, the education department, the state teachers' unions, academics, and administrators, that teaching standards – and measuring teachers' ability to apply those standards in the classroom – are necessary in Connecticut. As such, a key purpose of the BEST program is to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and competencies of teachers beginning their careers in Connecticut to ensure they meet the state's teaching standards.

Much of the discussion by stakeholders during this study has focused on the method used within the BEST program to assess beginning teachers. Since the 1999-00 school year, the state has used a multi-part portfolio assessment to gauge a teacher's understanding and application of the state's teaching standards specified in the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching. Formally adopted by the State Board of Education in 1999, the standards serve as the foundation against which over 90 percent of teachers beginning their teaching careers in the state are evaluated for licensure purposes through the BEST assessment. The remaining 10 percent are in certification areas normally outside the classroom teaching field (e.g., counselors, business education instructors, and certain pupil services assistants) that receives support only through BEST.

Embedded within the Common Core of Teaching standards is what the State Board of Education has identified as the central elements of effective teaching for teachers in pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12: 1) planning; 2) instructing; 3) assessing students; and 4) self-assessing and adjusting teacher performance based on student learning. Measuring these elements is the key concept on which the BEST portfolio is based. The CCT also contains standards specific to 10 individual content areas, which beginning teachers also must meet in their particular area in order to pass their BEST portfolios. *The overall goal of assessing beginning teachers through the BEST portfolio process is to ensure they meet a minimum level of competency at the start of their teaching careers in the state with respect to their knowledge and application of the state's teaching standards.*

Based on academic research and practical application, the portfolio is the method chosen by the state to measure teacher competencies regarding foundational and content-specific standards within the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching. Accordingly, the portfolio's four parts closely follow the central elements of effective teaching described in the standards. The four parts of the portfolio are summarized in Table III-1. As the table shows, within their portfolios, teachers are asked to: 1) organize a unit of instruction around an essential concept in a series of lessons; 2) engage students in exploring that essential concept in the series of lessons; 3) assess student learning and use this assessment to adjust instruction both within the series of lessons and in future instruction; and 4) reflect on the quality and extent of students' learning, as well as on the quality of their own teaching.

Table III-1. General Structure of the BEST Portfolio		
<i>Teaching Task</i>	<i>Teacher Task</i>	<i>Portfolio Contents</i>
Planning a Learning Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select one class of students • Design a short unit (about 5-8 hours of instruction) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class description • Unit goals
Teaching the Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach the unit • Monitor student learning • Videotape two different lessons featuring instructional foci • Document the unit every day in one to two pages of daily logs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings about student learning • Daily instructional adjustments • Videotaped instructional segments • Daily activities and instructional strategies • Daily student written work
Assessing Student Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select two students • Assess student learning • Analyze student work using articulated evaluation criteria • Provide feedback to students on their work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original student work containing teacher feedback comments • Analysis of strengths and weaknesses in student learning
Reflecting on Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze teaching based on students' learning • Suggest ways to improve own teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-commentary on teaching and learning

Source: SDE materials

By requiring teachers to successfully complete a standards-based assessment in order to retain their certification, the state has determined it is of significant importance that beginning teachers demonstrate their knowledge and application of effective teaching practices in the classroom. The Common Core of Teaching standards that serve as the basis for assessing teachers, however, have not been reviewed formally for their continued appropriateness since their adoption in 1999. More current research completed in the intervening years may indicate additional and/or modified teaching practices that further increase student learning. Thorough, periodic review and refinement of the standards within the Common Core of Teaching would ensure the standards are based on contemporary national research and modern-day thinking, as well as the experience of Connecticut's educators, in relation to the state's current educational goals. Since the standards serve as the fundamental base of Connecticut's education continuum for effective teachers, it is important that they be reviewed for their suitability and current relevancy.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education should review the current Common Core of Teaching standards to determine if changes or modifications are necessary. Such review and update of the standards should be completed by July 1, 2009, and every seven years thereafter.

Assessment Effectiveness

Connecticut's process of assessing beginning teachers through the BEST portfolio is predicated on teachers receiving adequate preparation and support prior to their assessments. As indicated earlier in the report, the level of support beginning teachers receive through the BEST program is not consistent across and within school districts. As such, a key principle upon which the BEST program is built – beginning teachers will have adequate support to assist them in preparing for their portfolios – is inherently flawed.

An outcome of BEST, as the state's teacher induction program, is to assist beginning teachers in improving their teaching abilities through the portfolio process, with the ultimate goal of increasing student learning,²⁹ yet the program has succeeded only partly in fulfilling this goal. Oversight of the BEST support component seems neglected, in part, because of the emphasis placed by the state on the BEST portfolio assessment, and by the inconsistent quality of support for beginning teachers. At the same time, generally less than two percent of beginning teachers ultimately fail their portfolios, indicating most teachers at least minimally meet the state's teaching standards.

The portfolio is considered a high-stakes assessment because a teacher's continued certification in Connecticut rests with passing the portfolio.³⁰ The department promotes BEST as a way for beginning teachers to strengthen their teaching skills, as previously mentioned. Until the program is designed in such a way, however, that a consistent level of quality support is

²⁹ *A Guide to the BEST Program for Beginning Teachers 2007-2008*, Department of Education.

³⁰ State law does not require a formal assessment of teachers under certain circumstances, including those who have completed at least three years of successful teaching in a public school (e.g., in another state) or a state-approved nonpublic school during the ten years immediately preceding the date of application.

provided to beginning teachers and beginning teachers consider the assessment an experience to strengthen their teaching abilities, many teachers may continue to view the portfolio experience as nothing more than a state test to pass in order to retain their teaching certificates. The committee believes changes to both the support and the assessment components of BEST can make the licensure assessment a more effective learning experience for teachers.

The fact that some teachers look at the portfolio as simply a test, as confirmed by the committee’s survey results, interviews, and testimony submitted by educators, does not fully support the notion that beginning teachers are learning and using effective teaching practices based on completing the portfolio process. While there are new teachers who benefit from the portfolio process, *80 percent of Year Two teachers responding to the committee’s survey indicated the current portfolio is not the most effective way to measure a teacher’s application of the state’s teaching standards, and another 14 percent were unsure.* Moreover, *when asked how useful the BEST portfolio process was in improving their ability to perform the key teaching practices required by the Common Core of Teaching standards, a relatively high percentage Year Two teachers replied “not useful,”* as shown in Table III-2. This indicates many teachers do not view the portfolio experience as something that necessarily enhances their professional competencies based on the CCT standards.

**Table III-2. Usefulness of Portfolio to Improve Teaching Abilities
According to Year Two Teachers**

	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
Plan a series of connected lessons	14%	23%	29%	35%
Deliver effective instruction	9%	21%	28%	43%
Use student assessment to adjust instruction	9%	26%	30%	35%
Reflect on and improve teaching	14%	26%	31%	28%
Use various effective teaching techniques	9%	21%	31%	40%
n=690				
Source: PRI staff analysis of teacher survey				

There is agreement among the various constituencies involved with BEST, including beginning teachers, on two important principles: there are certain content knowledge and fundamental pedagogical characteristics necessary to be an effective teacher; and teachers should be held accountable in meeting the standards established for state licensing purposes. The issue for the state to consider is whether the current BEST portfolio is the most effective way to measure whether beginning teachers are knowledgeable about the state teaching standards and using effective teaching practices, or whether alternative assessment models may offer a more pragmatic way to measure those standards and be more useful for beginning teachers in strengthening their overall teaching practices. Regardless of the assessment method, all agree the instrument used for state licensing decisions must be valid, reliable, and legally defensible.

Portfolio Validity and Reliability

Connecticut has a history of implementing standards for its public school teachers for licensing purposes, beginning with the Connecticut Teaching Competencies (CTC) in the 1980s, to the more recent Common Core of Teaching standards, which focus on how teachers affect and promote student learning. Determining the most effective and efficient way of assessing beginning teachers against the teaching standards is a difficult task. This is evident given the BEST program has used several methods over the past two decades to assess novice teachers' skills and abilities.

Apart from the type of assessment used, it is important for licensure purposes that the assessment be properly vetted by professionals in the field and pilot-tested in order to be deemed *valid* (i.e., measures what it is intended to measure) and *reliable* (i.e., standards are applied consistently by assessors throughout the evaluation process). *The BEST portfolio instrument is based on academic research and was developed using the assessment guidelines and standards of several national associations. The portfolio was further developed and validated with the input and assistance of committees consisting of hundreds of professional educators throughout Connecticut, including classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, education administrators, higher education faculty, and other experienced educators.*

Specifically, the portfolio instrument was created in the mid 1990s in accordance with assessment standards for educational and psychological testing developed by the Joint Commission of the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. The standards of these organizations require the assessment be both valid and reliable. SDE also worked with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), which is part of the Council of Chief State School Officials, on developing a prototype for the mathematics content area. The portfolio also was systematically tested and refined by SDE over a five-year cycle of formative evaluation beginning in the mid-1990s for its validity and reliability as a formal measurement tool of beginning teachers before it was used, including review and consultation from Professional Evaluation Services and Educational Testing Service.³¹

To augment the research base used to develop the portfolio, the education department validated the portfolio instrument in multiple ways. Initially, the department sought to determine whether the CCT standards were the correct standards upon which to base the overall assessment. SDE conducted two separate “job analysis” surveys to gain feedback from teachers, administrators, and university faculty regarding whether the CCT standards were considered appropriate and useful. The first survey examined the foundational standards within the CCT, and the second examined the content-specific standards based on feedback from public school educators with that specific content background.

The results of the first survey regarding the foundational standards showed a high percentage (over 90 percent) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed the CCT standards were appropriate and useful. Results of the second survey showed an average of 85 percent of respondents indicated the content-specific standards were either important or very important for

³¹ State Department of Education, *Validity Report: BEST Portfolio Assessment Program, Draft 2005*.

beginning and experienced teachers. An average of 88 percent supported the importance of the standards to student learning and achievement. The department found the results from both surveys supported the validity of the CCT standards as the foundation for the BEST portfolio in promoting teaching and student learning.

After validating the CCT standards as the basis for the portfolio, additional efforts by the department to ensure the validity of the portfolio instrument to measure what is intended to be measured, included: 1) conducting studies of the internal consistency and alignment of the standards and the portfolio tasks with the tasks and scoring procedures for each content area; 2) developing the assessment system based on national testing guidelines, including using specific benchmark and standard-setting procedures; 3) reviewing the portfolio sections to ensure they were fair and free of bias; and 4) having educators previously uninvolved with BEST determine which parts of the portfolio were most useful for assessment and why. Results from these efforts were positive and were incorporated into developing the portfolio assessment, increasing its overall validity.

In addition to establishing the overall validity of the portfolio assessment method, the assessment's scoring process must be deemed reliable. *Recent SDE statistical analyses show the portfolio scoring system produces highly reliable scores, particularly on the overall pass/fail decision.*³² The department's analysis of the internal consistency of the scoring system further indicates high correlations between scores on the four portfolio elements and the final portfolio score. Moreover, the committee is aware of only one legal challenge to the current portfolio occurring since its inception. That challenge was not pursued, further strengthening the overall credibility of the assessment instrument. A more complete analysis of the reliability of the BEST portfolio process is provided in Appendix C.

Despite the high level of rigor in the development and application of the BEST portfolio, the committee believes the portfolio process can be improved upon in several areas, as discussed in more detail below. To enhance the overall effectiveness of the BEST program, improvements to the portfolio process should not be made in isolation from other parts of the state's continuum of effective teaching – namely, the support component within the BEST program and the state's teacher preparation programs, as described earlier.

Alternative Assessment Models

Qualitative information collected during this study through interviews, the public hearing testimony received by the committee, and even feedback received from the online video developed by a state education association using selective segments of the committee's hearing,³³ underscore the different opinions that exist among various constituencies as to whether the portfolio is the most appropriate mechanism for assessing the knowledge and application of state's teaching standards by beginning teachers. Differences aside, there is strong agreement among those same constituencies that an increased use of on-site classroom observation of beginning teachers based on specific components of effective teaching practices – along with timely and constructive feedback – would provide the state a more thorough and realistic

³² State Department of Education, *Reliability and Internal Consistency of the BEST Portfolio-based Teacher Assessment Program*, 2007.

³³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bguz4garGH8>

understanding of beginning teacher classroom abilities and application of the CCT standards than the current BEST portfolio process. However, *until an alternative to the portfolio assessment method is fully researched, developed, and deemed valid and reliable by the state and resources are committed to implement such a system, the current assessment method under BEST should remain. At the same time, there are some specific changes necessary to the current portfolio process to increase its overall effectiveness.*

Connecticut is one of two states that assesses its beginning teachers using a portfolio-based assessment model. Indiana is the other and its portfolio is modeled after Connecticut's and developed in consultation with this state's education department. Alone, the fact that only two states have adopted the BEST-type portfolio assessment model is not a reason for eliminating the instrument. Yet it begs the question of whether a feasible alternative should be explored. Additional information about the types of assessments used in other states for certifying beginning teachers is summarized in Appendix D.

The state's recent advisory committee established to examine BEST, which consisted of a wide range of educators and education professionals from across Connecticut, recommended in its 2006 draft report that the education department "identify, develop, and pilot alternatives to the portfolio assessment."³⁴ The group, however, was *not* unanimous on this recommendation. This fact, coupled with the time and resources necessary to develop, validate, and implement an appropriate alternative to the portfolio, should serve as a caution to requiring an immediate replacement of the BEST portfolio without proper research and planning. At the same time, *the education department should be encouraged in researching whether a different assessment method – particularly one incorporating classroom observations – is necessary and feasible from a methodological and resource perspective, and whether such an assessment may have the potential to more effectively evaluate beginning teachers' skills and abilities based on the CCT standards.*

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education shall conduct a review of possible, practical alternatives to assessing beginning teachers' knowledge and application of the state's teaching standards specified in the Common Core of Teaching. At a minimum, the review should identify the potential costs and overall logistics associated with transitioning to another assessment model. A report summarizing the department's findings shall be submitted to the legislature's committee(s) of cognizance by February 1, 2009.

There is agreement among the relevant constituencies within the state that the ideal model of assessing beginning teachers is for trained assessors to conduct multiple, sequential on-site observations of the teachers in their classrooms. This includes assessors having full knowledge of the lessons planned by the teacher, observing actual classroom instruction and interaction with students, the teacher's evaluation of student learning, and the teacher's self-reflection of teaching practices. A key component is providing feedback to the teacher that is timely and constructive. A legitimate concern with such a process, however, is the complexity of the overall design and significant resources likely needed for its implementation.

³⁴ Teacher Induction Sub-Committee: BEST Advisory Committee Recommendations, June 2006.

For roughly the first decade of the BEST program, a classroom observation model to assess beginning teachers was used – albeit not within the exact parameters outlined above. Due to various reasons, the process was discontinued and the transition to a portfolio-based system occurred. The reasons included a sharp decrease in program funding, difficulties with the scheduling logistics of assessors, issues with assessors who were teachers frequently having to leave their own classrooms to conduct on-site observations, and Connecticut’s work at the national level to develop a portfolio-based assessment model.

Given the committee is recommending SDE research whether there *may* be a more practical and effective way of assessing the competencies of beginning teachers, including the possible use of onsite classroom observations, an understanding of other assessment models would be beneficial. Several examples of commonly-discussed options for assessing Connecticut’s beginning teachers are summarized below. The results of the committee’s survey question about what alternatives Year Two teachers would prefer to the BEST portfolio are also presented.

Praxis III. A widely-discussed substitute to the BEST portfolio is the Praxis III assessment model. Developed by ETS, Praxis III includes an on-site classroom observation structure as its primary assessment method. The assessment combines elements of direct observation of classroom practice, a review and analysis of written documentation prepared by the teacher, and interviews with the teacher before and after the observed lesson. After observing a lesson taught by a beginning teacher, a trained Praxis III assessor evaluates the teacher’s performance using 19 teaching criteria, as summarized in Table III-3. The criteria are structured into four components: 1) organizing content knowledge for student learning; 2) creating an environment for student learning; 3) teaching for student learning; and 4) teacher professionalism.

The Praxis III assessment, which occurs over a single observation, generally takes up to three hours to complete, depending upon the teacher’s grade level. Pre- and post-assessment interviews between the assessor and teacher are part of the process. Upon completion of the assessment, the assessor sends a score report to ETS, which then issues the result to the teacher. Teachers generally are notified of their results within 10 to 12 weeks.

The education department believes an onsite classroom observation assessment method has merit, yet the Praxis III model may be an insufficient substitute to the portfolio. (SDE believes the assessment model may be most appropriate for use a tool to evaluate student teachers.) The department cites only two states (Arkansas and Ohio) that have adopted the system, even though it has been available for roughly a decade. The department also considers the system costly, estimating Ohio spends roughly \$4.6 million on Praxis III annually, or \$800 per beginning teacher assessment. Expenses for the portfolio component of BEST in Connecticut total approximately \$1.1 million per year, or \$500 per teacher. Using the same number of teachers used to get the per assessment figure in Ohio, Praxis III would total approximately \$1.8 million if used in Connecticut.

The committee believes the Praxis III model should not be fully discounted as a feasible assessment method simply because of the limited number of states using it. Only two states use a portfolio-type assessment. If the model were used in Connecticut, it would have to be tailored

to assess beginning teachers based on Connecticut’s specific teaching standards and effective teaching practices with at least a comparable emphasis on student learning as the portfolio. Use of this or any model would have to be fully evaluated prior to implementation, as recommended above.

Table III-3. Praxis III Assessment Criteria	
Organizing Content Knowledge for Student Learning	Creating an Environment for Student Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming familiar with relevant aspects of students' background knowledge and experiences • Articulating clear learning goals for the lesson that are appropriate for the students • Demonstrating an understanding of the connections between the content that was learned previously, the current content, and the content that remains to be learned in the future • Creating or selecting teaching methods, learning activities, and instructional materials or other resources that are appropriate for the students and that are aligned with the goals of the lesson • Creating or selecting evaluation strategies that are appropriate for the students and that are aligned with the goals of the lesson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a climate that promotes fairness • Establishing and maintaining rapport with students • Communicating challenging learning expectations to each student • Establishing and maintaining consistent standards of classroom behavior • Making the physical environment as safe and conducive to learning as possible
Teaching for Student Learning	Teacher Professionalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making learning goals and instructional procedures clear to students • Making content comprehensible to students • Encouraging students to extend their thinking • Monitoring students' understanding of content through a variety of means, providing feedback to students to assist learning, and adjusting learning activities as the situation demands • Using instructional time effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on the extent to which the learning goals were met • Demonstrating a sense of efficacy • Building professional relationships with colleagues to share teaching insights and to coordinate learning activities for students • Communicating with parents or guardians about student learning
Sources: Educational Testing Service; College of Wooster: Department of Education	

Incorporating local evaluations. Another oft-cited method to assess beginning teachers is to incorporate performance evaluations done by a teacher's supervisor within the BEST assessment process. In testimony received by the committee and through interviews conducted during this study, *beginning teachers generally seem perplexed their local performance evaluations are not considered in the licensure assessment.* The question asked is: who better to evaluate teachers' skills and competencies than the local building administrators who have contact with beginning teachers and directly observe them in their classroom settings? Moreover, assessments conducted by local administrators could have a broader, positive impact on schools' overall evaluations of teachers for professional development and goal-setting purposes. Administrators would become closely involved with the BEST assessment, which is based on specific teaching standards and effective practices.

The use of local evaluations for state licensing purposes presents several hurdles. First, local evaluations are used by school districts to make employment decisions (e.g., promotions). This is a separate and distinct function from using the same evaluations for state licensure decisions. There are potential legal implications with having the same person conduct performance evaluations for the cross-purposes of employment *and* state licensure decisions. In fact, ETS specifically states that use of Praxis III is solely for licensure purposes and not for employment decisions.

Second, use of district-level performance evaluations of beginning teachers within the BEST assessment process and separate from employment purposes would require the development of a standardized and reliable system for conducting such evaluations based on the CCT standards. This is not an insurmountable task, but it would take resources and careful planning. Incorporating local teacher evaluations within the state licensure assessment process would necessitate systematically training administrators in the use of a standardized evaluation method. The process also would have to account in some way for administrators potentially conducting evaluations of beginning teachers and not having experience in the teacher's content area. Some believe this already occurs, most frequently in secondary schools.

Third, requiring local administrators to conduct evaluations of their beginning teachers for dual purposes would disproportionately impact those administrators who supervise numerous beginning teachers. This issue likely would be more prevalent within larger, urban districts that experience more frequent turnover of beginning teachers, as well as of administrators, than other districts.

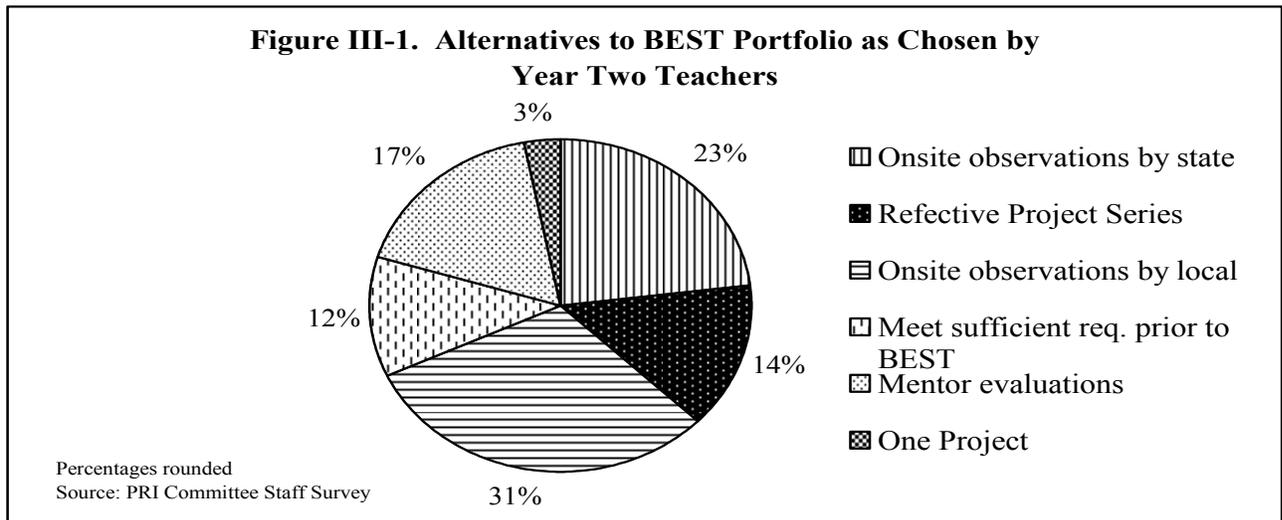
Despite the challenges, the committee believes the use of local performance evaluations may have a legitimate role in the state's assessment of beginning teachers for licensing purposes. Moreover, the challenges that local evaluations for licensing purposes present should not limit SDE from researching its use as a viable option within the BEST assessment process. Using local teacher evaluations within BEST has the potential of providing the department with a practical way of assimilating an on-site classroom observation model by state-trained personnel (i.e., local administrators) into the assessment process without experiencing the logistical problems under the CCI assessment model. This option also has the potential of providing beginning teachers with more timely and constructive feedback than the current process. It could also lessen the overall amount of work required in preparing the portfolio, including elimination of the video component.

Alternatives identified by survey. Year Two teachers were asked to select among various alternatives to the portfolio if they believed the BEST portfolio was not the most effective way to measure a teacher’s application of the CCT teaching standards. Although the survey technically asked teachers to select one alternative only, if they responded “no” to the question of whether the portfolio is the most effective way to assess teachers’ application of the CCT standards, this direction was not always followed. As such, the responses were analyzed in the aggregate rather than invalidating the responses that did not follow the direction of the question.

Survey recipients were provided the following alternatives to the current BEST portfolio from which to choose:

- a series of in-person classroom evaluations by state-trained evaluators;
- a series of smaller reflective projects done throughout a school year;
- a series of in-person observations by a principal or district official;
- nothing, new teachers meet sufficient state standards for certification when first licensed by the state prior to BEST;
- formative evaluations by mentors; and
- a project examining and reflecting on one aspect of my teaching.

The committee acknowledges this is not an exhaustive list of alternatives. Yet, the list accounts for the options most discussed during this study and in the literature search. Figure III-1 shows the distribution of the various alternatives Year Two teachers preferred to the current portfolio assessment.



The option most chosen by Year Two teachers as their choice for replacing the portfolio was “a series of in-person observations by a principal or district official” (31 percent). Another 23 percent chose replacing the portfolio with “a series of in-person classroom evaluations by state-trained evaluators.” Moreover, an additional 17 percent of teachers chose “formative evaluations by mentors,” which also could include some form of onsite classroom observation assessment. *In total, 71 percent of the responses to the question indicated an assessment using some form of onsite classroom observation was preferred to the current portfolio-type assessment as the most effective way of measuring a beginning teacher’s application of the state’s teaching standards.*

Another interesting survey result for this question is that only 12 percent of the selections made indicated new teachers meet sufficient state standards for certification prior to BEST. This reinforces the notion that *the vast majority of beginning teachers believe some type of formal assessment beyond the current minimum requirements of student teaching and passage of the Praxis I and Praxis II exams for initial certification is necessary to ensure teachers meet the CCT standards.*

An alternative method of assessment not identified in the survey, but discussed during interviews, is an assessment conducted by mentors. This would involve a beginning teacher’s mentor/mentor team being responsible for both supporting and assessing the beginning teacher. Such a process does not seem feasible now, given the current inconsistency in support experienced by beginning teachers. Under the committee’s recommendations of reduced classroom duties for mentors and the mentor module system, however, this type of assessment model may be feasible.

The committee fully recognizes completing the BEST portfolio – or any type of formal assessment upon which state certification is based – is a difficult experience for many teachers. A strong contributing factor to this difficulty may be the inconsistent level and quality of mentoring available for beginning teachers and the daily time demands placed on teachers, as addressed in the recommendations presented in Section II. Until the policy decisions are made, however, that: 1) an alternative assessment structure is necessary; 2) resources are committed to such a transition; and 3) a more effective assessment alternative is developed to ensure beginning teachers fully meet the state’s teaching standards – or until the standards are eliminated as a matter of state policy – then the current system of assessing beginning teachers remains a valid and reliable method for evaluating teachers’ knowledge, skills, and competencies as measured against Connecticut’s teaching standards.

Finally, *continuing the current portfolio process until an alternative is duly researched, vetted, tested, deemed valid and reliable, and ultimately accepted as policy, should not be viewed as full endorsement of the BEST portfolio process. Modifications to the current portfolio structure are warranted, as discussed below.*

PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENTS

The BEST portfolio is a valid and reliable assessment method. Additional concerns have been raised regarding selected parts of the portfolio process, which are addressed below, however, pertaining to time, content, the video portion, portfolio scoring scale, and feedback.

It is difficult to fully quantify the rationale underlying some of the recommended changes to the BEST portfolio process. When applicable, the committee relied on qualitative information collected from its extensive interviews of a cross-section of constituencies, oral and written testimony presented to the committee, including a formal response to the committee's public hearing from SDE, and the previous work of two advisory groups examining the BEST program. The proposed changes to the portfolio process, combined with the earlier recommendations to strengthen the overall support beginning teachers receive, should help lessen the burden many beginning teachers experience in fulfilling the BEST assessment requirements. At the same time, the state's objective of ensuring effective teaching practices among its beginning teachers based on specific state standards is maintained.

Timing of Portfolio

The portfolio has been required by the teacher's second year in BEST since it was adopted as the program's assessment method. This timing originated in SDE's final report to the 1993 BEST Blue Ribbon Panel, which summarized the panel's ideas for revamping the BEST program. The report indicated beginning teachers' development of content pedagogical knowledge along with their skill to transfer content into specific subject matter knowledge for teaching, often does not occur until the second or third year in the classroom.³⁵ The report specified BEST induction should span at least the first two years of when a teacher starts his or her teaching career in Connecticut. This indicates thought was given as to what year the assessment is most appropriately placed.

Presently, as indicated in Appendix E, the State Department of Education endorses a more flexible time frame for when teachers would submit their BEST portfolio. Public hearing testimony further supports this option.

Extending the BEST portfolio beyond the current second year requirement to a third year has several advantages. It would provide beginning teachers who did not attend a teacher preparation program in Connecticut adequate time to understand and incorporate Connecticut's teaching standards into their daily teaching practices. SDE data for 2006 and 2007 show 21 percent of the portfolios submitted for those years were from teachers who attended teacher preparation programs in other states. Also, 21 percent of Year Two teachers who responded to the committee's survey attended a teacher preparation program outside of Connecticut. That means, of the approximately 4,200 teachers submitting portfolios for those two years, just under 900 completed their teacher preparation and training outside of Connecticut. Although current failing portfolio scores show teachers from out of state performing better than teachers trained in Connecticut, this has not always been the case and may not be indicative of future score distributions.

³⁵ *Final Report to the BEST Blue Ribbon Panel – BEST Program: A New Performance Standard Continuum*, Connecticut State Department of Education, June 1993.

Providing beginning teachers an additional year to submit their portfolios would assist all new teachers in strengthening their overall teaching skills, which is an underlying goal upon which the BEST program is structured. Although teachers are required to submit their portfolios in May of Year Two in BEST, many may begin preparing them shortly after beginning their second year. *Those teachers without previous teaching experience – 83 percent of Year Two survey respondents – realistically have little more than a year in the classroom upon which to gain the knowledge and professional experience needed to fulfill the portfolio requirements.* To many, additional time and experience in the classroom would sharpen their overall knowledge, skills, and abilities and further strengthen their teaching pedagogy.

Allowing beginning teachers the option of when to submit their portfolios would not affect those who want to fulfill the requirement either in their first or second year; it simply provides teachers more time to gain experience and complete the portfolio requirements. This includes additional opportunity for teachers to become familiar with their districts' curricula before completing BEST portfolios. With the two years of formal mentoring support recommended earlier, beginning teachers should have an appropriate amount of time to fully grasp and understand the state's teaching standards and how to apply that knowledge within the BEST portfolio.

The program review committee recommends C.G.S. Sec. 10-145f(d) shall be amended to allow teachers to complete the professional knowledge clinical assessment required for state teacher certification purposes no later than their third year of teaching in a public school in Connecticut. The provision whereby teachers, after not fulfilling the requirements of the assessment within the designated time, may petition the department to approve a plan of intervening study and experience shall be eliminated.

The committee also recommends the State Department of Education should modify the BEST program to provide beginning teachers the option of when to submit their BEST portfolios. Teachers will have a choice to submit the required portfolios either in their first, second, or third years in the BEST program. Teachers will only be permitted to submit one additional portfolio upon not achieving a passing score on their first portfolio.

The committee's earlier proposal to extend formal mentoring through a teacher's first two years in the BEST program plus the above option of completing the portfolio requirement by the end of a teacher's third year in the program, allows sufficient resources and time for teachers to: 1) work with experienced mentors in strengthening pedagogy; 2) understand the portfolio requirements; and 3) prove their competency as teachers according to Connecticut's standards. As such, the above recommendation calls for eliminating a teacher's opportunity to regain state certification upon additional coursework and experience.

The current provision allowing someone to regain his or her state teaching certification upon additional study and experience after submitting three portfolios, affects a very small percentage of teachers in relation to the overall number submitting portfolios. Of the more than 10,000 portfolios submitted since 2000, the department reports a total of only 24 applications for additional study and experience have been approved since that time. (SDE notes applications are rarely denied once submitted.) Of these, 17 beginning teachers successfully completed the

process and had their initial certifications re-issued; the remaining seven either have not completed or are still in progress. Table III-4 shows results for the last two years.

Table III-4. Number of Teachers Submitting Portfolios by Year of Submission and Requests/Approvals for Intervening Study and Experience: 2006-2007		
	May 2006	May 2007
Teachers Submitting Portfolios	2,832	2,851
Teachers Submitting Third Portfolios	22	22
Teachers Failing Third Portfolios	5	3
Intervening Study and Experience: (Requests)	1	2*
Intervening Study and Experience: (Approvals)	1	2
* One additional application in progress. Source of data: SDE		

The very low number of teachers who submit and ultimately fail three portfolios, along with the even lower number who request and are approved for intervening study and experience, indicates very few teachers would be negatively impacted by the above recommendation. A more structured mentoring process in a teacher's beginning years, focused on state standards, and extending the time frame for submitting first portfolios should benefit beginning teachers more than the ability to prolong the process of becoming a certified teacher through additional study and experience after failing the portfolio requirements multiple times. Candidates who ultimately fail the portfolio two times would retain the option of gaining experience in alternative settings to public schools to regain their state certification, as currently allowed under state law.

There are potential implications with allowing teachers to submit their portfolios during their third year in BEST. In particular, coordination of the process with the current state law regarding teacher tenure would be required, assuming the tenure law remains unchanged. Tenure for new teachers begins after 40 school months of full-time, continuous employment for the same school district, provided the teacher is offered a contract for the following year. SDE, therefore, will have to determine the most appropriate time when beginning teachers should submit a second portfolio to avoid implications for tenure.

Moving the portfolio process to a participant's third year in the BEST program also raises the issue of whether or not this prolongs the employment of teachers who have already developed poor teaching habits. The recommended extra year of required structured mentoring for teachers should counter this concern. Under the proposal, teachers will receive formal mentoring based on specific modules of effective teaching practices over a longer period of time than is currently required, which should help teachers strengthen pedagogy. Local school districts would retain their authority to discontinue employment of poorly performing teachers. Thus, increased attention by local administrators during the local evaluation process would help minimize the continuation of poor teaching habits and/or teachers.

Content

SDE has established an internal group of BEST staff and certification unit staff that annually reviews whether changes to portfolio content are necessary. The purpose of the reviews is to clarify language, streamline tasks, and increase uniformity across subject areas. Given the implementation of the portfolio assessment has been an evolving process with some content area portfolios (e.g., world languages) implemented only a few years ago, this type of review is necessary. Substantive changes to the portfolio requirements made by the group in recent years include reducing the number of commentaries required from teachers and limiting the overall number of pages required for teacher commentaries in an effort to reduce the overall level of work required of teachers. The process indicates *the department is proactive in ensuring the portfolio requirements are as minimal as possible, while maintaining the validity of the portfolio, yet changes to specific areas may be worthwhile.*

Two issues that surfaced during this study regarding the content of portfolios are: 1) SDE requires elementary education teachers to submit two portfolios – one for literacy and one for numeracy; and 2) English language arts teachers at the secondary school level are required to include separate lesson plans for writing and literature in their portfolios. Although the requirements increase the workload for these two groups in comparison with other content areas, the committee understands the rationale behind these two requirements.

The program review committee recommends the department of education should continue to make a concerted effort to fully examine portfolio requirements across all content with an emphasis on identifying areas of redundancy and streamlining overall requirements. Included in such review for the 2008-09 school year should be a determination whether: 1) elementary education teachers should have a choice between submitting only a literacy- or a numeracy-based portfolio; and 2) the requirement for separate writing and literature lesson plans within the English language arts portfolio requirements is necessary or whether the two components should be combined within the English language arts portfolio requirements.

Video

There is much debate over the functionality and value of the video component of the BEST portfolio. Under the original BEST program, the observation portion consisted of at least six on-site classroom observations of beginning teachers over a school year. A decrease in program funding, the overall logistics of supporting an on-site observation model, and a policy shift to an assessment focused more on student learning, helped generate the move to the current BEST portfolio model. As part of the portfolio, a 15- to 20-minute video has become the vehicle for assessors to observe teachers in their classrooms and corroborate the teachers' written commentaries.

Functionality. The use of the video as a means to observe beginning teachers in their classrooms has been under scrutiny since its inception. The committee's survey results confirm, to a degree, beginning teachers have experienced problems with the video portion of the BEST assessment.

Table III-5 shows the percentage of the teachers who experienced problems with either access to videotape equipment or assistance with actual videotaping, based on the survey of Year Two teachers. In total, 40 percent of teachers experienced problems with “access to videotape equipment” and 45 percent experienced problems with “assistance with the actual videotaping.” When analyzed by DRG, the survey revealed a statistically significant difference between teachers in DRGs A-H and DRG I experiencing video problems. Results show teachers in the poorest urban districts experienced more problems with the video portion of the portfolio than those in other districts.

SDE acknowledges there are issues with the way the current video part of the portfolio is implemented. The department has attempted to address the problems in several ways, including making video equipment available at each RESC for loan to beginning teachers. However, nowhere in the instructions in the content portfolio handbooks, or in any other resource available to beginning teachers, is it mentioned the video equipment is available at the RESCs.

Table III-5. Video-Related Problems for Year Two Teachers: 2007			
	All Districts	DRGs A-H	DRG I
Problems with accessing videotape equipment (n=512)	39.9%	36.7%	48.6%
Problems with actual videotaping (n=515)	44.6%	39.6%	57.5%
Note: The difference between the A-H and I districts was statistically significant at the 0.05 level for both video-related problems.			
Source: PRI staff analysis of teacher survey			

Another issue encountered by teachers in completing their portfolios is the state’s slow transition to DVD technology for submitting the video portion of the portfolio. Presently, the portfolio video must be done using the relatively outdated VHS technology. The department recently announced at its district facilitators’ meetings, however, teachers will be permitted to choose between using a DVD or VHS format for their video part of the portfolio. The department said the change will occur with portfolios submitted in May 2008. Although the department sent a letter in December explaining the change to all teachers through the BEST website, a review of the portfolio directions in the 2007-08 handbooks and information contained on the BEST website shows the materials do not yet indicate the change was made, leading to potential confusion among teachers completing their portfolios.

The education department should supply prompt and sufficient notice to all teachers, mentors, administrators, district facilitators, and Regional Educational Service Centers indicating the department’s approval for teachers to use DVD technology for the video portion of their portfolios beginning with portfolios submitted in May 2008. The department should also devise ways to ensure beginning teachers in the poorest urban school districts have access to equipment to fulfill their portfolio requirements. At minimum, all teachers should be informed that equipment is available for loan at each Regional Educational Service Center.

Value. State law outlining the requirements of a support and training program for beginning teachers requires the assessment of beginning teachers be based upon, but not limited to, data obtained from observations conducted by assessors using an assessment instrument. Some have construed this to mean the current assessment should include classroom observations, since the law seems to be tailored according to the state's prior assessment model under the Connecticut Competency Instrument used in the late-1980s. The current video requirement under BEST, however, is interpreted by SDE to fulfill the statutory requirement of observation for assessment purposes.

The committee believes the use of on-site observations of beginning teachers in their classrooms is preferred to the use of videos within the BEST assessment process. The committee also agrees any additional costs associated with implementing on-site classroom observations to replace the video portion of the BEST portfolio process should be borne by the state and not school districts.

The State Department of Education should replace the video component of the BEST portfolio assessment with on-site classroom observations, with the state reimbursing school districts for any resulting additional costs.

Scoring Scale

Part of the rationale behind differentiating portfolio scores using a 1-4 scoring scale is to give beginning teachers a better sense of where on the "performance continuum" their portfolios scored. This, plus the feedback received from SDE with the portfolio score (discussed below), is intended to provide beginning teachers an opportunity to see where their strengths and weaknesses are and to focus on improving/maintaining their craft in those areas.

Methodologists within SDE have differing opinions on exactly what the portfolio scoring scale should be. As noted in Appendix E, the department endorses a revised scoring scale, yet does not indicate a specific scale. There are some constituencies – including the recent BEST Advisory Committee – that believe a pass/fail scoring system is sufficient, while others support a scale that recognizes those teachers whose portfolios are exemplary by adding another level (e.g., pass with distinction).

Regardless of the scale used, there is wide agreement among the various constituencies interviewed during this study that the current four-point scale is more pertinent for analyzing and scoring the individual performance indicators for portfolios than as the final score a teacher receives. Based on feedback the committee received during the study, many teachers simply want to know whether they are competent or not when measured against the state's teaching standards. Moreover, the results from SDE's analysis of this summer's scoring session, as summarized in Appendix C, indicate that if the portfolio scoring system was based on a pass/fail scoring scale, the reliability of portfolio scores would greatly increase, compared to scoring based on a 1-4 scoring scale.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education should implement a revised scoring scale for BEST portfolios based on the final ratings of: "competent" and "not competent."

Moving to essentially a “pass/fail” scoring scale for portfolios would not change the way portfolios currently are scored. Scorers would continue using the evaluation rubrics for each content area to score portfolios based on the individual performance indicators identified in the rubrics. The only change required by this recommendation would be the final score provided to the beginning teacher simply would indicate whether or not the teacher met the state’s required competency requirements. As discussed below, more descriptive feedback should be provided to beginning teachers with their portfolio scores. Such feedback should show where a teacher’s individual portfolio scored for each performance indicator along the rating continuum based on the current evaluation rubrics.

Timeliness of Results

Some teachers are dissatisfied with the amount of time it takes SDE to deliver portfolio scores. The process generally takes three to four months to complete following the portfolio submission deadline in mid-May. Results are sent to teachers at the end of August or in early September each year.

In order to have portfolios scored by current practitioners, SDE has arranged its portfolio scoring process around the schedules of the various educators and administrators who score portfolios. This means the training and scoring sessions occur mostly during the summer months to avoid conflicts with the school schedules for teachers and administrators. EastConn, as the central repository for portfolios, also needs sufficient time to receive, organize, code, and deliver portfolios to the various scoring sites throughout the state. The May submittal date for portfolios avoids the typical year-end commotion teachers and students generally experience at the conclusion of each school year in June.

As such, the committee does not believe the time it takes to distribute portfolio scores is unreasonable with all the logistics that are involved in organizing the portfolios, training assessors, scoring portfolios, and distributing the results. Moreover, the scoring process largely is a manual process, which inherently takes longer to complete than a computer-driven testing and scoring process like the Praxis exams or the state’s bar examination for attorneys, which is a combination of computer and manual scoring and takes three months to complete. The department, however, should regularly examine whether there are ways to streamline the length of time for reporting portfolio results.

Feedback

Teachers commit a great deal of time to fulfilling their portfolio requirements. Available analysis shows the amount of time necessary for secondary science teachers to complete their portfolios averages between 51 and 75 hours.³⁶ Although this information is limited to a specific group of teachers, the committee believes it is comparable to the time

³⁶ *Morale of Non-Tenured, Connecticut Secondary Science Teachers Participating in a Beginning Educator Support and Training Program*, Claire Norman-Gloria, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Bridgeport, 2007.

teachers, in general, spend on developing their portfolios, based on interview information collected during the study.

The portfolio feedback received by teachers includes a cover letter indicating whether the teacher's portfolio was successful. There also is a listing of the four portfolio components with a brief description of the teacher's performance within each component. The descriptions are based on the rubric language corresponding to the four-point rating scale where a "1" equals fail and a "4" equals exemplary. A sample portfolio feedback report and accompanying documents sent for a failing portfolio is found in Appendix F.

Survey results show a full 78 percent of beginning teachers were either "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" (47 percent were "very dissatisfied") with the feedback received with their portfolio scores. SDE acknowledges the level of feedback is not desirable, yet its current level of human and financial resources is insufficient to correct the problem, as highlighted in Appendix E.

A perceived lack of feedback can be especially frustrating for teachers who do not pass their portfolios. The committee reviewed the rubric language within several content areas and believes a dichotomy exists since the same language is used for scoring purposes and feedback purposes. *The feedback provided to beginning teachers with their portfolio scores is the same as the language used within the scoring rubrics and is not sufficient for most teachers – especially those failing their portfolios.* More detailed feedback is necessary for beginning teachers to gain a full understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as identified by their portfolios, as indicated by the survey results.

Although the department offers resources to assist teachers who fail their portfolios, the resources may be perceived as generic by teachers who fail their portfolios. For example, teachers may set up individual post-portfolio conferences with portfolio scorers to examine the portfolio results in general terms. The conferences are limited to one hour, and the scorers who conduct the conferences are trained by SDE not to discuss the specifics of the portfolios, but to keep the conversation(s) focused on general themes. Moreover, the scorers used in the conferences are not permitted to have scored the teacher's actual portfolio, although they are supposed to thoroughly review the portfolio of the teacher with whom they will meet in order to focus on the themes that were misunderstood or missing in the failing portfolio.

The perception of portfolio scoring feedback as "generic" or "canned" diminishes the positive impact teachers may experience with the portfolio process. Limited feedback also may be interpreted by beginning teachers that their portfolios were not given full attention during the scoring process or scored by credible professionals, despite information to the contrary contained in the various outreach sources used by the BEST program.

The committee understands the program's resource constraints. At the same time, the department should continue to search for ways to make portfolio score feedback as beneficial as possible for beginning teachers. More substantive feedback based on the portfolio results could be more beneficial to teachers in helping them develop more effective teaching practices.

The program review committee recommends the education department should adopt ways to include feedback language that is as detailed as possible with portfolio results to provide beginning teachers with a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as shown by their portfolios. This includes incorporating the full scoring rubric indicating where on the performance continuum the teacher scored for each performance indicator contained in the rubric as part of the formal portfolio feedback teachers receive. The department also should consider differentiating the feedback provided to teachers who fail the portfolios to include more substantive language indicating teachers' strengths and weaknesses than is currently contained in the scoring rubrics, on which the feedback is based.

Administrative Appeal Process

The BEST portfolio process does not allow for an appeal of failing portfolio scores, which is similar to other assessment processes upon which licensure/certification based (e.g., Connecticut Bar Examination). Although SDE has outlined the basic mechanics of a possible administrative appeals process, as contained in Appendix E, the department also maintains the structure of the current scoring process, including the level of review for portfolios with failing scores, coupled with the opportunity for teachers to confer with portfolio scorers after receiving their scores, is sufficient. SDE further cites the overall validity and reliability of the scoring process as support for not implementing a formal appeals process to date: if the scoring process is a valid and reliable process, there is no need for appeals after portfolios have been scored.

There also is an appeal process available within the broader certification regulations that may be accessed if applicable, which the committee believes provides beginning teachers sufficient recourse regarding certification issues. Moreover, the recommendations proposed above to strengthen the support beginning teachers would receive and the enhancements made to the portfolio process, should improve teachers' understanding of the fundamental teaching concepts tested through the portfolio leading to better performance by teachers on their portfolios.

Residual Effects

Reports of unintended consequences of the portfolio process were made during the course of this study, including misrepresentation by some teachers in writing their portfolios, videos being "staged," and other ways for teachers to manipulate the portfolio process, as well as school districts using portfolio scores to base hiring decisions (i.e., a district not hiring a beginning teacher who scored below a certain score.) Such claims are difficult to quantify. Teachers and administrators must abide by the state's codes of professional responsibility for teachers and administrators, which includes the development and review of BEST portfolios.

Additional Portfolio Analysis

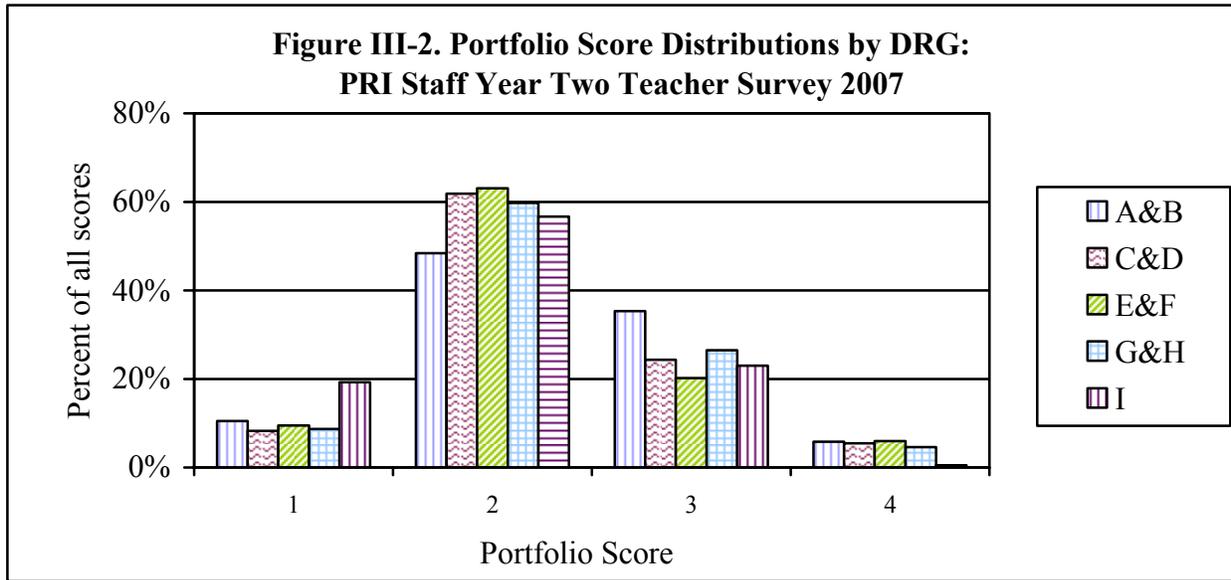
Some maintain the effectiveness of the BEST portfolio assessment should be determined by a direct correlation with student achievement, as measured by a corresponding rise or fall in standardized test scores including the Connecticut Mastery Test or the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. The committee cautions against making any direct correlation between the

BEST program and student achievement because it is documented that student achievement is dependent upon multiple factors, not a single factor. As such, the committee did not determine whether any direct correlation exists between the BEST portfolio assessment and student achievement in Connecticut.

Analysis was conducted, however, to determine whether certain independent factors have a direct, statistically significant impact on beginning teachers' portfolio scores. The effects of different characteristics and experiences on whether Year Two teachers passed the BEST portfolio (i.e., received scores of 2 through 4) were analyzed. Each portfolio category – elementary literacy, elementary numeracy, and non-elementary portfolios – was analyzed independently. Appendix G details the full methodology used for this analysis. In summary, the analysis found:

- Few of the characteristics and experiences measured in the survey had a statistically significant impact on whether a beginning teacher passed the portfolio.
- There was no single variable that was considered a significant factor across the portfolio categories. DRG was significant for the elementary education portfolios, but not for the non-elementary content portfolios.
- The variables that were significant for the elementary literacy and non-elementary content area portfolios did not (individually or together) have much impact on whether the beginning teacher passed.
- Previously teaching in a private school is associated with not passing the literacy portfolio. The reason(s) for this correlation is unclear.
- No aspect of mentoring – a beginning teacher's satisfaction with the mentor, quality of the mentor match, or whether the mentor provided help with the portfolio – was a significant variable for any portfolio category. This supports the hypotheses that not much quality mentoring is being given, and that beginning teachers may be satisfied with less-than-quality (i.e., non-substantive) mentoring.
- A few non-mentoring support variables – whether portfolio help by a school or district was accessed by a beginning teacher, a beginning teacher's satisfaction with state support, and support from other teachers – did impact portfolio performance for certain portfolio types. The fact that these variables were not uniformly significant across portfolio types means that improvement in these particular resource areas targeted to beginning teachers in certain portfolio categories may boost portfolio performance.
- Receiving help from a portfolio scorer was not significantly associated with receiving a passing score in any portfolio type.

Portfolio scores by DRG. The overall distribution of portfolio scores by DRG using the results from the Year Two teacher survey were analyzed. Although the finding above indicates DRG was a statistically significant predictor only for passing the elementary education portfolio, it is useful to understand the overall distribution of portfolios scores across DRGs. Figure III-2 illustrates the results.



The figure shows that for beginning teachers who submitted their portfolios in May 2007 and responded to the survey, a greater portion of those who failed their portfolios were from DRG I school districts. There also was a lower percentage of teachers in DRG I schools who scored “4s” on their portfolios in relation to the other DRG categories. As mentioned, however, DRG was a statistically significant predictor of passing only for the elementary education portfolios, although this content area includes the most teachers submitting portfolios.

Surveys of Beginning Teachers and District Facilitators

Survey Methodologies

Beginning teachers. To gather information from the BEST program's main participants, the committee surveyed all beginning teachers who had completed their first or second years in the program in spring 2007. The survey of Year One teachers focused mainly on the support they had received, while the survey of Year Two teachers concentrated on portfolio-related support and experiences. These groups were determined most critical to survey, as the core constituencies of the BEST program. Input from additional large groups, such as mentors or veteran teachers who had completed the BEST program, was gained through numerous interviews and informal conversations.

The beginning teacher surveys were mailed out to the new teachers' homes initially in late September with additional mailings to those teachers whose surveys were returned unopened with forwarding addresses through early October. Responses were accepted until mid November. Addresses were acquired from SDE, which keeps the teachers' addresses in a staff file for certification purposes. The survey was accompanied by an explanatory cover letter from the PRI director, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the survey's return. There were no identifying marks on the surveys or return envelopes; the surveys were completely anonymous. No pre-mailing notice or post-mailing follow-up reminder was sent.

The response rates for the Years One and Two surveys, 26 percent and 35 percent, respectively,³⁷ exceed the 25 percent benchmark that is generally considered a good response rate to base results and analysis for a survey of this type. This response rate threshold was independently offered by several academics at the University of Connecticut and professionals within SDE. Analysis indicates the distribution of survey respondents is very similar to the actual distribution of beginning teachers for both district reference groups (Years One and Two) and portfolio scores (Year Two).

The survey respondents' distribution across DRGs nearly mirrors the actual distribution of beginning teachers for both cohorts, as shown in Table A-1. A correct distribution is important because many constituencies predicted and analyses revealed DRG to be a significant factor in many support and portfolio-related experiences. Further, there was no need to weight the survey data to acquire more accurate results because the composition of the beginning teacher samples was already representative.

³⁷ For the Year One survey, 717 teachers responded. There were 2,869 included in the original mailing, which was to all teachers (including those receiving only support in BEST) in their first year of the program, but 92 of those were returned without a forwarding or new address. For the Year Two survey, 690 teachers responded. There were 2,099 included in the original mailing, which was to only teachers who were required to complete a portfolio, but 156 were either returned without a forwarding address or were returned by respondents who were exempted from the portfolio.

Table A-1. DRG Distribution of Survey Respondents Compared to the Distribution of All Teachers, for Years One and Two						
D R G	Percent of Yr. 1 Respondents	Percent of All Yr. 1 Teachers	Yr. 1 Difference (% points)	Percent of Yr. 2 Respondents	Percent of All Yr. 2 Teachers	Yr. 2 Difference (% points)
A	5.3%	6.0%	-0.7	6.5%	6.4%	+0.1
B	14.7%	13.7%	+1.0	13.5%	15.0%	-1.5
C	5.2%	5.7%	-0.5	5.2%	6.1%	-0.9
D	13.2%	12.9%	+0.3	14.3%	13.4%	+1.0
E	4.2%	3.7%	+0.5	3.8%	3.6%	+0.2
F	4.2%	5.5%	-1.3	6.4%	6.0%	+0.4
G	10.2%	10.7%	-0.5	10.9%	11.1%	-0.2
H	12.7%	11.7%	+1.0	11.7%	11.7%	0
I	23.3%	21.3%	+2.0	19.1%	20.1%	-1.0

Note: The percent columns do not sum to 100% because some teachers in BEST, such as those who teach at state-approved private schools, do not teach in a school system with a DRG designation. A positive difference in the percentage points columns means the responses were somewhat overrepresented for those DRGs, while a negative difference means the responses were somewhat underrepresented for those DRGs. The differences in either direction were minimal in relation to the overall distribution of the responses.

Source: SDE data and PRI staff calculations from the beginning teacher surveys

Distribution of Year Two survey respondents' portfolio scores also nearly matches the actual distribution of portfolio scores for all Year Two teachers, as depicted in Table A-2. This factor was important because scores may have been associated with either the actual or perceived quality of experiences. For example, teachers who received "1's" may have received worse support, or retrospectively, knowing they failed the portfolio, they may have been dissatisfied with their support, despite being satisfied with it last year. The representative distribution of respondents' portfolio scores means the total results for all beginning teachers were not overly influenced by a disproportionately large group whose experiences or perceptions might have been atypical. At the same time, the committee understands the timing of the survey may have some influence on the responses. Due to the timeframe the study was conducted, the only feasible time to develop and distribute the survey for Year Two teachers was a few weeks after they received their portfolio scores in September. It is unclear whether this affected the responses to any questions related to their portfolio experience.

Table A-2. Portfolio Score Distribution of Survey Respondents Compared to the Distribution of All Year Two Teachers			
Portfolio Score	Percent of Yr. 2 Respondents	Percent of All Yr. 2 Teachers	Difference (% points)
1	11.4%	10.8%	+0.6
2	57.4%	58.5%	-1.1
3	26.5%	27.1%	-0.6
4	4.3%	3.3%	+1.0
Note: A positive difference in the percentage points column means the responses were somewhat overrepresented, while a negative difference means the responses were somewhat underrepresented. The differences in either direction were minimal in relation to the overall distribution of the responses. Sources: SDE data and PRI staff calculations from the beginning teacher surveys			

Although the committee believes the survey results appropriate for drawing conclusions for this report, caution is necessary when interpreting the survey results for two reasons. First, it is possible survey respondents were different in some way (e.g. quality of BEST experience) from the total population of beginning teachers. The response rates mitigate, but cannot eliminate, this concern. Second, some teachers withheld the names of their districts or portfolio scores, out of privacy or other concerns, and therefore could not be included in the distribution calculations. If these respondents were more likely to teach in a certain district or have another characteristic in common, the representativeness of the data is lessened. From examination of survey item responses of those who identified DRG and those who did not, no such connection was perceived, yet it may be present on a small scale. Despite these caveats, the committee believes the survey responses generally are a good way to broadly understand beginning teachers’ BEST experiences.

District facilitators. The committee also surveyed district facilitators to understand how BEST is implemented and monitored at the district level. District facilitators serve as the liaisons between the BEST program and local school districts.

The online survey was sent to all facilitators for whom SDE had e-mail addresses; respondents could complete the survey only by using a dedicated link in the e-mail they received. The online survey limited district facilitators to one survey response. The response rate from facilitators in “standard” districts was high: 46 percent.³⁸ Facilitators in non-standard districts, such as charter schools which are considered their own districts under the BEST program, responded at a lower rate of 33 percent. Only the results of facilitators in standard districts are presented in this report for two reasons. First, the non-standard facilitator group results are substantially different, owing to their unique positions. Second, the low number of respondents for the group makes the data relatively unreliable.

The district facilitator responses generally followed the distribution of all teachers by DRG. A few DRGs – B, C, and E – were somewhat over-represented but not highly so. The two

³⁸ For the district facilitator survey, 74 responded out of 161 who received the survey invitation via e-mail. Standard districts include the state’s 166 local and regional school districts.

DRGs with the lowest percentage of responses, however, had proportional representation, as shown in Table A-3. The committee believes the generally accurate distribution of district facilitators across DRGs provides a good base for broadly understanding facilitators’ actions and beliefs. At the same time, when examining the district facilitator survey results, it is important to keep in mind that district facilitators have different impacts, depending on how many beginning teachers are in their purview. For example, although the group E districts have 20 percent of the state’s district facilitators, they have only 4 percent of the state’s Year One teachers. In addition, it is possible that facilitators who shared some characteristic that impacted their survey responses, were more or less likely to respond, which makes the results less reliable.

Table A-3. DRG Distribution of Survey Respondents Compared to the Distribution of All BEST District Facilitators			
DRG	Percent of Respondents	Percent of All District Facilitators	Difference (% points)
A	1%	5%	-4%
B	20%	13%	+7%
C	23%	18%	+5%
D	15%	14%	+1%
E	11%	20%	-9%
F	14%	10%	+4%
G	7%	9%	-2%
H	4%	5%	-1%
I	5%	4%	+1%

Note: A positive difference in the percentage points columns means the responses were somewhat overrepresented for those DRGs, while a negative difference means the responses were somewhat underrepresented for those DRGs. The differences in either direction were mostly minimal in relation to the overall distribution of the responses.
Sources: SDE data and PRI staff calculations from the beginning teacher surveys

Surveys

The beginning teacher surveys are on the following pages. When printed in proper formatting, each survey was one double-sided page in 11-point font. The district facilitator survey is not included in this appendix due to its length.

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE: SURVEY OF BEGINNING TEACHERS (ABOUT YEAR 1)

GENERAL

1. Which school district did you work in last year (2006-07)? _____
2. What was your primary teaching assignment last year? a. Grade level _____ b. Content area _____
3. Are you an Alternate Route to Certification graduate? a. Yes b. No
4. Will you have to complete or have you already completed a BEST portfolio? a. Yes b. No c. I don't know

MENTORING

5. What type of mentor arrangement did you have last year?
 - a. Individual mentor
 - b. Mentor team
 - c. I did not have an assigned mentor (*If "c," skip to Q.11*)

6. What best describes your mentor/mentor team arrangement last year? (circle all that apply)

Individual Mentor in my <u>same</u> :	a. Content area	b. Grade level	c. Building
Mentor Team with at least one member in my <u>same</u> :	a. Content area	b. Grade level	c. Building

7. How did your mentor arrangement (as answered in Q. 6) impact the level of support you received last year?
 - a. Positively impacted
 - b. Not impacted
 - c. Negatively impacted
8. When did you first meet with your mentor/mentor team last year?
 - a. When I started teaching
 - b. Within 2 months after I started teaching
 - c. More than 2 months after I started teaching
 - d. Never
9. In what ways did your mentor/mentor team help you last year? (circle all that apply)
 - a. Familiarized me with my school and/or district
 - b. Helped me with lesson planning
 - c. Helped me understand the BEST portfolio
 - d. Helped me with techniques to improve my teaching
 - e. Made me aware of BEST resources
 - f. Helped me understand the CT Common Core of Teaching standards
 - g. Other: _____
 - h. No help was provided
10. If you were assigned extra or co-curricular duties last year, did you still find common time with your mentor/mentor team to meet?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I had no extra or co-curricular duties
11. Did the district you worked for last year provide mentor support for second-year teachers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know

12. Please indicate the frequency of the following occurrences for last year: (circle one response for each line)

	Number of Times During 2006-07 School Yr.			
	0	1-2	3-4	5+
a. My mentor/mentor team observed my teaching:	0	1-2	3-4	5+
b. I observed my mentor/mentor team's teaching:	0	1-2	3-4	5+
c. I observed other teachers:	0	1-2	3-4	5+
d. I received release time to work with my mentor/mentor team:	0	1-2	3-4	5+
e. I received release time for professional development:	0	1-2	3-4	5+

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE: SURVEY OF BEGINNING TEACHERS (ABOUT YEAR 2)

GENERAL

14. Which school district did you work in last year (2006-07)? _____
15. Which district did you work in the prior year (2005-06)? _____
16. What was your primary teaching assignment last year? a. Grade level _____ b. Content area _____
17. What is your highest level of education?
 a. Bachelor's degree b. Master's degree c. Beyond Master's degree (including 6th Year)
18. What was your previous level of work experience prior to becoming a teacher in Connecticut?
 a. No prior teaching or professional experience c. Previously a private school or higher ed. teacher
 b. Taught in another state d. Professional experience in a non-teaching field
19. Are you an Alternate Route to Certification graduate? a. Yes b. No
20. Where did you attend a teacher preparation program? a. Conn. (which one: _____) b. Another state

SUPPORT

8. What type of mentor arrangement did you have during: (circle one response per year)

Your first year of teaching (2005-2006)	a. Individual mentor	b. Mentor team	c. Neither
Your second year of teaching (2006-2007)	a. Individual mentor	b. Mentor team	c. Neither

9. If you were mentored last year, what best describes your mentor/mentee arrangement: (circle all that apply)

Individual Mentor in my <u>same</u> :	a. Content area	b. Grade level	c. Building
Mentor Team with at least one member in my <u>same</u> :	a. Content area	b. Grade level	c. Building

10. If you were not formally mentored in your 2nd year, who provided assistance to you? (circle all that apply)
 a. Other teacher(s) c. Master mentor (if available) e. BEST district facilitator g. No one
 b. Mentor from first year d. Building principal f. Other _____
11. To be an effective teacher, how many years of mentoring do you think a beginning teacher should receive:
 a. None b. 1 year c. 2 years d. More than 2 years

12. How satisfied were you with the support you received last year from the following sources:

(circle one response per source)	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Support Provided
a. Mentor or mentor team	VS	S	D	VD	NSP
b. Other teachers	VS	S	D	VD	NSP
c. Master mentor	VS	S	D	VD	NSP
d. Building principal	VS	S	D	VD	NSP
e. BEST district facilitator	VS	S	D	VD	NSP
f. Department chair	VS	S	D	VD	NSP
g. State level (e.g. BEST website, printed materials, seminars, other)	VS	S	D	VD	NSP

ASSESSMENT

13. How useful were your formal evaluations by your supervisor(s) in making you a more effective teacher?
 a. Very useful b. Useful c. Somewhat useful d. Not useful
14. How would you rate your understanding of the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching standards when you began teaching in Connecticut? a. Full understanding b. Some understanding c. No understanding

15. Following completion of the BEST portfolio, how would you rate your understanding of the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching standards? a. Full understanding b. Some understanding c. No understanding

16. How useful was the portfolio process in improving your ability to: (circle one response per question)

	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
a. Plan a series of connected lessons?	VU	U	SU	NU
b. Deliver effective instruction?	VU	U	SU	NU
c. Use student assessment to adjust instruction?	VU	U	SU	NU
d. Reflect on and improve teaching?	VU	U	SU	NU
e. Use various effective teaching techniques?	VU	U	SU	NU

17. What types of portfolio help did you access? (circle all that apply)

- a. BEST district facilitator
- b. Mentor/mentor team
- c. Colleague who had already completed portfolio
- d. Exemplar portfolios
- e. Web information
- f. Connecticut Common Core of Teaching
- g. A portfolio scorer
- h. Outside consultant not affiliated with district or BEST
- i. Other help provided by my school or district
- j. Other help provided by the State Department of Education

18. In completing your portfolio, did you personally experience any problems regarding: (circle all that apply)

- a. Access to videotape equipment
- b. Assistance with the actual videotaping
- c. Information from mentor, scorer, BEST district facilitator, or State Department of Education staff
- f. Directions in the portfolio handbook
- g. Teaching performance
- h. Other _____

19. How satisfied were you with the written feedback you received from SDE with your portfolio score?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied

20. What score(s) did you receive on the portfolio? _____ (Elem. Ed. Literacy ___) (Elem. Ed. Numeracy ___)

21. If you received a "1" score, will you attend a Portfolio Assessment Conference? a. Yes b. No

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. Is the current portfolio process the most effective way to measure a beginning teacher's application of the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching standards? a. Yes b. No c. Unsure

23. If yes to Q. 22, should the portfolio be moved to a different time?

- a. Yes, to the 1st year of teaching
- b. Yes, to the 3rd year of teaching
- c. No, it should remain as is

24. If no to Q. 22, should the portfolio be replaced with: (circle *one* response only)

- a. A series of in-person classroom evaluations by state-trained evaluators
- b. A series of smaller reflective projects done throughout a school year
- c. A series of in-person observations by a principal or district official
- d. Nothing, new teachers meet sufficient state standards for certification
- e. Formative evaluations by mentors
- f. A project examining and reflecting on one aspect of my teaching
- g. Other _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING AND RETURNING THIS SURVEY BY OCTOBER 19TH
(Please call 860-240-0300 if you have any questions regarding the survey or study.)

Appendix B

District Reference Groups (DRGs)

DRG A: Darien, Easton, New Canaan, Redding, Regional District 9, Ridgefield, Weston, Westport, Wilton
DRG B: Avon, Brookfield, Cheshire, Fairfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Greenwich, Guilford, Madison, Monroe, New Fairfield, Newtown, Orange, Regional District 5, Regional District 15, Simsbury, South Windsor, Trumbull, West Hartford, Woodbridge
DRG C: Andover, Barkhamsted, Bethany, Bolton, Canton, Columbia, Cornwall, Ellington, Essex, Hebron, Mansfield, Marlborough, New Hartford, Oxford, Pomfret, Regional District 4, Regional District 7, Regional District 8, Regional District 10, Regional District 12, Regional District 13, Regional District 14, Regional District 17, Regional District 18, Regional District 19, Salem, Sherman, Somers, Suffield, Tolland
DRG D: Berlin, Bethel, Branford, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, East Granby, East Hampton, East Lyme, Ledyard, Milford, Newington, New Milford, North Haven, Old Saybrook, Rocky Hill, Shelton, Southington, Stonington, Wallingford, Waterford, Watertown, Wethersfield, Windsor
DRG E: Ashford, Bozrah, Brooklyn, Canaan, Chaplin, Chester, Colebrook, Coventry, Deep River, Eastford, East Haddam, Franklin, Hampton, Hartland, Kent, Lebanon, Lisbon, Litchfield, Norfolk, North Branford, North Stonington, Portland, Preston, Regional District 1, Regional District 6, Regional District 16, Salisbury, Scotland, Sharon, Thomaston, Union, Westbrook, Willington, Woodstock, Woodstock Academy
DRG F: Canterbury, East Windsor, Enfield, Griswold, Montville, North Canaan, Plainville, Plymouth, Regional District 11, Seymour, Sprague, Stafford, Sterling, Thompson, Voluntown, Windsor Locks, Wolcott
DRG G: Bloomfield, Bristol, East Haven, Gilbert Academy, Groton, Hamden, Killingly, Manchester, Middletown, Naugatuck, Norwich Free Academy, Plainfield, Putnam, Stratford, Torrington, Vernon, Winchester
DRG H: Ansonia, Danbury, Derby, East Hartford, Meriden, Norwalk, Norwich, Stamford, West Haven
DRG I: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury, Windham

Source: "Connecticut's District Reference Groups (DRGs), 2005-06 to Date," Connecticut State Department of Education, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/edfacts/drags.htm>

Portfolio Scoring Reliability

Scoring System

Portfolios are scored by a wide range of educators from throughout the state, including current and retired teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and university faculty. Prospective scorers are chosen by their school districts and have at least five years of teaching experience in public schools and/or state-approved private schools. Scorers who submitted portfolios as part of their own certification requirements typically scored within the top ranges of the portfolio scoring scale. These factors enhance the overall credibility of the scoring system, although some question whether scorers should have taught for more than five years.

BEST portfolios are scored using a “guided expert judgment” model.³⁹ Simply, that means scorers make the scoring decisions by following a standardized process when reviewing portfolios. First, detailed data are collected from the portfolios using specific data collection documents that are common across content areas. Second, based upon their professional experience, proficiency as trained scorers, and professional judgment, scorers analyze the portfolio data collected to determine the final portfolio scores. In more detail, the scoring process is structured around four steps:

- 1) review of the entire portfolio and collection of relevant evidence using structured note-taking tables;
- 2) analysis of the collected evidence and identification of performance patterns;
- 3) integration of the performance indicators and identification of the CCT-based category performance pattern; and
- 4) integration of the category performances into an overall score.

The committee believes the standardized portfolio scoring structure helps ensure the overall reliability of the portfolio assessment process. Moreover, scorers do not work in isolation. There is assistance available, and at times required, during the entire process from more experienced scorers, including table leaders, site leaders, and SDE project leaders. Every stage of the scoring process is designed to produce tangible products making the process transparent for more experienced scorers to review the accuracy and reliability of each initial scorer’s decision.

Although SDE has implemented a uniform portfolio scoring process, there is some potential for ambiguity, based upon committee staff’s observations of three sites during the summer scoring session. For example, for portfolios initially scored as “passing” (i.e., receiving scores of 2, 3, or 4), the degree to which formal review occurs beyond the initial review seemed somewhat vague when it was conveyed to committee staff. As summarized in the committee’s

³⁹ *Validity Report: BEST Portfolio Assessment Program, Draft 2005*, Connecticut State Department of Education.

September briefing report, although each portfolio is officially reviewed at least three times, the level of review and the amount of time spent reviewing the portfolios beyond the initial review may not be as extensive as the original review. This depends on many factors, including the initial score (lower scores receive more in-depth reviews) and the overall thoroughness of the initial scorer's data collection and review as determined by the more experienced scorers within the scoring hierarchy.

The seemingly limited amount of time spent reviewing portfolios after the initial review – except for those originally scored low – is somewhat offset by the experience levels of the additional reviewers, which increases with each layer of reviewer (e.g., table leader, assistant site leader, site leader). The need for an entire “full” review of a passing portfolio lessens since the subsequent scorers generally have more professional experience and scorer experience than those who initially score the portfolio. Coupled with the standardization of the scoring process, this may account for the varying amounts of time and levels of review dedicated to portfolios initially scored as “passing,” as indicated in committee's September briefing report. The committee believes, however, its recommendation proposing a competent/not-competent scoring scale would minimize this issue as it relates to scorers determining final portfolio scores. Under the recommendation, scorers will not be making finite distinctions within a four-point scoring scale when determining final scores, but will assign final portfolio scores using a broader scale, lessening the need for such finite review for portfolios with passing scores (portfolios deemed failing or borderline between passing and failing will still need thorough reviews.)

Another area for potential ambiguity is the level of specific subject knowledge scorers should possess to adequately score portfolios. Although an analysis of the actual credentials of portfolio scorers was not conducted as part of this study, it is unclear as to how often portfolios are scored by scorers who have specific knowledge regarding the subject or topic of the portfolio. For example, portfolios in the area of social studies may include several different subject areas, such as economics, government, geography, or world cultures. This also holds true in other content areas, including special education given the various types of disabilities among students.

During committee staff's observations of the portfolio scoring sites during the summer, SDE staff was asked to what degree scorers are matched with the specific topic of each portfolio. The department is cognizant there should be as direct a connection as possible between scorers' content knowledge and the level of specificity of portfolio topics. To the extent feasible, scorers are matched in accordance with grade level and sub-content area. Moreover, scorers are recruited, in part, based upon the projected needs within the various content areas to help minimize potential discrepancies between scorers' overall content knowledge and the content depth of portfolio topics.

Training

Portfolio scorers receive specific initial training from SDE prior to officially scoring portfolios. After initial training, which is approximately 50 hours over multiple sessions, scorers undergo “calibration” training using benchmark portfolios. This occurs each year a scorer wants to score portfolios. Scorers, whether new or experienced, also must be deemed proficient through a process of successfully scoring a previously scored benchmark portfolio. Proficiency

testing is a diagnostic process to ensure reliability among scorers. The testing occurs during the summer right before the live scoring session starts.

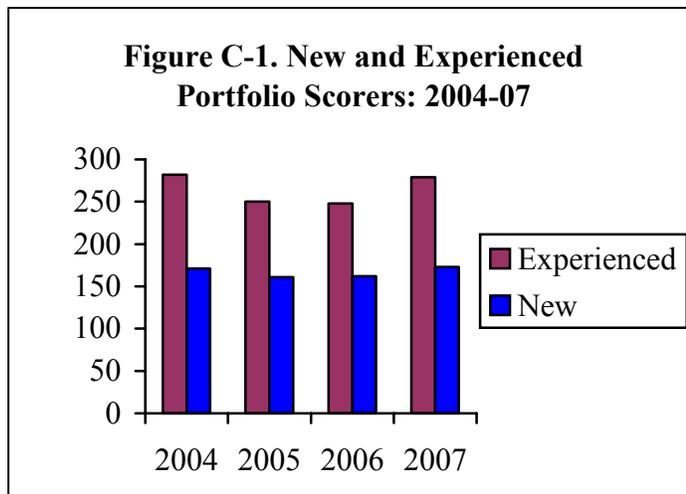
Upon completion of the proficiency testing, prospective scorers are graded as: 1) *proficient* – scorer is permitted to begin scoring portfolios with ongoing review from a more experienced scorer; 2) *proficient with review* – scorer works with an experienced scorer to identify and correct deficiencies, and a formal review of the new scorer’s first two portfolios is made by an experienced scorer; or 3) *non-proficient* – prospective scorer does not satisfactorily meet the SDE proficiency standards and must score another proficiency benchmark portfolio. A prospective scorer graded as nonproficient may repeat this process until proficiency standards are met.

Between 2000-2005, data collected by SDE show about 85 percent of all trained scorers pass the proficiency testing requirement upon their first try. The remaining scorers attained proficiency generally upon a second proficiency test.⁴⁰ Table C-1 shows the overall proficiency rates for the 2007 summer scoring session mirror the 2000-05 results.

Table C-1. Portfolio Proficiency Test Results: May 2007 Scoring Session				
Content Area	Scorers Taking Proficiency	Proficient Upon First Attempt	Proficient Upon Second Attempt	Not Proficient (Did Not Retake/Left)
Elementary Educ.	169	157 (93%)	6 (4%)	6 (4%)
English Lang. Arts	45	42 (93%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Math	31	21 (68%)	10 (32%)	0
Music	24	18 (75%)	5 (21%)	1 (4%)
Physical Ed.	30	25 (83%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)
Science	38	27 (71%)	10 (26%)	1 (3%)
Social Studies	42	41 (98%)	1 (2%)	0
Special Education	52	47 (90%)	5 (10%)	0
Visual Arts	17	16 (94%)	0	1 (6%)
World Languages	31	27 (87%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)
Totals	479	421 (88%)	44 (9%)	14 (3%)
Source of data: SDE				

⁴⁰ *Validity Report: BEST Portfolio Assessment Program, Draft 2005*, Connecticut State Department of Education.

Another indicator of the strength of the scoring system is the percentage of scorers who return to score portfolios. Scorers who return for additional years are considered more experienced scorers, since they have scored portfolios through at least one cycle. Between 2004 and 2007, a total of 1,726 portfolio scorers went through proficiency training. Of those, 61 percent were considered experienced scorers, while 39 percent were new to the process. Figure C-1 shows the ratio of new scorers to experienced scorers has remained relatively constant over the past four years. Although there is no formal context through which to gauge the strength or weakness of this ratio, in broad terms it is better for the process to have more experienced scorers than new scorers, and to have a relatively consistent supply of experienced scorers over a period of time, which is occurring within BEST.



It is program policy that portfolio scorers who do not score for one year after receiving the initial training and passing the proficiency test, must complete recalibration training and pass the proficiency test again the year they want to score portfolios, as do all returning scorers. Scorers who do not score for two or more years after being initially trained, must attend the full initial training and recalibration training, and pass the proficiency test prior to scoring portfolios.

One criticism of the BEST portfolio scorer training process gleaned from the written testimony to the committee is that Connecticut's training for portfolio scorers does not meet the rigor of that used by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to train its portfolio scorers. NBPTS scorers are required to pass multiple proficiency tests prior to scoring.

It is correct that Connecticut's level of scorer training does not meet the NBPTS standards, even though the BEST portfolio assessment model is partially based on the NBPTS evaluation. At the same time, NBPTS certification is a national process used to certify outstanding teachers using the most rigorous standards and criteria, since it is a prestigious national process. Teachers who are nationally certified through the NBPTS may teach in nearly any state in the country without having to undergo each state's particular certification requirements and they often receive additional compensation. The committee believes Connecticut's process is tailored to Connecticut's standards, and it should not be perceived as a direct duplicate of the national board process, which has its own standards for its own purpose.

Inter-rater Reliability

As discussed above, a key determinant of the overall reliability of the BEST portfolio scoring process is the consistency of portfolio scores among scorers (i.e., inter-rater reliability). In other words, the final scores assigned to a portfolio must have a high degree of similarity

among all the scorers who scored the portfolio for the scores produced to be reliable. There also should be a high degree of correlation between the overall portfolio pass/fail rates.

The education department analyzed the consistency among portfolio scores for the 2007 summer scoring session.⁴¹ A random sample of portfolios within each of the 10 content areas was scored by two independent scorers at each site. In total, 210 portfolios (7 percent) were analyzed. The scorers were not aware their portfolios were sampled for the analysis and there was no further review by more experienced scorers after the initial review for the analysis process, adding to the rigor of the test.

The portfolio scores were analyzed in several different ways to determine the levels of reliability and consistency of the portfolio assessment process. First, statistical analyses were conducted of the overall level of agreement of the portfolios based on the scores assigned to the portfolios using the 1-4 scoring scale. Second, additional analyses were run on the the level of reliability based on the overall pass/fail decision, where a score of “1” represented portfolios that failed and scores of “2-4” represented portfolios that passed. Additional, more finite analyses included: correlations between the instructional design, instructional implementation, assessment of learning, and analysis and reflection components of the portfolio; whether there was exact agreement, adjacent agreement, or no agreement among scorers; and the internal consistency of the scoring systems for each of the different content areas based on the independent scoring documents produced for the portfolios.

For purposes of this report, the committee focused on the results of two specific reliability measures: 1) the overall level of inter-rater reliability using the 1-4 portfolio scoring scale; and 2) the overall level of inter-rater reliability regarding the pass/fail status of portfolios. The results, presented in Table C-2, show relatively high inter-rater reliability levels for both measures. For example, in 71 percent of the portfolios, there was complete agreement among scorers on the final score when using the 1-4 rating scale. The level of agreement among scorers increased to 94 percent when scores were analyzed based on a pass/fail rating.

The department’s analysis correctly puts its results in the context within which they should be viewed, based on the types of statistical analyses used. In other words, according to testing norms for performance assessments like the BEST portfolio, standards for the agreement levels indicated in Table C-2 are appropriate in relation to the overall purpose of the portfolio. When fully considered, the department notes its analysis shows that when the current portfolio scoring system is applied by highly trained and proficient scorers, highly reliable portfolio scores are produced.

Table C-2. Selected Inter-rater Reliability Measures: 2007 Summer Session Portfolio Scores		
Sample Size	Percent Agreement 1-4 Scores	Percent Agreement Pass/Fail Scores
210 Portfolios	71%	94%
Source: State Department of Education		

⁴¹ *Reliability and Internal Consistency of the BEST Portfolio-based Teacher Assessment Program, 2007*, Connecticut State Department of Education.

Licensure Assessments in Other States

Table D-1. Assessments Required for Teacher Licensure in U.S. States

Assessment Type (Number of States)	States		
Standardized, Non-performance-based Assessment Only			
Praxis II (27)	Alabama Delaware Hawaii Idaho Kansas Kentucky Louisiana Maine Maryland	Minnesota Missouri Mississippi New Hampshire Nevada New Jersey North Carolina North Dakota Pennsylvania	Rhode Island South Carolina South Dakota Tennessee Texas Utah Vermont Washington West Virginia
NES (8)	Arizona Florida Georgia	Massachusetts Michigan Oregon	New Mexico Oklahoma
Praxis II and/or NES (2)	Colorado Virginia		
Combination of Standardized and Performance-based Assessments			
Praxis II and III (2)	Arkansas Ohio		
Combination of Praxis II and Unique Performance Assessment (5)	Alaska California	Connecticut Indiana	New York
<p>--“Praxis II” is ETS’s content knowledge test. There are other types of Praxis II tests (including pedagogy) that some states require, but inclusion in the categories above means a state requires the Praxis II content test.</p> <p>--“NES” stands for National Evaluation Systems, Inc. NES works with states to devise state-specific tests of teacher candidates’ basic and content knowledge. Inclusion in the NES category means a state requires the NES content knowledge test.</p> <p>--“Praxis II and/or NES”: Colorado requires candidates to take either the NES content assessment or Praxis II. Virginia requires its candidates to take the NES assessment of communication and literacy skills, as well as Praxis II.</p> <p>--“Combination of Praxis II and Performance Assessment” includes a wide range of performance assessments. Alaska and New York require new teachers to submit videos of their teaching; Alaska requires substantial supporting documentation. California, Connecticut, and Indiana require a portfolio or portfolio-type exercise; California requires this during teacher preparation, in addition to a required formative assessment during the first few years of teaching.</p> <p>--Several states’ policies were unclear, and so were not included in this table: Illinois, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.</p> <p>Sources: Education Commission of the States and PRI staff original research</p>			



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



COPY

November 6, 2007

The Honorable Edward Meyer, Co-Chair
Legislative Program Review and
Investigations Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 506
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Meyer:

I am pleased to enclose the response of the Connecticut State Department of Education to the issues raised at the September 27, 2007, public hearings in connection with the review of the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program.

We have carefully reviewed both the oral and written testimony presented at these hearings. This report will outline the efforts of the Department to be responsive to the many constituents affected by this program over the two decades that this program has been in effect. In addition, we have acknowledged our support for some of the recommendations made to improve the program, as well as provided the rationale for re-consideration of or modifications to some of those suggestions.

We thank you and the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee for providing us with this opportunity to clarify and respond to your committee's questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George A. Coleman".

George A. Coleman
Deputy Commissioner of Education

GAC:cnc

Enclosure

**Response to Issues Presented at September 27, 2007,
Legislative Program Review Committee Hearing on the
Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program**

ISSUES RELATING TO THE SUPPORT COMPONENT OF THE BEST PROGRAM

Elimination of state financial support for mentoring activities leading to inequities in support to beginning teachers

The Connecticut State Department of Education (Department) acknowledges the presence of inequities in the quality and level of support provided to beginning teachers at the district level, with the problems most severe in the state's high need districts. These problems include: (1) mentors and beginning teachers not always matched in the same content area/grade level; (2) beginning teachers being assigned to mentors whose training has not been recently updated; (3) lack of release time for beginning teachers and their mentors to observe each other's classes; (4) differentials in (or lack of) stipends for mentors serving in the role; and (5) mentor support that does not extend for all teachers into their second year of teaching—the year in which beginning teachers prepare their BEST portfolios.

Over the last several years, the Department and State Board of Education (Board) have sought to address these inequities in the following ways:

- (1) legislative proposal for the creation of a corps of retired educators to be assigned to supplement school-based mentors for teachers in the state's largest urban areas, with the goal of ensuring that beginning teachers are supported by trained, experienced educators in the same approximate grade level/subject areas as the beginning teachers (budget option requests in 2004 and 2006);
- (2) requests to increase BEST Program funding to provide stipends for mentors for first and second year beginning teachers and to enhance training for mentors and beginning teachers (budget option requests in 1996, 2000 and 2006);
- (3) offering of state-sponsored professional development and resources to supplement school-based mentoring beginning in 1998 (e.g., three regional content-specific seminars for first and second year teachers, on-line teaching resources such as learning units and portfolio exemplars, and availability of BEST teachers-in-residence in each content to provide content-specific assistance and resources to beginning teachers);
- (4) targeted technical assistance to beginning teachers in the urban and priority districts, including delivery of content-specific seminars on-site, training of master mentors and "portfolio coaches"; and
- (5) expansion of availability of regional and in-district training, as well as development of more training options for mentors and administrators to increase district capacity to support beginning teachers (e.g., master mentor training, mentor coaching seminars, training of "content colleagues" who are part of a "mentoring team").

Need for mentoring support beyond the first year of teaching

The Department endorses expanding the requirement for school-based mentor support beyond the first year of teaching. A second year of mentor support is currently required for teachers who are graduates of Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) programs and holders of Durational Shortage Area Permits (DSAP). As noted earlier, some districts extend formalized mentoring support to beginning teachers in the second year of teaching; however, this practice is neither universal nor mandated by the state.

School administrators need to be partners in the BEST Support Structure

The BEST Program was originally designed to promote a “triad” support model in the school—that is, the mentor, principal and beginning teacher would work together as a team in the induction process. In reality, however, the evaluative role of the principal was often in conflict with the supportive role that mentors were to assume and the confidentiality provisions that were needed to foster trust between the mentor and beginning teacher.

The Department supports a more vigorous role for principals in the induction process. To this end, a series of administrator workshops and resources have been developed in the last three years to promote more direct principal involvement in supporting mentors and beginning teachers. This includes modifying school schedules to provide time for mentors and beginning teachers to meet regularly, providing release time for mentors and beginning teachers to observe one another’s classrooms, providing time and resources to support the beginning teacher in the portfolio preparation process, and incorporating the beginning teacher’s BEST portfolio into the school-based professional growth plan of the beginning teacher.

ISSUES RELATING TO THE ASSESSMENT COMPONENT OF THE BEST PROGRAM

The stressful nature of the portfolio assessment

The Department acknowledges that completion of a BEST portfolio produces stress for beginning teachers because it is a high-stakes assessment linked to eligibility for continued certification. Any type of teacher assessment would produce some degree of anxiety, whether through a written test, a portfolio or classroom observation. In fact, beginning teachers frequently complained of the pressure and stress of the BEST Program classroom observation-based assessment in place during the late 1980s through mid-1990s, when three to six observations were conducted by state assessors during the first year of teaching.

The Department has responded to this issue as follows:

- (1) *Alignment of portfolio tasks to what teachers should be doing daily in their classrooms:*
The BEST portfolio generally asks teachers to document five to eight hours of instruction with one class of students. This usually can be accomplished within a two week timeframe. The portfolio is designed to document actual teaching practices—developing a lesson and unit plan, delivering instruction over several days and assessing student learning at the conclusion of the unit.

- (2) *Annual "reduction in portfolio" review:* Each year, we review the portfolio handbooks and portfolios to eliminate and streamline requirements in order to make the process easier for the teacher, while ensuring there is enough information submitted in the portfolio to make a valid judgment of the teaching performance. This has included reducing the number and length of teacher commentaries and eliminating any redundancies in information submitted in the portfolio. Portfolio documentation currently consists of one to two pages of daily lesson logs including the lesson plan (which teachers should already be preparing on a daily basis) and progress of the lesson. In addition, we ask for 8-10 pages of commentary on the unit design and learning expectations, progress of student learning and reflection on teaching and overall learning of the students—in total, no more than 25 written pages of written documentation. The Department plans a further review to determine whether portfolio tasks can be simplified or fewer days of instruction documented in the portfolio unit.
- (3) *Introduction of DVD submission option in lieu of VHS tapes:* Beginning with portfolios submitted in the spring of 2008, beginning teachers will have the option of submitting videotapes of their teaching on either a VHS tape or DVD format. Directions and technical assistance to beginning teachers in submitting their videotapes is available through the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). Also, video cameras are made available for loan if beginning teachers cannot secure one through their schools/districts. The Department will review videotaping requirements in each portfolio area to reduce the need for editing.
- (4) *Administrative accommodations for hardship:* Since the inception of the BEST Program, the Department has implemented a series of administrative accommodations to ensure beginning teachers have every opportunity to successfully complete the BEST assessment. Examples include extending timeframes for completion of the assessment due to illness, extended absences during the school year, or significant changes in teaching assignment. To illustrate, during the 2006-07 school year, about 500 of 2,800 (or slightly over 10 percent) of beginning teachers received an extension of an additional year to complete the BEST portfolio.
- (5) *Exemptions from the BEST Portfolio requirement:* Subsection (d) of Section 10-145f of the Connecticut General Statutes authorizes the Department to exempt certain teachers from the BEST Program assessment if the circumstances of the teaching assignment are sufficiently unique to preclude a teacher from demonstrating the teaching standards. Examples of situations include a special education teacher whose students are so disabled that instruction consists of teaching life skills, or a teacher in an alternative education setting in which the student population is so transient that the teacher cannot document working with students for a sufficient period of time as required in the portfolio. Districts must submit documentation to support an exemption request, which is then submitted for approval to the BEST Review Committee, which includes school district personnel in addition to representatives from the Department. During the 2006-07 school year, 157 teachers were granted full or partial exemptions from the portfolio assessment.
- (6) *Encouraging administrator support to beginning teachers completing portfolios:* Some districts actively support beginning teachers in the portfolio process by providing a knowledgeable and trained mentor or portfolio scorer to support the new teacher, as well as securing release time for the teacher to plan and complete the portfolio. Beginning teachers who receive high levels of support often report that preparing the portfolio was not easy, but worthwhile in terms of improving their teaching. The Department will continue to offer workshops and other administrator resources to promote a greater role of the district in supporting new teachers through the portfolio process.

Classroom observation is a more valid assessment of performance than the BEST portfolio

As noted earlier in this report, the BEST Program assessment consisted of classroom observations from 1989 until the mid-1990s, when it was gradually phased out and replaced with the content-specific portfolio assessment. Factors leading to the replacement of the classroom observation assessment, the “Connecticut Competency Instrument” (CCI) with the portfolio assessment include the following:

- (1) *CCI was a limited “snapshot” of teaching:* The CCI was used to evaluate a teacher teaching a single lesson and only focused on teacher behaviors common to all teachers (e.g., classroom management, management of routines and transitions, student questioning, monitoring and adjustment of instruction). Although such teaching behaviors are important and requisite to effective teaching, the CCI assessment failed to capture evidence of student learning over time, the relationship of that single lesson to students’ prior learning or future learning expectations, and the relationship of the content of the lesson to important instructional outcomes as defined by the district’s curriculum goals or state standards for student learning. In contrast, the portfolio is content-specific and documents a series of lessons over time. It provides multiple sources of data, including teacher lesson plans, daily student work, assessments, videotapes of teaching, and commentaries on student learning and their teaching. In addition, teachers must justify the selection of the unit’s content and learning goals to school/district goals or state content/curricular frameworks.
- (2) *Significant resources and costs required to administer and staff the CCI:* “Live” classroom observations require that assessors who are classroom teachers be released from their schools to travel to other schools to conduct and document the assessment. This requires the state to reimburse the district for substitutes, as well as reimburse the assessor for travel and to compile the assessment documentation on their own time. In addition, in order to make a valid licensure decision using classroom observation, multiple assessments of the teacher are required—at a minimum, three—and up to six or more if the teacher is not successful. The administrative systems required to schedule these assessments were costly and resource intensive. In addition, by the mid-1990s, districts were increasingly reluctant to release teachers to conduct CCI assessments.
- (3) *Limited performance differentials in CCI assessment among candidates:* Within a couple of years, nearly 100 percent of teachers were meeting the CCI assessment requirement. In general, the high pass rate was attributed to the selection of “safe, showcased” lessons which had little relation to daily teaching practice and district curriculum or which provided very little evidence of student learning within the lesson taught.

In summary, the resources and costs to administer the CCI were high in comparison to the impact of the assessment and its capability to adequately measure teaching effectiveness.

It should be noted that two states (Ohio and Arkansas) have adopted PRAXIS III, a classroom observation-based system developed by Educational Testing Service which is very similar to the CCI. This assessment, which is administered during the first year of teaching and consists of only one classroom observation, produces first-time pass rates of 98 to 99 percent. Recent data from Ohio indicates that the cost to administer the PRAXIS III assessment program (excluding costs to support mentoring) is substantially higher than Connecticut’s BEST portfolio. For example, during 2005-06, Ohio spent approximately \$4.7 million to assess 5,238 teachers, or approximately \$897 per teacher. In contrast, annual scoring costs for the BEST Program

portfolio assessment program during 2005-2006 totaled approximately \$1.1 million to assess 2000 portfolios, or \$550 per portfolio.

Request for “alternatives” to the portfolio assessment from which beginning teachers can choose

Developing alternatives to the current portfolio assessment and allowing teachers to choose the method of assessment would have the following implications:

- (1) *Validity and fairness to candidates:* Because the BEST Program assessments are related to licensure decisions, the assessment structure must be fair, valid and reliable. If multiple assessments were available for use, the state would have to validate and conduct equating studies to ensure equivalence in performance standards and equity in outcomes for candidates choosing one assessment or the other.
- (2) *Resources to support multiple assessment options:* Significant amounts of additional state resources would be required to support multiple assessment administration, different trainings for scorers and mentors, and multiple scoring and reporting systems. As noted earlier in this paper, the costs for an observation-based assessment such as PRAXIS III or the CCI are substantially higher than the current BEST portfolio assessment. The costs would be even greater if both systems were to be administered concurrently.
- (3) *Development of alternatives to the current BEST Portfolio:* The development of new clinical teacher assessments would require several years of development and validation as well as significant additional state resources to ensure that the new assessment would meet Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, which is required for the legal defensibility of a licensure-based assessment.

Modifications to the current portfolio assessment

The following are the Department’s responses to proposed modifications to the current BEST Portfolio assessment:

- (1) *Replacement of current score points (1-4) with pass/fail:* The Department endorses the recommendation to modify the existing four-point scale. An alternative to consider is to adopt a “pass”/“pass with distinction”/“fail” option, in order to recognize the exemplary performance of a small number of beginning teachers.
- (2) *Extended, flexible timeframe to meet BEST portfolio standards:* The Department supports the option of allowing beginning teachers to submit a portfolio in year one, year two or year three, with a fourth year in the program available to those teachers who do not pass the portfolio with their first submission.
- (3) *Appeals process for the portfolio:* The Department has developed a proposed appeals process, which is included as attachment A to this document. The implementation of this appeals process would require extending the timeframe to complete the BEST Program by one additional year.
- (4) *Modifications to current portfolio requirements for elementary teachers:* The Department has some concerns about giving elementary teachers the option of submitting either a literacy or numeracy portfolio, as mathematics and language arts are both critical subject areas in which elementary students are tested and schools held accountable for student outcomes.

- (5) *Modifications to current portfolio requirements for English teachers:* The Department supports the recommendation to consolidate the two components of the English portfolio (teaching literature and writing) into a single, shorter unit of instruction.
- (6) *Elimination of the BEST Video with administrative district evaluations to be included instead:* A critical element in evaluating teacher effectiveness is the interaction between the teacher and student. As noted earlier in this report, “live” classroom observations are costly and logistically difficult to implement. Therefore, the Department opposes the elimination of the video in the portfolio.

However, the Department supports the concept of integrating the principal’s or supervisor’s evaluations into the BEST Program assessment process. In order to ensure fairness and equity to candidates in this process, a common evaluation instrument would need to be developed and principals and supervisors trained to use this instrument.

- (7) *More comprehensive feedback for teachers:* The Department recognizes that the portfolio feedback rubrics are not nearly as meaningful as in-person conferences, such as the ones we provide to beginning teachers who score a “1” on their portfolio submission. Unfortunately, with a large scale assessment like the BEST portfolio in which more than 2,000 beginning teachers submit portfolios each year, the BEST Program currently does not have either the monetary nor human resources to provide that level of feedback (no matter how much we support the idea). As a more feasible, less costly alternative, the Department proposes offering feedback seminars to small groups of beginning teachers who “pass” the portfolio but want help in interpreting their results. Teachers would be invited to bring their portfolios and feedback rubric to the session, which would be conducted by an experienced BEST Program trainer who would help them understand the feedback report and identify areas for future growth. In addition, the Department agrees to develop modifications to the current portfolio feedback report to augment feedback on identified strengths and weaknesses.

ISSUES RELATED TO DEPARTMENT’S RESPONSE TO CEA CONCERNS

In response to the issues raised about the Department’s lack of responsiveness to the concerns of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), we would offer the following comments:

- (1) *CEA representation on policy committees:* It is a longstanding practice of the Department to invite representatives of the two state teachers’ unions/associations to be part of its policy committees. Over the past two years, representatives of these organizations have had input on Connecticut’s educator policies through the Educator Continuum Steering Committee, the Subcommittee on Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development, the Subcommittee on Educational Leadership, the BEST Advisory Subcommittee, the “Special Education Stakeholder Group” certification committee, and the committee to develop pre-service competencies for general education committees. Many of the recommendations of these committees have not yet been finalized.
- (2) *Other constituent input on Department committees:* It should be noted that the Department also invites other constituency groups to have a voice at important Department policy making committees. Examples of these constituencies include representatives of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), Connecticut deans of education (AACTE-CT), representatives of business and industry,

parent organizations, as well as at-large teachers, administrators, and superintendents representing the diversity of Connecticut's school districts. Depending upon the issues to be discussed, legislators and representatives of organizations who may be affected by certain policies are also invited to have input into Department policies.

- (3) *CEA recommendations regarding the BEST Program:* The Department has taken seriously the input from the state's teachers unions, but must also consider other constituent input. The BEST Program is a complex program with school personnel having diverse perspectives about its operations and issues. The draft recommendations of the BEST Advisory Committee were not brought forth to the Board because the report acknowledged that consensus was not reached on certain recommendations (including the elimination of the video component of the BEST Program and replacement with principal/supervisor evaluation). In addition, eight of the committee members subsequently submitted written comments disagreeing with other recommendations in the report.

Proposal for BEST Program Administrative Appeals Process

Eligibility:

Individuals who have received a score of “1” on a portfolio submission during their third year of teaching (this could be a first or second submission, which is due on February 1, with results received by April 1).

Areas subject to review in the administrative appeals process:

- review of scoring documentation to verify appropriate scoring procedures followed and documentation supports score;
- teaching assignment or circumstances that would prevent the teacher from having a fair opportunity to demonstrate teaching competency as required by the portfolio assessment;
- lack of adequate mandated school- or district-based mentoring during year one (and year two for Alternate Route to Certification graduates); and/or
- extenuating circumstances (illness, extended absence during school year, etc.) that adversely affected the teacher’s ability to document teaching.

Requirements in order to file appeal:

- (1) An appeals request must be made in writing within 30 days of receiving the BEST score report, along with supporting documentation as appropriate (e.g., medical certificate, description of unique teaching assignment, documentation of lack of mentoring support).
- (2) A superintendent sign-off must be included as confirmation of the circumstances meriting an appeal.

Appeals committee:

The appeals committee would consist of district personnel representative of the diversity of the teaching profession and including at least one principal, central office administrator and one higher education faculty member in addition to classroom teachers. The classroom teacher representatives would be in the same content area as the teacher initiating the appeal. Members of the committee cannot be current portfolio scorers and must complete a one-day training session in order to serve on the committee.

Consequences of upheld appeal:

- (1) inadequacy of documentation to support score of 1: Score overturned and eligibility for provisional educator certificate if all other requirements met;
- (2) determination that teaching assignment/circumstances precluded opportunity to document teaching as required in portfolio: retroactive exemption from assessment requirement;
- (3) lack of mandated school- or district-based mentoring support: invalidation of score and additional year in BEST with district required to provide mentoring; or
- (4) extenuating circumstances: invalidation of portfolio score and provision of additional year in BEST.

Consequences of denied appeal:

Opportunity for an additional portfolio submission during a fourth year in the BEST Program.

Deadline for filing of appeal: May 1 with a decision to be rendered by June 1.

Sample Portfolio Feedback Report for a Failing Portfolio



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program



From: Catherine Fisk Natale, Director of Educator Support and Assessment
Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification

Date: September 1, 2007

Subject: BEST Portfolio Performance Report

Portfolio Results

We are writing to inform you that you have not yet met the acceptable performance standard on the portfolio assessment, as your performance level was judged to be "1" or "conditional." A performance level of "2" or higher is required to meet the portfolio assessment standard.

Portfolio Performance Report

Attached to this letter is your portfolio performance report, which has two parts:

1. ***Your portfolio performance level:*** Levels of performance range from "1" (conditional) to "4" (advanced).
2. ***Your portfolio performance summary:*** This is a narrative description consisting of rubric feedback statements that reflect your portfolio performance. In order to help you interpret your performance, you may access the portfolio feedback rubric and a guide to interpreting your portfolio performance summary report at the BEST Connections website. Go to www.ctbest.org, click on "Resources," and scroll down to "BEST Portfolio Performance Feedback Rubrics."

Consequences of the Assessment and Notification to District

1. ***Certification Status:*** Beginning teachers who achieve the conditional performance level during the second year of teaching are not eligible for the Provisional Educator Certificate and must submit a new portfolio documenting new instruction with their students during year-three of participation in the BEST Program.
2. ***Notification to District:*** Your district will be notified of your performance on the portfolio assessment and the consequences. We do not provide the district with your portfolio performance summary narrative report; however, we encourage you to share it with your mentor, department chair, or other instructional personnel, who may be able to provide you with additional assistance in further improving your teaching.

Critical Information Regarding Submission of BEST Portfolios in Year Three

All year-three teachers must submit portfolios by **February 1, 2008**.

Portfolio Handbook Edition to be used

You must use the **2006-07 edition of the Handbook for the Development of a Teaching Portfolio** when you prepare your portfolio for submission by February 1, 2008. If you no longer have this handbook, you will find it online at www.ctbest.org, click on "Resources," or you may contact the BEST Program office at (860) 713-6820.

Sources for Assistance in Completing the BEST Portfolio Assessment Requirements

BEST Portfolio Conference: You are eligible for an in-person conference with a portfolio scorer/trainer who will provide you with more detailed information on your portfolio performance. To schedule a conference, please call the BEST Program office at (860) 713-6820. ***Conferences will take place during the last week in September and the first two weeks in October. Please call no later than September 14 to schedule your conference.***

BEST Program Seminars: We encourage you to access BEST Online Learning Units and attend In-person Regional Seminars.

Online Learning Units: The online learning unit seminar series is available through the BEST Connections website in each of the ten portfolio subject areas. Go to www.ctbest.org and click on "Online Learning Units." Then click on your own subject area.

In-Person Regional Seminars: We are also scheduling two regional "in-person" seminars in each portfolio subject area in the fall of 2007 for all teachers who will be submitting portfolios during the 2007-08 school year. Check the BEST Connections website at www.ctbest.org for those schedules.

District-based Support: We recommend that you seek assistance from district personnel with expertise in your content area, (e.g., a department chair or district curriculum coordinator) in those areas needing attention, as identified in your portfolio performance summary. You may want to contact your Regional Educational Service Center to determine what professional development is available regionally.

Critical Certification Information

The bureau's Certification Analysis Unit has been notified of your need to complete another year in the BEST Program for the purpose of successfully completing the portfolio assessment requirement. Please check the lapse date on your current Initial Educator Certificate to determine whether you need to apply for an extension. It is your responsibility to maintain a valid certificate for the 2007-08 school year. If you have any questions about your certification status, please call the Certification office at (860) 713-6969, or send an e-mail to teacher.cert@ct.gov.

Consequences of Not Meeting the BEST Requirement in Year Three

In order to be eligible for the Provisional Educator Certificate, you must meet the acceptable performance standard during your third year of BEST participation. Failure to do so will result in ineligibility for reissuance of your Initial Educator Certificate. In such cases, a beginning teacher may become eligible to apply for reissuance of the Initial Educator Certificate only after submission of evidence showing completion of a planned course of study and additional teaching experience, as pre-approved by the Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification.

The majority of teachers who submit portfolios during their third year of participation in BEST are successful as they gain more experience in the classroom and seek out assistance to address those areas identified as needing attention. The BEST Program is committed to helping new teachers in this regard. If you have any questions, please contact the project leader or the teacher in-residence in your respective content area by calling the BEST Program Office at (860) 713-6820.

Attachments

**Connecticut State Department of Education
Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program
Portfolio Performance Report**

Subject Area: Social Studies

Your portfolio was evaluated by highly trained and experienced teachers in your content area. This document represents a summary of their comprehensive evaluation, based upon: (1) the foundational skills and competencies of Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching (CCT) related to teacher knowledge, planning, instruction, assessment and reflection; and (2) discipline-based professional teaching standards.

The performance report includes two parts:

1. Portfolio Performance Level
2. Portfolio Performance Summary

Your portfolio performance level was evaluated as:

Conditional (1)

Consequence:

You have not yet met the passing portfolio performance standard. You must meet the passing portfolio performance standard to be eligible for the Provisional Educator Certificate. Therefore, you must submit a new portfolio documenting new instruction with your students during your third year of participation in BEST, due **February 1, 2008**.

A profile of your portfolio performance is attached.

Assessor Notes Providing Contextual Information

Course and Grade Level(s): World History Grade 7
Portfolio Topic: Pre-Columbian Societies

Profile of Portfolio Performance

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN: How well does the teacher use his/her knowledge of students to organize content, instructional strategies, materials and resources around essential social studies concepts?

The portfolio unit focused on learning related social studies events or topics. The teacher designed instruction to address students' general learning needs. The unit's resources and activities provided students with opportunities to actively learn the content.

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION: How well did the teacher actively engage students in discourse, learning through inquiry and the use of essential social studies skills?

Student work indicated there was little or no opportunity for students to develop or use essential social studies skills. In the featured activity, students responded to fact-based questions or summarized information about a topic. During class discourse the teacher engaged students in expressing opinions about unit-related content.

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING: How well did the teacher monitor and assess student learning, communicate expectations, and provide useful feedback?

The teacher monitored students' progress towards developing an understanding of the lesson's content. Findings about student learning were rarely used to adjust instruction. The assessments provided information mainly about students' recall and summary of social studies information. The evaluation criteria for student work were unclear. Assessment feedback included a mix of general and specific comments about students' strengths and weaknesses.

ANALYSIS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: How well does the teacher analyze student learning and reflect on the connections between teaching and learning?

The teacher's analysis of student learning focused mainly on students' learning of the content. The reflective commentary on teaching described limited connections between teaching practices and students' learning.

Regression Analysis Methodology

Committee staff analyzed the effects of different characteristics and experiences on whether Year Two teachers passed the BEST portfolio (i.e. whether they received scores of 2 through 4). Each portfolio category – elementary literacy, elementary numeracy, and non-elementary portfolios – was analyzed independently. The category of non-elementary portfolio scores encompassed eight content areas; the number of scores within each content area was insufficient to conduct meaningful analysis for the individual areas. A multi-step process of statistical analysis was used to determine which characteristics and experiences impact the likelihood of passing the portfolio.

First, individual cross-tabulations were run for each of the survey response items that potentially could have impacted portfolio score. This generally encompassed all items except for those relating to the respondents' beliefs about the appropriate way(s) to assess beginning teachers and to the effects of the portfolio on the beginning teachers' pedagogy. The level and significance of the statistical correlation between an item and whether the portfolio was passed was computed for each cross-tabulation. Kendall's tau-b was used because the items were categorical. The items that were statistically significant at $p=0.06$ were noted. This significance level, which is just above the more conventional level of significance ($p=0.05$), was used to avoid disregarding an item that potentially could be significant in regression analysis.

Second, significant items were included in regressions. For the regressions, the items were the independent variables (called covariants) and whether the result was a pass or a fail was the dependent variable. Binary logistic regressions were run because the independent variables were categorical (i.e., not continuous numbers) and the dependent variable was binary (i.e., one either passed the portfolio or did not). Each independent variable first was analyzed (i.e., regressed) individually to determine whether its significance was sufficient to justify inclusion in a larger regression. The variables that were significant at $p=0.06$ were then noted for use in multi-covariant analyses.

The multi-covariant analyses generally began with the variable that had the highest level of significance in the cross-tabulation calculations. Variables were added individually to the regression to determine which were significant when controlling for other variables (i.e., when other variables were included in the regression). Variables that were insignificant in the regression and/or that did not substantially alter the percent of variance in the dependent variable explained, which is measured by a statistic called the r-squared, were disregarded. In contrast, (independent) variables that *were* significant or *did* alter the percent of variance explained by the regression, were kept. This iterative process continued until the regression contained only the variables that were statistically significant and added explanatory power. These variables are described in Section III of the report.

This process of conducting regression analyses was used because it enables the user to determine which variables (i.e. characteristics, beliefs, or experiences) impact something when the influence of other variables is held constant. Regression analysis is especially important

when one factor may strongly influence other potential factors. For example, in this study, DRG often was associated the type or quality of support received. Analyzing only the type or quality of support received, without controlling for DRG, could lead one to conclude erroneously the support received – not DRG – partially accounted for whether a teacher passed the portfolio.

The regression analyses found the following factors impacted whether beginning teachers passed the portfolio at a statistically significant level ($p < 0.05$), when controlling for other factors:

- Elementary literacy: Beginning teachers who taught in DRG I or who had previously taught in a private school were *less* likely to pass. Those who accessed portfolio-related help provided by their schools or districts (excluding mentoring, working with a portfolio scorer, or receiving assistance from a colleague who had recently completed the portfolio) were *more* likely to pass the portfolio.
- Elementary numeracy: Beginning teachers who taught in DRG I, who were less satisfied with support provided by the state, or who experienced problems with the accuracy or completeness of information from a mentor, scorer, BEST district facilitator, or SDE-affiliated person, were *less* likely to pass.
- Non-elementary: Beginning teachers who were less satisfied with overall support received from other teachers (excluding mentors) were *less* likely to pass. In addition, the volume of problems experienced completing the portfolio by beginning teacher (which was constructed using responses to individual portfolio problem items) impacted whether the teacher passed: a teacher who experienced *a few problems* was *less* likely to pass than one who experienced no problems, but *more* likely to pass than one who experienced many problems.

All factors involving satisfaction, as well as the variable on the volume of portfolio-related problems, were scaled. These factors can be interpreted in the following way, using satisfaction with support provided by the state (which was significant for the elementary numeracy portfolio outcome) as an example: Those teachers who were very satisfied were more likely to pass than those who were somewhat satisfied, and were much more likely to pass than those who were dissatisfied or received no support.

Any beginning teacher who had more than one of these factors for their particular portfolio category was less likely to pass than a teacher who had only one factor.

It should be noted, the size of the committee's survey sample may limit the conclusions in two ways. First, some of the characteristics and experiences included in the survey may be found to be significant if a larger sample could be obtained. Second, only passing the portfolio – not the precise portfolio score – was used for a dependent variable. Consequently, these results do not convey whether certain variables would raise an already-passing score. As with all regressions, it is difficult to analyze all factors that could impact the outcome (passing the portfolio). This analysis was limited by the amount and quality of information that could be collected through the survey of Year Two teachers.