

The Oregon Mentoring Program (OMP) has been supporting evidence-based practices in mentorship programs (both single district and consortia) since 2009. Mentoring is often cited in research as an effective means of retaining beginning teachers (e.g., Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). We know from previous review of OMP retention data ([Fast Facts: Retention Update](#), 2018 and 2019) that OMP mentored teachers stay on the job longer than non-mentored teachers. This is seen in one-year retention rates, but is especially impressive when long term employment (5 years or more) is evaluated, where it rises to a 14-16% difference in retention rates.

While teacher shortages seem to be a perennial problem for districts, those shortages appear to be especially challenging when it comes to special educators (e.g., Vittek, 2015) and teachers working in rural areas (e.g., Ulferts, 2016). According to the Office of Postsecondary Education (DOE, 2019), special educators were at the top of the teacher shortage list for 54 U.S. states and territories from 2016-2018. Viadero (2018) states that rural districts, especially the most remote, are difficult to keep fully staffed. *Does OMP mentoring have the same impact on beginning teachers in rural, micropolitan, and metropolitan settings? Does OMP mentoring impact the retention of special educators?* This research brief explores the OMP data from these two perspectives.



Definitions

For the purposes of this Brief, the 2010-2011 through the 2014-15 OMP mentored and non-mentored cohorts are included. **Long-term retention** is defined as working 5 or more years (whether or not they are continuous years). Depending on the year teachers began, members of these cohorts could have worked a maximum of 5 to 9 years.

Information on employment position, school district, and employment location for beginning teachers are provided by ODE from **Staff Position and Staff Assignment** data collections.

The **size indicators** used were the categories of metropolitan (an area that contains a core urban area of 50,000 in population or more), micropolitan (an area that contains a core urban area of between 10,000 and 50,000 in population), and rural (core areas contain less than 10,000 in population). The category classification used was developed by ODE for distributing funds for a rural grant project. Appendix A includes a list of districts and their designations.

Special education assignments were identified for the purposes of this study by reviewing the Position Description each year a beginning teacher taught. Any position descriptor with “Special Education” in it was categorized as a special education assignment. All others were categorized as general education. For ease in identifying comparable data, the tables here refer to SPED and Non-SPED teachers. Teachers may have had both special education and general education assignments in the same year. Some teachers had both assignments but in different years.

OMP mentored beginning teachers are those who worked in districts supported by an OMP grant, were assigned a trained mentor, and who participated in the activities as required by the project. Non-mentored beginning teachers did not have an OMP trained mentor, but they may have had supports, “buddies,” or true mentors provided by their districts.

OMP mentors meet the following qualifications as specified in the Oregon Revised Statutes 329.788:

- a) Is an acting or retired teacher, principal or superintendent;
- b) Has met established best practice and research-based criteria as defined by the State Board of Education by rule
- c) Possesses a teaching or administrative license issued by the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission;
- d) Has successfully served for five or more years as a licensed teacher, principal or superintendent in any public school; and
- e) Has been selected and trained as described in ORS 329.815.

It is important to note that not all mentoring programs are comparable. Statutes for the OMP state that mentoring: “...means a professional relationship between an educator and a skilled mentor. In a confidential and trusting partnership, the mentor supports the educator to transform practice through a process of reflection and inquiry. The goals of this collaborative and continuous work are: to accelerate instructional practice, ensure equitable learning for all students, retain effective educators, and empower educational leaders.” Mentors are taught methods to achieve these goals, and evidence-based practices to use to support mentees. Finally, mentors are not allowed to participate in evaluation of the beginning teacher and the relationship is based in confidentiality and mutual trust.



With special education there are so many different forms and paperwork to be submitted that it was nice to have someone to ask questions that had been working in the field for awhile. BT, 2012-13

Opportunities to collaborate, especially with being a special education teacher with no team to collaborate with. BT 2011-12

In the table below, the numbers and percentages of beginning teachers in each cohort year are broken down by size and special education assignment. Note that the subgroups will not always add up to the total as teachers sometimes had multiple assignments or even worked in multiple districts of different sizes in a given year. The table is divided into mentored teachers (MT) in the top portion and non-mentored teachers (NMT) in the bottom portion.

Mentored and Non-Mentored Teachers 2010-11 to 2014-15 by Demographic Category

Category	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total MT	374		325		409		979		993	
Metro MT	343	92%	290	89%	351	86%	865	88%	890	90%
Micro MT	49	13%	50	15%	91	22%	140	14%	112	11%
Rural MT	6	2%	5	2%	13	3%	33	3%	44	4%
SPED MT	62	17%	61	19%	70	17%	148	15%	121	12%
Non-SPED MT	335	90%	285	88%	362	89%	885	90%	909	92%
Total NMT	1724		1667		1746		1968		2686	
Metro NMT	1417	82%	1358	81%	1391	80%	1568	80%	2152	80%
Micro NMT	344	20%	344	21%	410	23%	449	23%	589	22%
Rural NMT	113	7%	118	7%	118	7%	110	6%	120	4%
SPED NMT	304	18%	247	15%	253	14%	306	16%	367	14%
Non-SPED NMT	1540	89%	1512	91%	1607	92%	1794	91%	2449	91%

In looking at the proportionality of those mentored to the whole population of new beginning teachers in Oregon, beginning special educators were mentored on par with the total population of beginning special educators in the state, varying from 1% fewer to 4% greater numbers mentored. The differences in proportions were greater when looking at district size. Beginning teachers located in metropolitan areas were mentored in greater numbers (6.2% more on average) than the proportion found in the total population. Beginning teachers in micropolitan and rural districts were mentored at lower rates than that of the total population, 5.2% for micropolitan beginning teachers and 2.6% fewer than the total population for rural beginning teachers. The remainder of the Brief will cover the impact of mentoring on retention of those with special education assignments and on retention based on district size.

Our district needs support in retaining teachers since we are a rural area. High teacher turnover. There should be some form of social aspect to the program so that new teachers can develop a network and hopefully keep them in our district.
BT 2011-12

Impact of OMP Mentoring on Retention of Special Educators

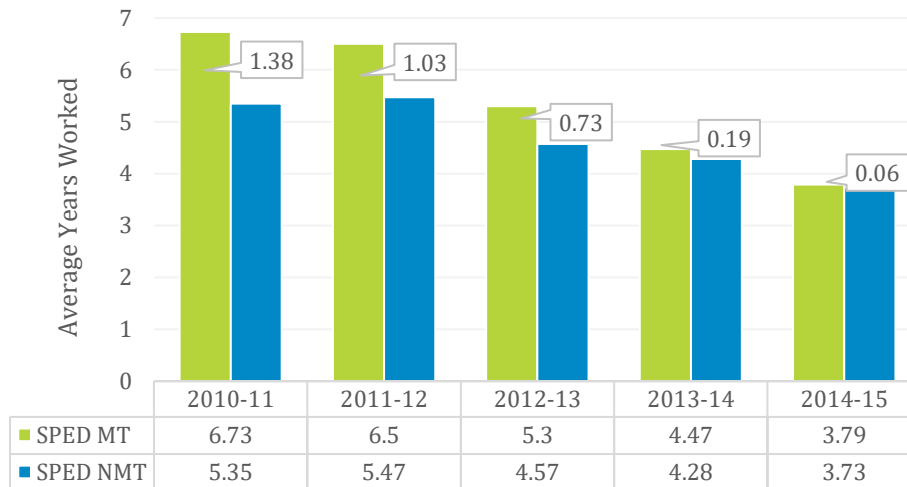
Overall, beginning teachers worked an average of 7.2 years if they started in 2010-11 and were mentored, and 6.1 years if they were not mentored, a difference of 1.1 years. This average falls to 4.38 and 4.14 years, respectively, for the 2014-15 mentored and non-mentored cohorts. This is because, in order to be considered a long-term retention educator, teachers must have worked all 5 years with no breaks in the final cohort included in this study.

Her classroom observations and her help in talking me through difficult case management/IEP situations has been invaluable. BT 2013-14

Beginning special educators starting in the 2010-2011 cohort year worked on average 6.73 years if they were mentored and 5.35 years if they were not mentored, a difference of 1.38 years (see the first pair of columns in the graph below). The 2014-15 cohort members could have worked a maximum of 5 years. The difference for these two groups is .06 years. The callout boxes at the top of the bar pairs indicates the difference between the number of years worked for each cohort pair. It should be noted that, assuming trends continue as they have in the past, many of the teachers in the 2014-15 cohort who currently do not count as retained will rejoin the group as the years extend. The numbers in the table at the bottom of the graph indicate the average number of years worked for each cohort.

She has helped me reflect on my teaching and the ways that I can improve in order to increase student learning and participation. BT 2014-15

Average Years Worked by Mentored and Non-Mentored Special Educators



It is important to remember it was often a challenge for projects to locate mentors with special education backgrounds to match with beginning special educators. While a few mentees expressed dissatisfaction with not having a mentor with the same teaching background, most still found the program beneficial. At least one author (Vittekk, 2015) recommends that because

beginning special educators often have multiple roles, they should be provided both special education and general education mentors.

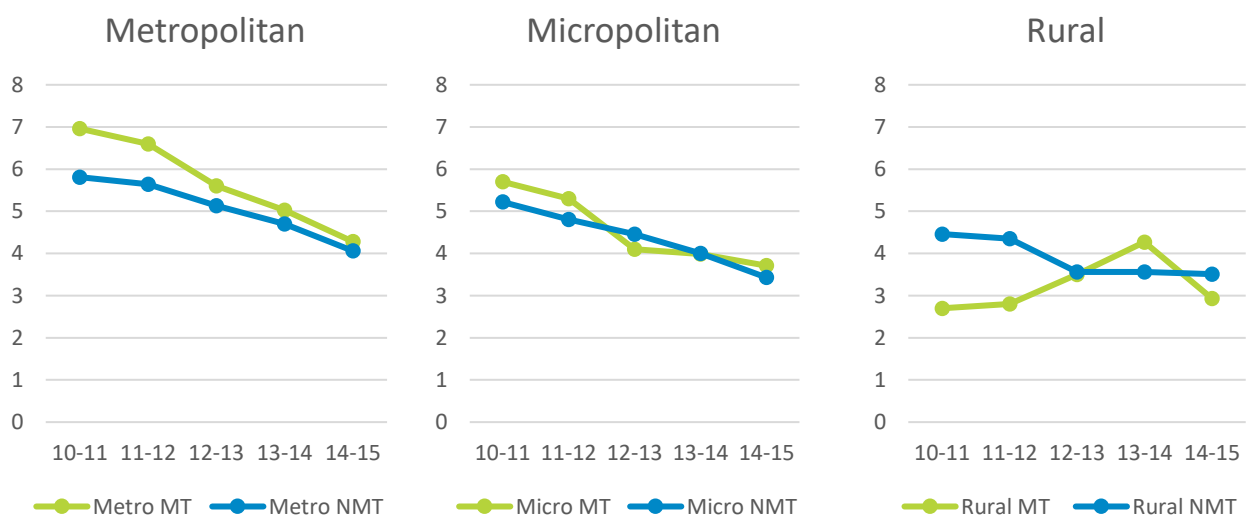
Impact of Mentoring on Retention in Different District Sizes

Research also tells us that retention of teachers in rural settings is a challenge for districts. Viadero (2018) quoted Dan Goldhaber, director of the Center for Education Data and Research, in Education Week, “it’s not the case that we have a nationwide teacher shortage. It is the case that we have a shortage in particular schools and schools systems.”

The data from the OMP on the long-term retention of educators also indicates these challenges. For the purpose of this analysis, only beginning teachers staying in the same district size classification were counted as retained. In the Metro chart on the far left, the same pattern of higher rates of retention (years worked, shown on the left of each chart) for mentored teachers is evident. Retention is similar in micropolitan districts, but to a lesser degree. In rural districts, the data is less clear. Much of the initial variability is due, in part, to much smaller numbers of beginning teachers in rural areas. In the first three years of the project, there were 6, 5, and 13 mentored beginning rural teachers. By the last two years included in this study, the numbers were up to 33 and 44, but the more recent years are less able to show differences in retention rates because teachers taking time off or moving to a different sized district will not be categorized as retained. With smaller total numbers of participants, changes to a few people’s status can make the outcomes look radically different.

Working at a small school with only 8 teachers, left me with very few people to use as a resource. Without my mentor I would not have been able to succeed this year. BT 2011-12

Cope with the demands of being an entire department in a small, rural school. BT 2014-15



Discussion

The benefits of a rigorous mentoring program to increase long-term retention rates are supported by this investigation of its impact on special educators and educators in metropolitan and micropolitan settings. There is inadequate data to draw this conclusion for beginning educators in rural areas, though. As the Oregon Mentoring Program sunsets and districts can utilize Educator Advancement Council funds in a variety of ways, it will be important to continue evaluating the mentoring impact on mentees in districts deciding to implement an induction/mentoring system.

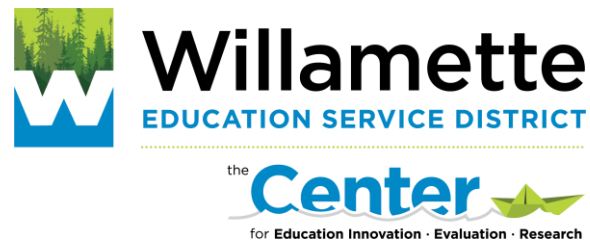
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District and County Designations

Adel SD 21	Rural	Douglas ESD	Micro	Lake ESD	Rural
Adrian SD 61	Rural	Drewsey SD 13	Rural	Lake Oswego SD 7J	Metro
Alsea SD 7J	Metro	Dufur SD 29	Micro	Lane ESD	Metro
Amity SD 4J	Metro	Eagle Point SD 9	Metro	Lebanon Community SD 9	Metro
Annex SD 29	Rural	Echo SD 5	Micro	Lincoln County SD	Micro
Arlington SD 3	Rural	Elgin SD 23	Micro	Linn Benton Lincoln ESD	Micro
Arock SD 81	Rural	Elkton SD 34	Micro	Long Creek SD 17	Rural
Ashland SD 5	Metro	Enterprise SD 21	Rural	Lowell SD 71	Metro
Ashwood SD 8	Rural	Estacada SD 108	Metro	Malheur County SD 51	Rural
Astoria SD 1	Micro	Eugene SD 4J	Metro	Mapleton SD 32	Metro
Athena-Weston SD 29RJ	Micro	Falls City SD 57	Metro	Marcola SD 79J	Metro
Baker SD 5J	Rural	Fern Ridge SD 28J	Metro	McKenzie SD 68	Metro
Bandon SD 54	Micro	Forest Grove SD 15	Metro	McMinnville SD 40	Metro
Banks SD 13	Metro	Fossil SD 21J	Rural	Medford SD 549C	Metro
Beaverton SD 48J	Metro	Frenchglen SD 16	Rural	Milton-Freewater Unified SD 7	Micro
Bend-LaPine Admin SD 1	Metro	Gaston SD 511J	Metro	Mitchell SD 55	Rural
Bethel SD 52	Metro	Gervais SD 1	Metro	Molalla River SD 35	Metro
Blachly SD 90	Metro	Gladstone SD 115	Metro	Monroe SD 1J	Metro
Black Butte SD 41	Rural	Glendale SD 77	Micro	Monument SD 8	Rural
Brookings-Harbor SD 17C	Micro	Glide SD 12	Micro	Morrow SD 1	Micro
Burnt River SD 30J	Rural	Grants Pass SD 7	Metro	Mt Angel SD 91	Metro
Butte Falls SD 91	Micro	Greater Albany Public SD 8J	Metro	Multnomah ESD	Metro
Camas Valley SD 21J	Micro	Gresham-Barlow SD 10J	Metro	Myrtle Point SD 41	Micro
Canby SD 86	Metro	Harney County SD 3	Rural	Neah-Kah-Nie SD 56	Rural
Cascade SD 5	Metro	Harney County SD 4	Rural	Nestucca Valley SD 101J	Rural
Centennial SD 28J	Metro	Harney Co Union High SD 1J	Rural	Newberg SD 29J	Metro
Central Curry SD 1	Micro	Harney ESD	Rural	North Bend SD 13	Micro
Central Linn SD 552	Metro	Harper SD 66	Rural	North Central ESD	Rural
Central Point SD 6	Metro	Harrisburg SD 7J	Metro	North Clackamas SD 12	Metro
Central SD 13J	Metro	Helix SD 1	Micro	North Douglas SD 22	Micro
Clackamas ESD	Metro	Hermiston SD 8	Micro	North Lake SD 14	Rural
Clatskanie SD 6J	Metro	High Desert ESD	Metro	North Marion SD 15	Metro
Colton SD 53	Metro	Hillsboro SD 1J	Metro	North Powder SD 8J	Micro
Columbia Gorge ESD	Micro	Hood River County SD	Micro	North Santiam SD 29J	Metro
Condon SD 25J	Rural	Huntington SD 16J	Rural	North Wasco County SD 21	Micro
Coos Bay SD 9	Micro	Imbler SD 11	Micro	Northwest Regional ESD	Metro
Coquille SD 8	Micro	InterMountain ESD	Micro	Nyssa SD 26	Rural
Corbett SD 39	Metro	Ione SD R2	Micro	Oakland SD 1	Micro
Corvallis SD 509J	Metro	Jefferson County SD 509J	Micro	Oakridge SD 76	Metro
Cove SD 15	Micro	Jefferson ESD	Rural	Ontario SD 8C	Micro
Creswell SD 40	Metro	Jefferson SD 14J	Metro	Oregon City SD 62	Metro
Crook County SD	Micro	Jewell SD 8	Micro	Oregon Dept of Education	Metro
Crow-Applegate-Lorane SD 66	Metro	John Day SD 3	Rural	Oregon Trail SD 46	Metro
Culver SD 4	Rural	Jordan Valley SD 3	Rural	Paisley SD 11	Rural
Dallas SD 2	Metro	Joseph SD 6	Rural	Parkrose SD 3	Metro
David Douglas SD 40	Metro	Junction City SD 69	Metro	Pendleton SD 16	Micro
Dayton SD 8	Metro	Juntura SD 12	Rural	Perrydale SD 21	Metro
Dayville SD 16J	Rural	Klamath County SD	Micro	Philomath SD 17J	Metro
Diamond SD 7	Rural	Klamath Falls City Schools	Micro	Phoenix-Talent SD 4	Metro
Double O SD 28	Rural	Knappa SD 4	Micro	Pilot Rock SD 2	Micro
Douglas County SD 15	Micro	La Grande SD 1	Micro	Pine Creek SD 5	Rural
Douglas County SD 4	Micro	Lake County SD 7	Rural	Pine Eagle SD 61	Rural

Pinehurst SD 94	Micro	Willamette ESD	Metro
Pleasant Hill SD 1	Metro	Willamina SD 30J	Metro
Plush SD 18	Rural	Winston-Dillard SD 116	Micro
Port Orford-Langlois SD 2CJ	Micro	Woodburn SD 103	Metro
Portland SD 1J	Metro	Yamhill Carlton SD 1	Metro
Powers SD 31	Micro	Yoncalla SD 32	Micro
Prairie City SD 4	Rural		
Prospect SD 59	Micro		
Rainier SD 13	Metro		
Redmond SD 2J	Metro		
Reedsport SD 105	Micro		
Region 18 ESD	Rural		
Reynolds SD 7	Metro		
Riddle SD 70	Micro		
Riverdale SD 51J	Metro		
Rogue River SD 35	Micro		
Salem-Keizer SD 24J	Metro		
Santiam Canyon SD 129J	Metro		
Scappoose SD 1J	Metro		
Scio SD 95	Metro		
Seaside SD 10	Micro		
Sheridan SD 48J	Rural		
Sherman County SD	Rural		
Sherwood SD 88J	Metro		
Silver Falls SD 4J	Metro		
Sisters SD 6	Metro		
Siuslaw SD 97J	Metro		
South Coast ESD	Micro		
South Harney SD 33	Rural		
South Lane SD 45J3	Metro		
South Umpqua SD 19	Micro		
South Wasco County SD 1	Micro		
Southern Oregon ESD	Metro		
Spray SD 1	Rural		
Springfield SD 19	Metro		
St Helens SD 502	Metro		
St Paul SD 45	Metro		
Stanfield SD 61	Micro		
Suntex SD 10	Rural		
Sutherlin SD 130	Micro		
Sweet Home SD 55	Metro		
Three Rivers/Josephine Co SD	Metro		
Tigard-Tualatin SD 23J	Metro		
Tillamook SD 9	Rural		
Troy SD 54	Rural		
Ukiah SD 80R	Micro		
Umatilla SD 6R	Micro		
Union SD 5	Micro		
Union-Baker ESD	Micro		
Vale SD 84	Rural		
Vernonia SD 47J	Metro		
Wallowa SD 12	Rural		
Warrenton-Hammond SD 30	Micro		
West Linn-Wilsonville SD 3J	Metro		