

Retaining New Teachers

Paralleling the concern for student dropouts (and pushouts) is the teacher turnover problem. As the Alliance for Excellent Education (2014) reports:

Roughly half a million U.S. teachers either move or leave the profession each year—attrition that costs the United States up to \$2.2 billion annually. This high turnover rate disproportionately affects high-poverty schools and seriously compromises the nation's capacity to ensure that all students have access to skilled teaching. Researchers estimate that more than one million teachers, including new hires, transition into, between, or out of schools annually.⁸ High-poverty schools experience a teacher turnover rate of about 20 percent per calendar year—roughly 50 percent higher than the rate in more affluent schools. The estimate of the percentage of new teachers leaving teaching after five years ranges from 40 percent to 50 percent, with the greatest exodus taking place in high-poverty, high-minority, urban, and rural public schools.

Our focus here is on the exodus of new teachers.

Why Do So Many Leave?

As Ingersoll (2001) has stressed, "fully understanding turnover requires examining the character and conditions of the organizations within which employees work." Clearly, teaching is a challenging job and newly hired teachers often feel ineffective, insufficiently supported, and frustrated. From the first day, many are expected to assume the same responsibilities as teachers with years of experience.

Common reasons reported for leaving include

- inadequate support from the school administration
- problems with students (e.g., dealing with discipline, lack of motivation, accommodating individual differences and learning problems)
- dealing with parents
- insufficient resources and support
- late placement and split grade assignments
- too limited faculty input into school decision-making
- low salaries

A case study by Fantili & McDougall (2009) underscores the problem. They explored the challenges and supports novices experienced when receiving their first teaching assignments. New teachers reported problems arising from hiring practices such as late placement and split grade assignments, lack of effective preparation, absence of effective leadership, absence of a qualified mentor, difficulty in differentiating instruction, difficulty in reporting student progress and communication with parents, difficulty in planning and organizing class schedules, student behavioral management problems, as well as self-doubt, anxiety, and stress when constantly seeking guidance from teacher colleagues.

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Addressing the Retention Problem

While experts agree that a multifaceted approach is needed, the main emphasis currently focuses on providing orientations, mentoring, and inservice to ameliorate novices' feelings of isolation, frustration, and failure. For example, the New Teacher Center (2016) collaborates with school districts and state leaders to establish leadership training models for (1) teacher induction (a program that pairs novice teachers with an experienced colleague who assumes the role of providing weekly on-the-job mentoring) and (2) instructional coaching (a program that provides daily on-the-job-coaching for all teachers).

Mentoring and coaching are strongly advocated. As Kardos & Johnson (2010) stress, ideally mentors can model good teaching, share materials and ideas, help novice teachers decide what and how to teach, help them develop strategies for succeeding with particular students, manage their classrooms, learn the modes of professional practice in the school, and adjust to the school and the families it serves, as well adjusting to new reform and school change efforts, both from inside and outside the school. At the same time, they caution that while some mentoring programs report measurable success, “it would be a mistake to assume that all mentoring programs are thoughtfully organized and that all mentors know what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it.”

A larger concern is that good mentoring and coaching are only one facet of increasing new teacher retention. Considerable consensus has formed around the need to address seven basic interrelated matters. They are: (1) salaries, (2) recruitment, (3) preservice professional preparation, (4) induction into the profession, (5) personalized on-the-job (inservice) learning, (6) student and learning supports, and (7) a career ladder (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2012).

As discussed in our Center's 2012 Center report on *Improving Teacher Retention, Performance, and Student Outcomes*, the need is to establish a unified approach that encompasses all seven elements. None of this is easy. Think about the problems of establishing salaries and recruitment practices that can compete effectively for a *large pool* of the best and the brightest college graduates. Think about transforming preservice professional preparation to effectively equip educators for jobs in schools where students come from diverse economic, social, racial, and cultural backgrounds (including students newly arrived in the country and the many for whom English is a new language to master).

The immediate needs at schools, of course, are for positive induction, personalized on-the-job (inservice) learning, and provision of student and learning supports.

Positive Induction

Good induction programs “extend beyond the friendly hellos, room key and badge pick-ups and buddy programs. While these are necessary ..., high-quality induction programs ... help [newcomers] survive and thrive in their new environments.”

American Federation of Teachers

Few entering a new worksite are not at least a bit anxious about how they will be received and how they will do. Moreover, each site has challenges that must be negotiated. A well-conceived and formally implemented induction program that provides professional and personal transition supports increases the likelihood that newcomers will function effectively in the unique culture of a particular site (Haynes, 2011; Gray & Taie, 2015).

For years, little thought was given to induction beyond cursory introductions and orientation. As a result, many newcomers were frustrated and even traumatized, especially those assigned to schools housing a great many “hard-to-reach and teach” students. Currently, as a recent report indicates, “most districts offer some form of teacher induction or mentoring, but they often provide a limited set of services” (Glazerman, Isenberg, Dolfen, et al., 2010).

The authors refer to this usual amount of induction as “informal or low-intensity teacher induction, which may include pairing each new teacher with another full-time teacher without providing training, supplemental materials, or release time for the induction to occur.” What forms and degrees of mentoring, coaching, collaboration, and teaming are offered tends to be determined idiosyncratically and by available resources. And, too often, the lack of a formal induction program leads to socialization at a site that subverts budding positive beliefs and attitudes.

Optimally, as a fundamental socialization process that transitions individuals into an important and essential societal institution, a good induction program for all education personnel should be comprehensively designed as a formal and multi-year program. “Comprehensive teacher induction ... provides novice teachers with carefully selected and trained full-time mentors; a curriculum of intensive and structured support that includes orientation, professional development, and weekly meetings with mentors; a focus on instruction, with opportunities to observe experienced teachers; formative assessment tools that permit ongoing evaluation of practice and constructive feedback; and outreach to school-based administrators to enlist their support for the program” (Glazerman, Isenberg, Dolfin, et al., 2010). Moreover, such a process should absorb the newcomer into a community of learners, guide and integrate them into decision making structures, and avoid undermining the idealism, commitment, and new ideas and practices that are the hallmark of a new generation of education professionals and are essential to advancing the field.

Minimally, a good induction program requires infrastructure mechanisms for planning and implementation of

- welcoming
- professional (and as feasible personal) support and guidance from colleagues and administrators to enable new staff to function effectively over the initial months of employment
- initial inservice education (which hopefully is targeted and personalized to meet the individual needs of the newcomer)
- ready access to learning/student supports (personnel, resources, strategies, and practices specifically designed

Proper placement and sound supports for [newcomers] need to be in place as they continue to hone their knowledge and skills. If they continue to work without a net, they will likely turn away from the profession or be less effective than we need them to be, regardless of the quality of their preparation. Sabrina Laine (in Rochkind, et al, 2008)

Personalized Inservice

Overlapping the induction program is the need for several mechanisms to provide personalized on-the-job learning. Given that preservice education generally is designed with beginning levels of functioning in mind, systematically designed programs to enhance job-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes are essential. This requires infrastructure mechanisms for planning and implementation of continuous learning programs, both at worksites and in other appropriate venues that foster a community of learners and higher levels of effectiveness.

In describing five high schools serving low-income families, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) note considerable commitment to continuing learning. “Overall, the schools allocate 7 to 15 days to shared learning time throughout the year. In addition, they organize substantial time during the week – usually several hours – for teachers to plan and problem solve together. With teachers meeting regularly in grade-level teams, the schools have venues for examining student progress, creating a more coherent curriculum, and enabling teachers to learn from one another. ... Mentoring and coaching systems for new and veteran teachers also augment professional learning. In staff meetings, teachers engage in focused inquiry about problems of practice.”

With a view to maximizing the value of job-related learning, targeted and personalized inservice education are ideals. In this respect, mentoring, coaching, collaboration, and teaming can provide an important foundation for daily on-the-job learning that goes beyond trial and error. By definition, professionals in a personalized inservice program should experience both the content and process as (a) maximizing their feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others and (b) minimizing threats to such feelings (Adelman & Taylor, 2015).

In stressing personalized and targeted continuing professional development, we recognize that there are also a variety of general school and district concerns requiring inservice time. Staff meetings provide one vehicle for addressing such concerns, and, increasingly, technology provides several types of delivery mechanisms.

Teacher Can't Do It Alone: A System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Teachers, and especially novice teachers, cannot and should not be expected to do it alone. Successful classrooms require teacher collaboration with others to effectively personalize instruction, overcome barriers to teaching and learning, and re-engage disconnected students. Classroom doors need to be open and teachers need to invite in others who can help improve instruction and provide special student assistance as needed. This includes collaborating with other teachers and with student and learning support staff, and professionals-in-training, as well as strategic use of parents and volunteers (Adelman & Taylor, 2006).

Beyond the classroom, teachers must be supported by school-wide student and learning supports focusing on factors interfering with good instruction and productive learning. A wide range of external and internal barriers to learning and teaching pose pervasive and entrenched challenges to educators across the country, particularly in chronically low performing schools. Failure to directly address such barriers ensures that (a) too many students will continue to struggle in school and (b) too many teachers will suffer the effects of having to deal with problems that stress them and the system. School-wide efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching involve developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports (Adelman & Taylor, 2006, 2015).

Concluding Comments

With little guidance and support teachers feel helpless and are at risk of moving to another school or giving up on teaching all together. Schools suffer because they lose time, money, and effort they spent training these teachers (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). But most importantly the children suffer because they lose the people in charge of teaching them the basic things they need to learn.

Education personnel deserve more credit.

Sure, but they wouldn't need it if we paid them better.



Exhibit: An Example of One District's Focus on Supporting New Teachers

Summarized from *Hiring (and keeping) urban teachers: A coordinated approach to new teacher support* by Towery, Salim, & Hom (2009)

“Boston Public Schools and its partner, the Boston Plan for Excellence, began to examine the new teacher hiring and support practices in 2002. At the time, half of BPS teachers were leaving within their first three years on the job. ... With 400-600 new teachers hired annually, or about 10% of its total teacher workforce, BPS had an enormous human capacity issue to address: how to bring the right teachers into the system and keep them long enough to have a positive impact on student learning.... [The following components] evolved over time....

(1) A customer service approach to hiring. Includes:

- *Red Carpet Treatment for Prospective Teachers* – including answering questions and helping them to navigate the hiring process.
- *Streamlined online application process* – allows applicants to create and store their application info online and apply to multiple positions.
- *Logistical support.* The website includes a checklist for new teachers and weekly sessions provide assistance with hiring paperwork and other logistical support.
- *Welcoming and connecting new hires.* New Teacher Celebrations are held during the summer at prominent public institutions (e.g., Boston Public Library, Children's Museum) which introduces newcomers to community education resources and lets new teachers meet and network with one another before the start of the school year.
- *Follow-up support.* A new teachers' support office provides a central point of contact for new teachers throughout the school year.

(2) A district-based teacher preparation program. To recruit and retain teachers, the Boston Teacher Residency was created (based on a medical residency model). For a year, aspiring teachers, called residents, participate in a program that includes four full days a week working in a mentor teachers' classroom and graduate level course work taught by BTR instructors and tied to the district's instructional priorities. Cohorts in “host” schools learn to teach from trained and supported mentors.

(3) Revamped induction support for new teachers. BPS created within its Office of Professional Development a New Teacher Support System to provide a fresh start to its mentoring program. This New Teacher Development program provided a 5% salary differential for new teacher developers. Beyond their work with individual teachers, the program plays a role in district wide support of new teachers (e.g., facilitates workshops, seminars, courses on teacher leadership). The BTR program strives to make teacher professional development “rich and ongoing.” In their second and third years, residents continue to receive support from BTR through additional courses and advanced offerings and induction coaches.

(4) Professional development opportunities for new teachers. Includes:

- *New Teacher Institute* – new teachers engage in workshops in areas such as classroom management, fostering equity in the classroom, and differentiating instruction.
- *Beginning Teacher Seminars* – recurring seminars for first year teachers differentiated by grade level (elementary, middle, and high school); content is aligned with the Dimensions of Effective Teaching.
- *Advancing Practice Courses* – for second and third year teachers to improve specific areas of practice (e.g., differentiating instruction for ELL and students with disabilities).
- *Online technology courses* – helps new teachers master instructional technology skills.
- *Exemplary teaching cross-site visits* – structured visits for new teachers to observe exemplary teachers at work.

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Brianna Andrade also prepared *A Personal Perspective on the Teach for America Program* – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/tfa.pdf>