

# TEACHING IN THE EARLY YEARS IN ALBERTA:

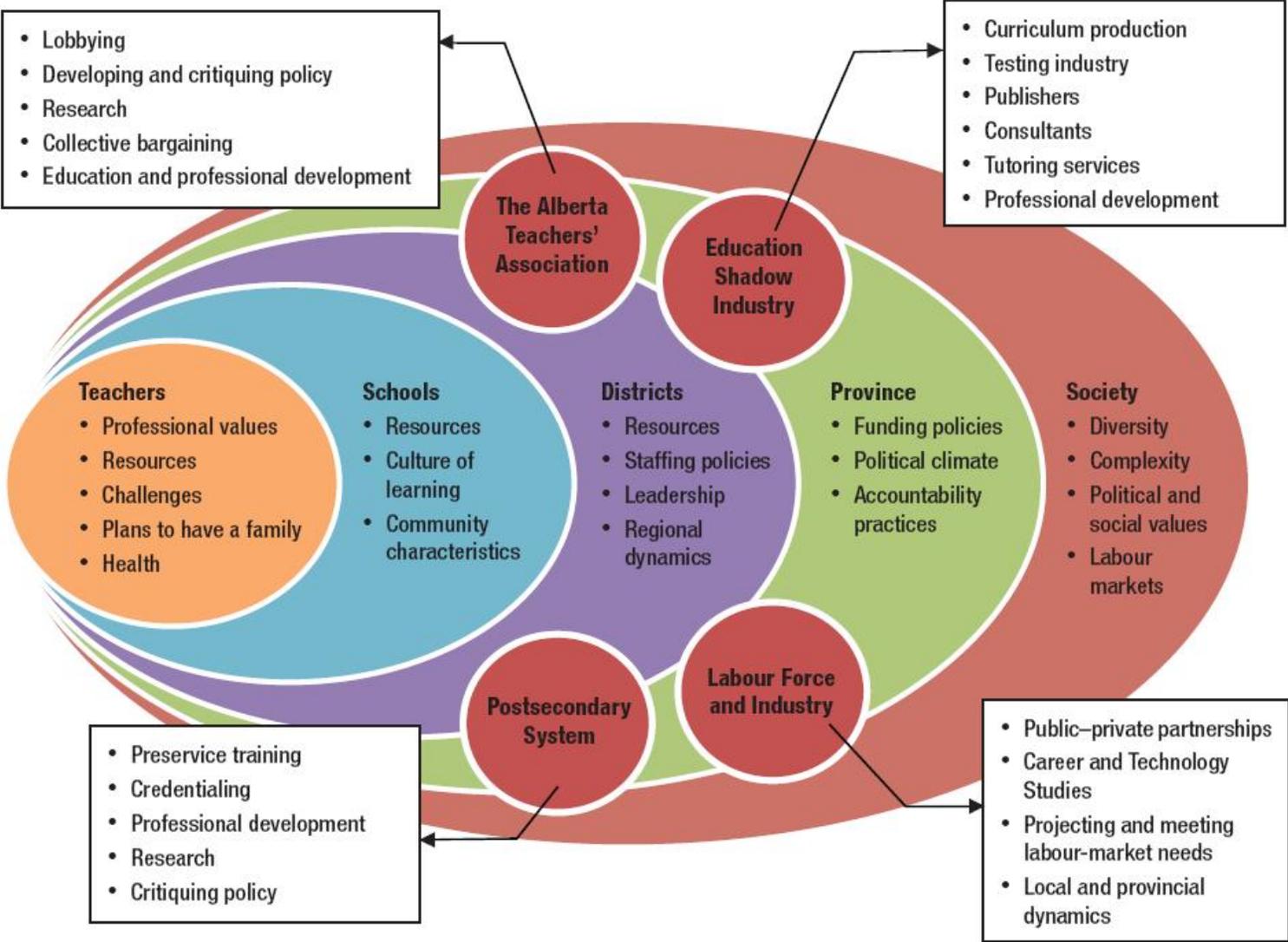
## Linking Research to Practice

Teacher Induction and Mentoring Forum  
Kingston, September 23, 2016



Laura Servage & Jaime Beck, University of Alberta  
J-C Couture, Alberta Teachers' Association

# Teacher Induction: Systems Thinking



# Study Rationale

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- Track patterns of beginning teacher attrition and mobility
  - ▣ Literature widely states that 25-30% of new teachers will leave the profession within their first five years
  - ▣ High costs of turnover
- Explore range of induction practices across the province
  - ▣ Mentorship programs in place, but no sense of their quality or efficacy.
  - ▣ Examine the effect of induction practices on professional identity and professional growth over time.

# Key Issues for Alberta Schools

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- ❑ Inadequate and unpredictable funding of public education
- ❑ Professional development: lost funding and autonomy (AISI)
- ❑ Narrow conceptualization of accountability ([PISA envy](#); international benchmarking)
- ❑ Countering the tide of anti-professionalism in science, education and government and the of the “public” service (now in retreat)
- ❑ Back to the basics while claiming 21st century learning (STEM versus STEAM)
- ❑ Ontology of tiredness: “Busy” is a badge of honour

# The Study...

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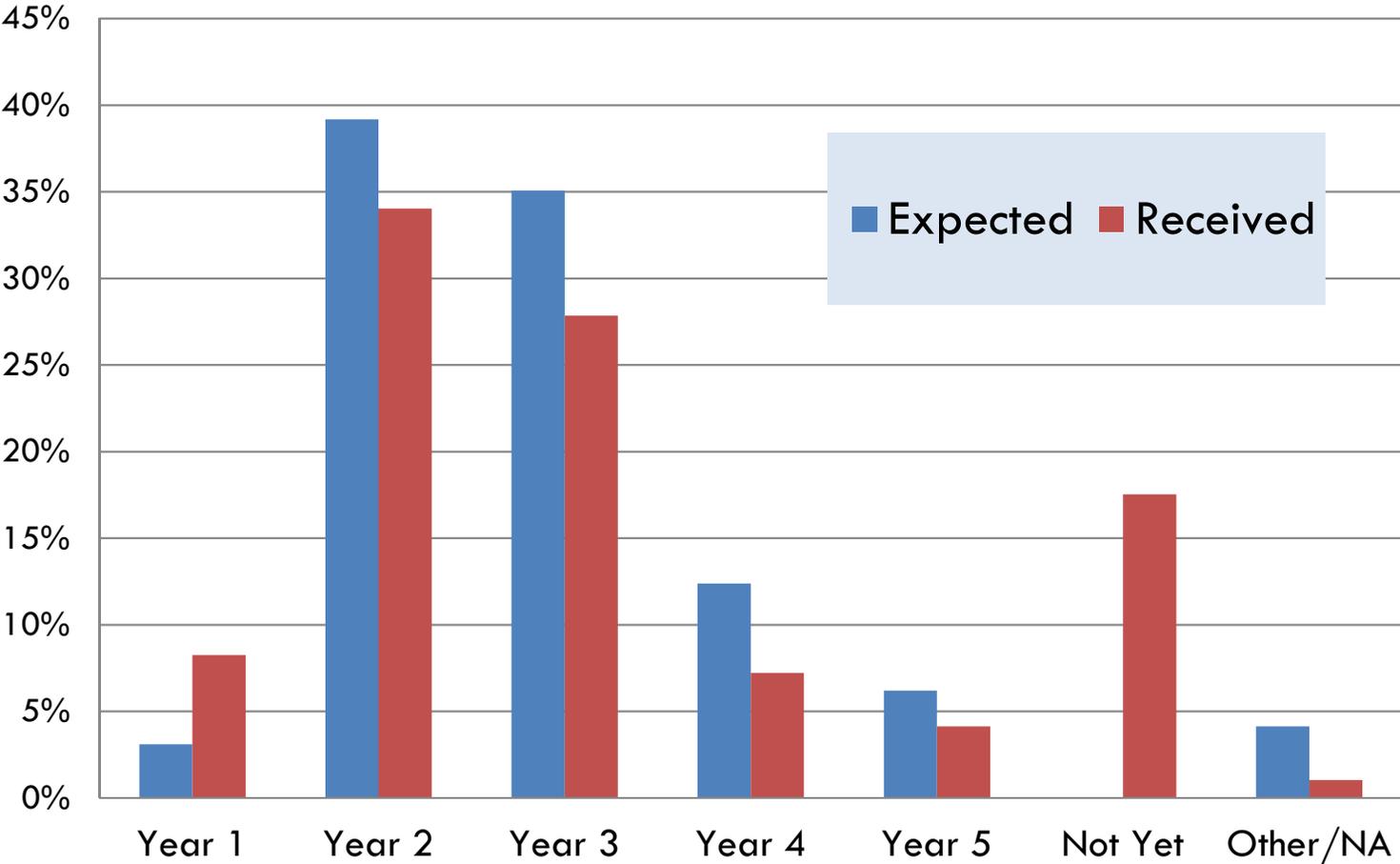
- Longitudinal study, 5 years
- Pilot study (2007), 100 beginning teachers
- Year 1 (2008) 135 beginning teachers
  - ▣ 83% female
  - ▣ 53% elementary grades; 47% middle school and high school
- Year 2 (2009) 117 interviews (83% of original sample)
- Year 3 (2010) 106 telephone interviews
- Years 4 (2011) 98 telephone interviews, 4 focus groups
- Year 5 (2012) 90 telephone interviews, 2 focus groups, 10 individual extended interviews

# Sample & Attrition

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- Representation across districts, regions, and population density
- Equally divided re: primary and secondary specialization areas
- Initial sample: 135 teachers
- Active sample by Year 5: 90 teachers
  - ▣ “Active sample” are those we contacted every year.
- Attrition and mobility sample: 125 teachers
  - ▣ We were able to contact a number of teachers we’d lost along the way and confirm their location and contract status.

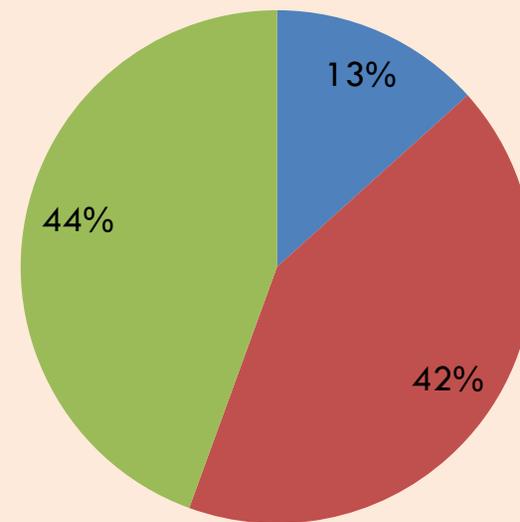
# Continuing Contracts



# Change and Stability (Years 1-5)

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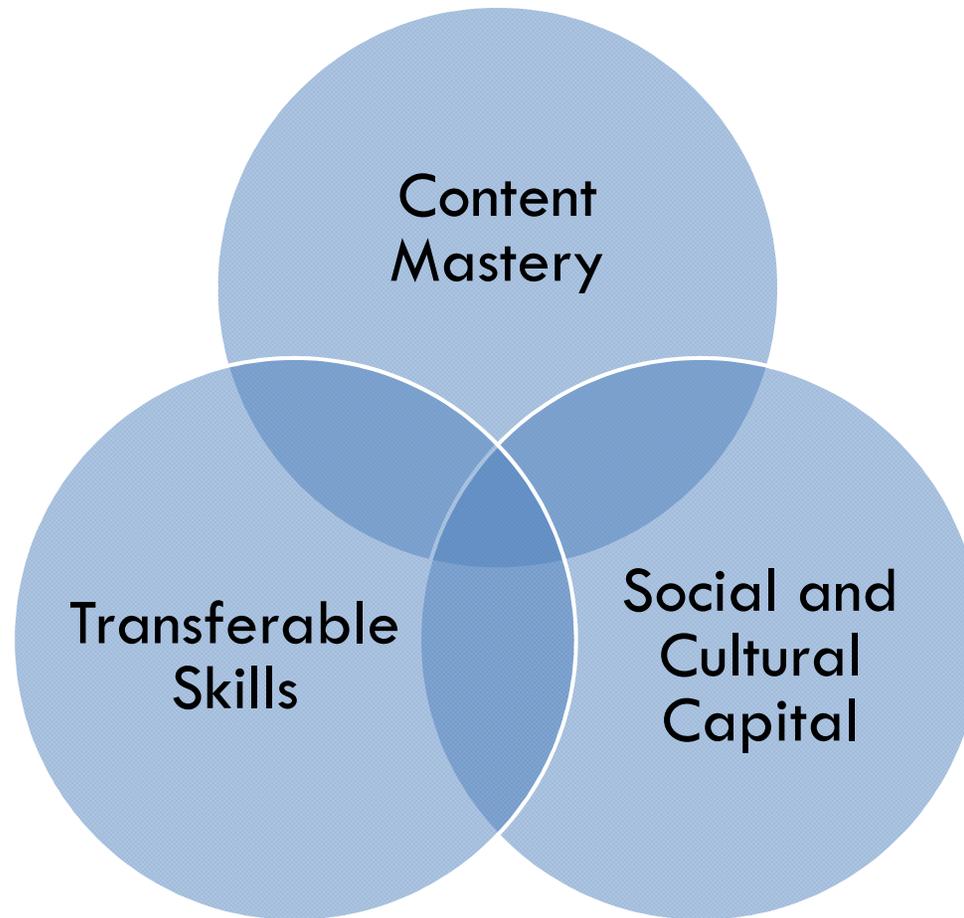
- Only 13% had **not** experienced a major change during the study (n=90)
- Major changes included changing schools and/or teaching assignments
- 92% believe three or more consecutive years in same position is required to achieve proficiency.
- Multiple changes: New teachers are always re-learning “the basics:” → Survival, not growth.



- No major changes
- 1-2 major changes
- 3 or more major changes

# Domains of Early Career Learning

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# Employment Outcomes

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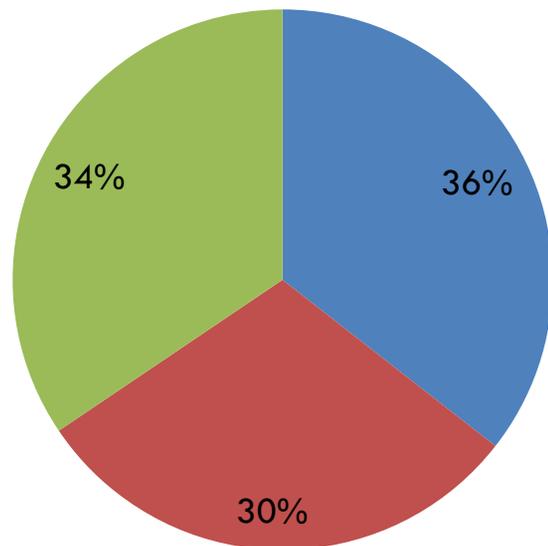
N=135 (Entire original sample), Year 5

Securely Employed	98	73%
Insecurely Employed	15	11%
Left Province	6	4%
Left Profession	6	4%
Lost Contact	10	7%

Patterns in early career teaching similar to **broader employment trends**: For a significant minority: longer periods of underemployment and precarity before a secure position is obtained.

# Parenting and Maternity Leaves

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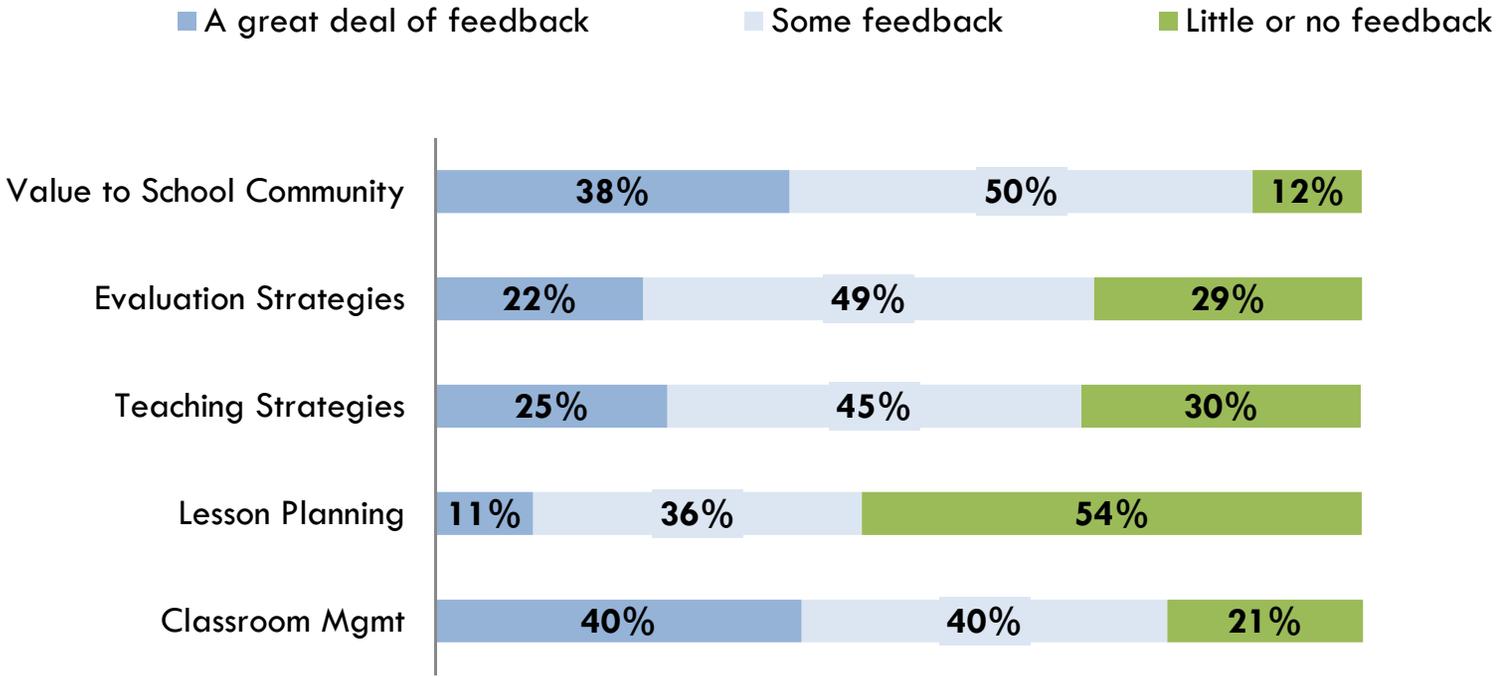
■ No/No plans

■ Not yet

■ Parents

- 34% of participants have had children or were expecting some time in Y6 (n=90)
- No males in our study took parental leave, but a number had young children at home
- Parenting greatly influences teachers' concerns about work/life balance.

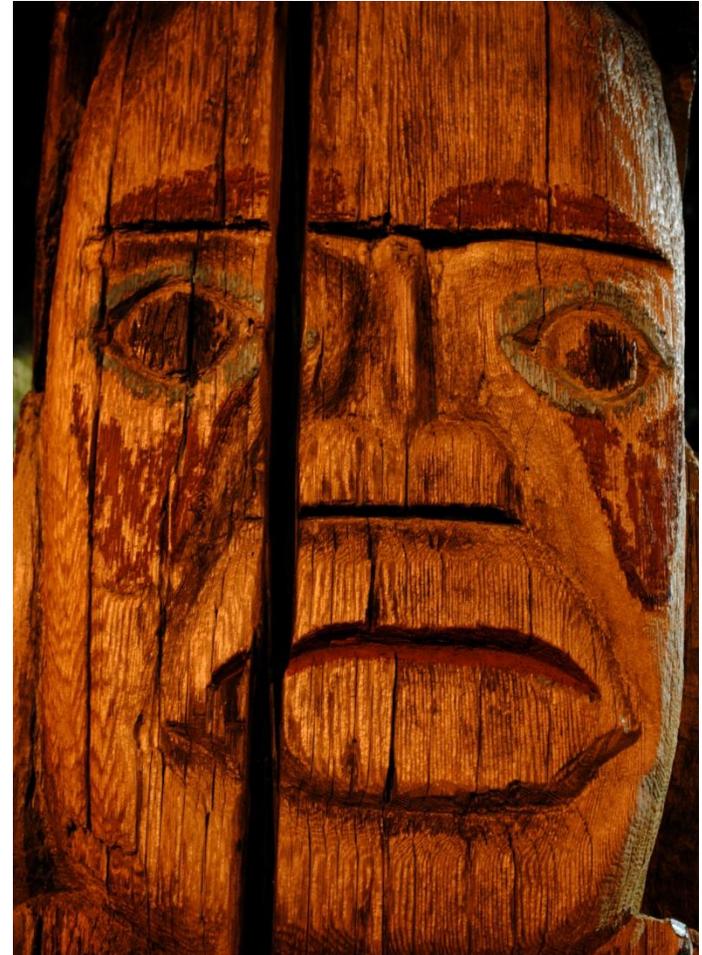
# Feedback



# “Paying Your Dues”

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- ❑ Split grades and “dog’s breakfast” teaching assignments
- ❑ High expectations re: extra-curricular activities
- ❑ Last in, first out
- ❑ Withdrawal and burnout in later years
- ❑ Repeating the pattern



# Micropolitical Currencies

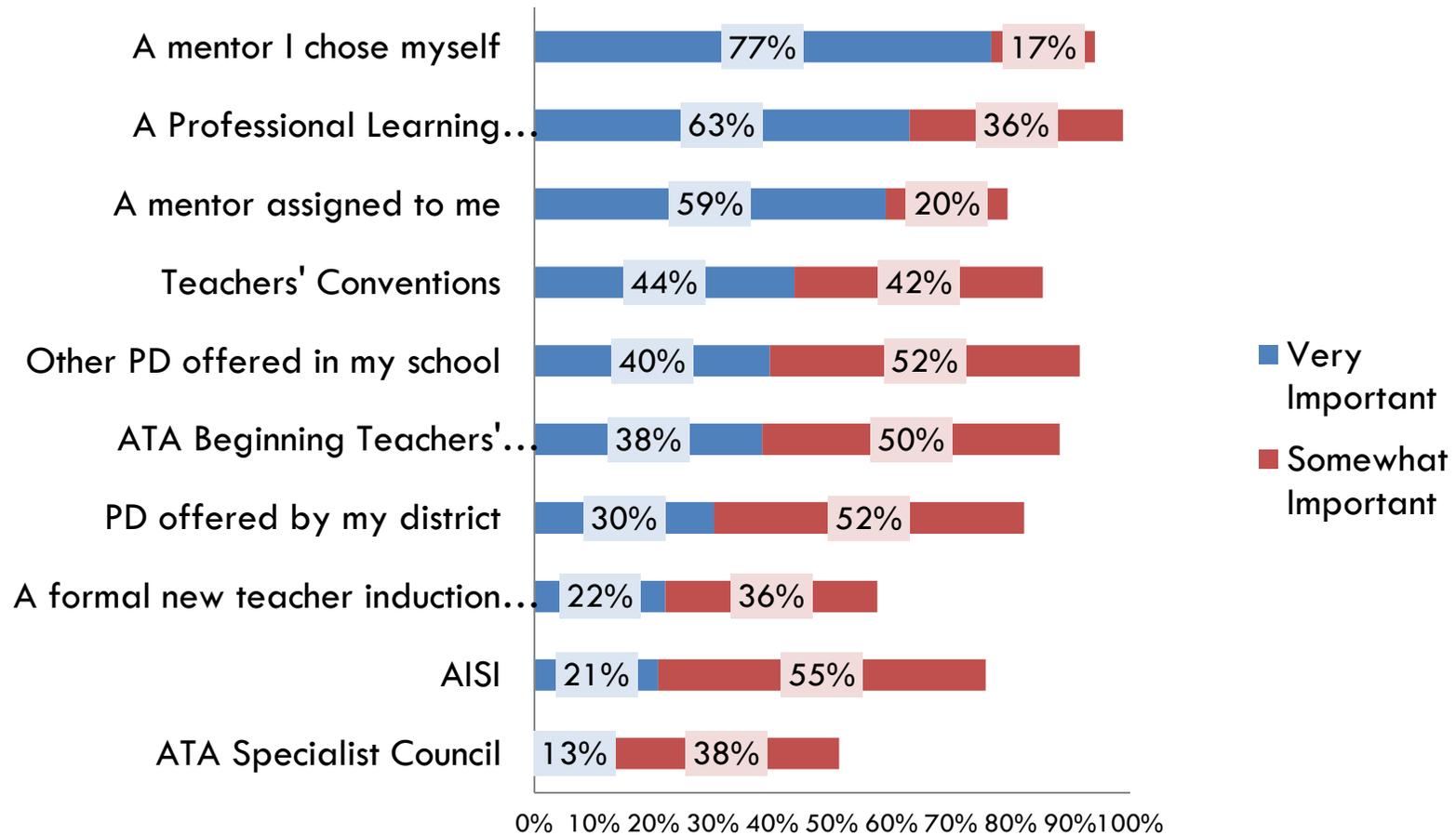
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Currencies are circulated in mundane, daily exchanges in the school. They are simultaneously sources of support/non-support, and communicators of status in the school.

- Information (feedback, acceptable practices, hiring criteria)
- Resources (lesson plans, curriculum resources)
- Asking for and offering help

# Early Career Learning Resources

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# Mentorship

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- Only half of Year One teachers had mentors
  - ▣ Only half of these teachers were satisfied with mentorship
- Critical success factors
  - ▣ Proximity and availability of mentor
  - ▣ Mentor in same subject area/grade level
  - ▣ Mentor committed to the role
  - ▣ Assigned time to meet. (Mentoring relationships without release time to meet tended to wane quickly.)
- Grade level partners and “learning communities” served significant mentoring functions.

# Induction $\neq$ Mentorship

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- **Reduce complexity**
  - ▣ Special needs students
  - ▣ Multiple class/subject preps
  - ▣ Extra-curricular activities
- **Just-in-time supports**
  - ▣ School orientation and classroom set up
  - ▣ Report cards, reporting systems
  - ▣ Discipline and interactions with parents
- **Maximize loosely structured collaboration opportunities**
  - ▣ Network with other new teachers and with veteran colleagues
  - ▣ Classroom observations and assessments
  - ▣ Professional learning communities
  - ▣ Distance collaboration (grade level and subject specializations)

# Meeting New Teachers' Needs

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## BASIC NEEDS...

- ✓ Contract security
- ✓ Access to resources
- ✓ Lesson and unit plans
- ✓ Orientation
- ✓ Classroom organization
- ✓ Affective support

MUST BE MET TO FACILITATE

## LONG TERM PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

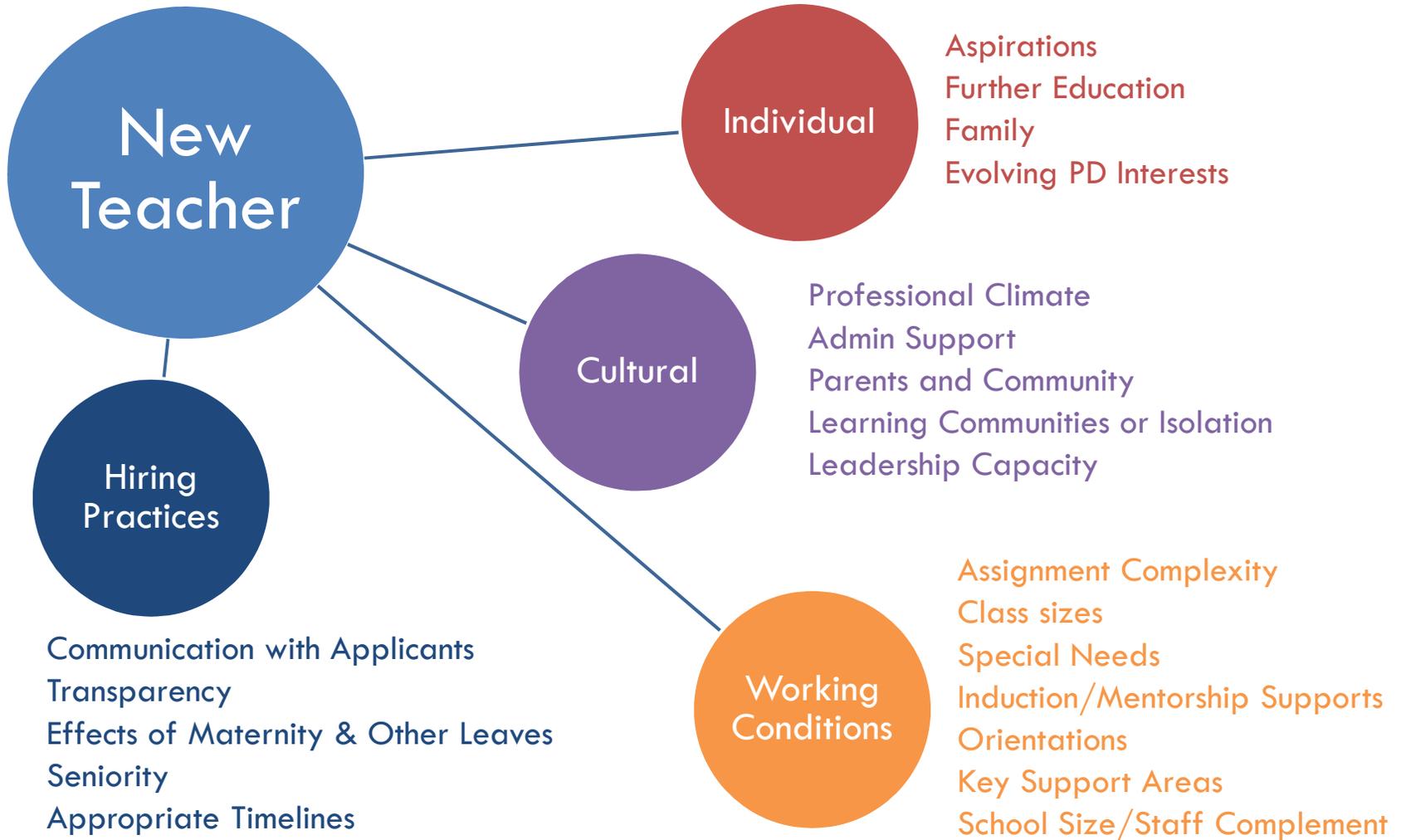
- ✓ Honing pedagogy, assessment and classroom management skills
- ✓ Becoming a lifelong learner
- ✓ Leadership: contributing to peer learning and school culture
- ✓ Engaging students, parents and community
- ✓ Reflecting on and refining practice

# Professional Learning

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- Year One: “Overwhelmed”
- Years Two and Three: Increasing discernment
  - ▣ Focus areas based on perceived student needs
  - ▣ Identifying and pursuing areas of interest
  - ▣ Collaborative learning with peers in shared areas preferred
  - ▣ “I can use it in my classroom the next day”
  - ▣ Enjoy leadership opportunities (legitimacy, recognition)
- “Foreclosure” on beginning teacher identity?

# Immediate Conditions Affecting Early Career Teachers



# Workforce Planning Considerations

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- **Our data suggests that:**
  - ▣ After 5 years, up to 15% of teachers remain insecurely employed or underemployed
  - ▣ Hiring practices lack transparency and consistency
  - ▣ Secure part-time positions and job sharing are attractive alternatives for teachers with young families, yet few such positions are available
  - ▣ Isolation and difficult working conditions contribute to attrition in remote/rural areas
  - ▣ Older teachers, parents, and contingent workers may be discriminated against in favour of newer, younger teachers.

# Implications for Induction Strategies

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“We advocate for students and great environments for them, but what about advocating for the people who are supposed to provide that?”

- ❑ Mentorship is critical, but must be effectively structured
- ❑ Orientation is a simple but significant strategy that is underutilized
- ❑ Mentors cannot be “assigned.”
- ❑ Districts step in to help new teachers in isolated settings to build relationships with teachers at other schools.
- ❑ Do new teachers have to “pay their dues?”
- ❑ Address norms that new teachers should have the toughest assignments and the greatest burden of extra-curricular expectations
- ❑ Resentment and burnout when workloads seem unfairly distributed
- ❑ Critical role of school leadership: visible, open and approachable
- ❑ New teachers need much more specific, intentional feedback on actual teaching practices, preferably via careful observation

# Stories to Stay By

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Who do “new teachers” eventually become? (7-10 years of practice)

- Survival: the conscious choice “not to break”
- Complexity: less acuity, but more awareness and nuance
- “Heavy hours” → inability to respond to moral intuitions
- Moral residue: the cumulative effects of reluctant compromises in practice

# Future Directions

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- What about the teachers who stay?
  - ▣ Cumulative psychic residue of compromise
  - ▣ Embedding wellness in school cultures and professional identity
- How, specifically, are cultural norms enacted?
  - ▣ I got the portable for my classroom
  - ▣ These are my textbooks
  - ▣ The pillaged classroom
- The norms of dominant PD practices
  - ▣ Despite consistent calls for collaboration, privatized practices persist
- Early career teaching from lifecourse and developmental perspectives

# Overview: Implications for Informed Transformation

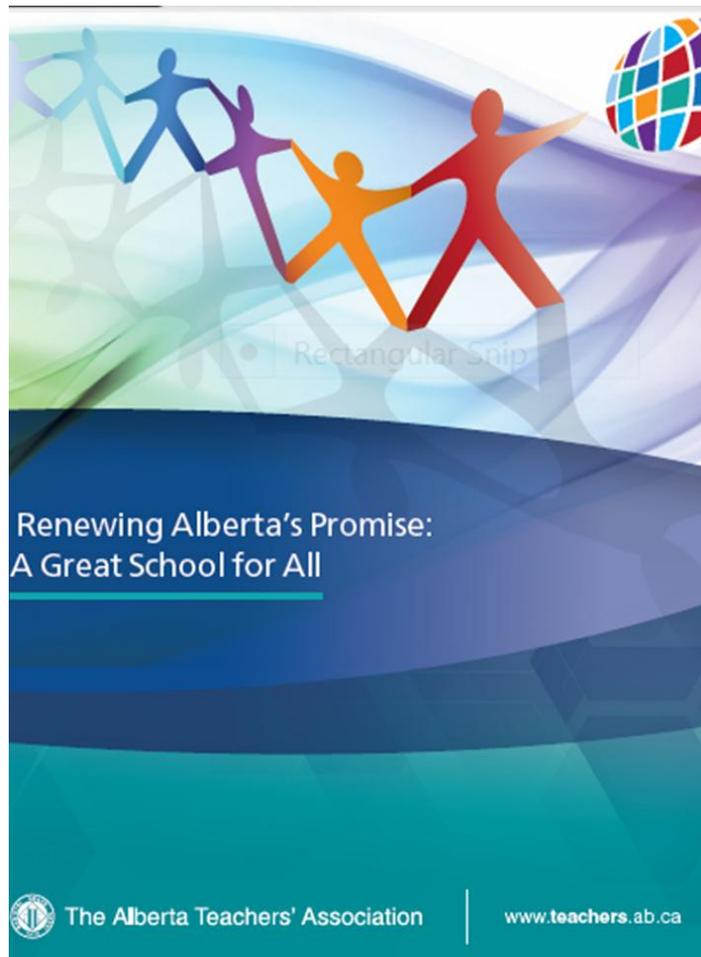
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The most effective school cultures for beginning teachers are the sorts of environments that help all teachers to thrive: those that maximize opportunities for professional collaboration, and encourage school staff to assume a collective responsibility for students' learning, and for one another's professional learning.



# Alberta Teachers' Association Research

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Laura Servage  
OISE, University of Toronto  
[lservage@utoronto.ca](mailto:lservage@utoronto.ca)

Jaime Beck  
University of Alberta  
[jbeck@ualberta.ca](mailto:jbeck@ualberta.ca)

J-C Couture  
Alberta Teachers' Association  
[jc.couture@ualberta.ca](mailto:jc.couture@ualberta.ca)

ATA Research  
<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ResearchUpdates/Pages/Current.aspx>