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A third of beginning teachers quit within their first three years on the job. We don't stand for this kind of dropout rate among students, and we can no longer afford it in our teaching ranks. But what does it take to adequately support novice teachers? What lifelines can we offer so they will remain in the profession and develop into highly effective classroom educators?

In education, as in any employment area, each year produces a certain number of newly minted professionals. But due to the particular circumstances of our time, the annual influx of newcomers to the teaching profession needs to rise dramatically in the coming decade.

Hired in large numbers in the 1960s and '70s to teach a booming student population, many veteran teachers have started reaching the natural end of their careers. Meanwhile, an expanding student population, coinciding with a proliferation of class-size reduction initiatives that require schools to lower their teacher-student ratio in certain grades, is creating more demand for teachers.

Further complicating the picture is the profession's ongoing "brain drain," the steady loss of teachers who, after a relatively short time in the classroom, give up on the profession, opting instead for jobs that offer more financial reward or may simply appear less stressful.

By one estimate, U.S. schools will need to hire from 1.7 million to 2.7 million new teachers within the next decade (Hussar, 1999). Others argue that the number is far smaller. Either way, many districts and schools throughout the country can look forward to an influx of new teachers in the coming years -- a situation that presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge, of course, is to give these newcomers the kind of support needed if they are not only to remain in the profession, but also to develop into educators able to teach to today's high standards. The opportunity lies in the fact that updating old skills or unlearning old habits -- a necessity for many veterans -- is not an issue for these fresh-on-the-scene teachers. Still in the early stages of learning their craft, they have the opportunity to begin their careers using the best of what we know from research and practice about effective teaching.

Beginning teacher support ***programs***, also called teacher ***induction programs***, can help schools and districts meet this challenge and take advantage of the opportunity it presents. Minimally, such ***programs*** can improve teacher retention rates by enhancing new teacher satisfaction. More importantly, a well-designed and implemented effort can improve practice, helping new educators apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in their teacher preparation ***programs*** to the complexity of real-life teaching. Not incidentally, such support ***programs*** can also serve as a drawing card in the increasingly competitive market for hiring new teachers.

Some educators have also come to think of beginning teacher support as a simple fairness issue. One district superintendent now working with the local teachers' union to develop a support ***program*** explains its genesis: "We'd been hiring a lot of new teachers, expecting a lot, and then holding them accountable after the fact -- when we evaluated them at the end of the year. The list of things new teachers are expected to know and be able to do has only grown in recent years, but they usually don't get any attendant support."

CHALLENGES FACING NEW TEACHERS

A great deal of research literature documents the extent to which beginning teachers struggle in their early classroom years. Simon Veenman's (1984) classic international review of perceived problems among beginning teachers found remarkable consistency, across both time and differently structured education systems. Among the greatest challenges perceived by rookie teachers were classroom management,

motivating students, dealing with the individual differences among students, assessing student work, and relations with parents.

In teaching, new entrants -- fresh out of professional training -- assume the exact same responsibilities as 20-year veterans. While many novice teachers have had terrific intellectual preparation and an outstanding student teaching experience, their limited experience generally yields an equally limited repertoire of classroom strategies -- far more limited than the variety of teaching challenges a new teacher invariably encounters. It's a situation ripe for frustration.

Not surprisingly, the attrition rate for beginning teachers has always been high, with nearly a third of novice teachers leaving the profession within their first three years. This revolving door creates a permanent core of inexperienced teachers who are learning their craft by, essentially, practicing on the students before them. At the schoolwide level, high teacher turnover drains energy and resources as well, requiring that administrators and teaching colleagues constantly focus on bringing newcomers up to speed on everything from operating the copy machine to participating in major reform efforts.

The 1980s and '90s generated a growing number of teacher ***induction programs*** aimed at helping beginning teachers make a successful transition from their teacher preparation experience to being the teacher-of-record in a classroom. Among the common goals of such ***programs*** are:

* Improving teaching performance;
* Increasing the retention of promising beginning teachers;
* Promoting the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers;
* Satisfying mandated requirements for ***induction*** and/or licensure; and
* Transmitting the culture of the system to beginning teachers (Huling-Austin, 1990).

Most such ***programs*** identify beginning teachers as those who are either fresh out of a teacher preparation ***program*** or who have taught only one or two years. But, increasingly, districts and schools recognize the need to also offer some support for teachers who, while not new to the classroom, are new to the school, the district, or the state.

For districts or schools undertaking -- or expanding -- an organized support effort for beginning teachers, it helps to understand the range of strategies that have been tried in the past and what the available data, limited as they are, suggest about the effectiveness of such strategies.

NEW TEACHER SUPPORT

Beginning teacher support should be looked at as a continuum, starting with personal and emotional support, expanding to include specific task- or problem-related support and, ideally, expanding further to help the newcomer develop a capacity for critical self-reflection on teaching practice. Each aspect of support serves a different purpose.

Personal and emotional support.

The first years of teaching are especially stressful. The effort of planning every lesson from scratch, teaching with unfamiliar materials, and, often, teaching at an unfamiliar grade level drains even the most energetic. Compounding all this is the inherent isolation of individual teachers sequestered in their individual classrooms.

Experienced colleagues can serve as a sounding board and assure beginners that their experience is normal, offer sympathy and perspective, and provide advice to help reduce the inevitable stress. Such support does little to directly improve teaching performance, but it improves the likelihood that teachers will stay the course long enough to have the opportunity to ***become*** effective practitioners.

Task- or problem-focused support.

Beginning teachers also need help in knowing how to approach new tasks and in solving specific problems that crop up in their teaching. They are usually undertaking even the most basic teaching tasks for the very first time. With the help of a veteran teacher, the beginner doesn't have to reinvent the wheel for such standard activities as developing a lesson plan.

Beginning teachers also need help in dealing with teaching challenges specific to their own students. This type of problem-specific support can improve teaching performance in specific instances and, as a by-product, reduce new teachers' stress.

Critical reflection on teaching practice.

If teachers are to ***become*** skilled at independently identifying and addressing the idiosyncratic learning problems of their students, they must learn to reflect critically on student work, as well as on their own teaching practices.

For beginners who have not developed the habit of reflecting on their own teaching, the veteran may

model the process: identifying a problem and proposing and analyzing for the beginner a variety of solutions. In doing so, the veteran can help the beginner think in terms of being guided by evidence; for example, how will you know that your students have learned what you're trying to teach? Then, as the novice begins to develop more self-confidence and efficacy, the veteran may continue to propose solutions, but prompt the beginning teacher to analyze the problem. Over time, the veteran reduces the amount of guidance offered and engages more as an interested and sympathetic colleague, shifting from a directive to collaborative to facilitative role.

SPECIFIC SUPPORT STRATEGIES

New-teacher support ***programs*** may be operated by school districts or by consortia of districts, either on their own or in partnership with the local teachers association. A state department of education may also offer a beginning teacher support model, as in California, which provides some implementation funding as well. But schools can also do much on their own. One Nevada high school principal, who has implemented a fairly complex teacher ***induction program*** at her school, notes, "We can do most of the things we need to do to support our new teachers with only the tacit support of the district -- although it would be nice to have its active involvement."

The resources schools and districts are able and willing to devote to beginning teacher support varies. Some states give districts funds specifically for teacher ***induction programs*** or for a specific type of mentor teacher ***program*** in which mentor responsibilities focus on beginning teacher support rather than on curriculum development or special projects. Often, mentor money is used to release mentor teachers from their own classrooms part time. Some districts fund full-time mentors from general and/or categorical funds. Veteran teachers who do not have to balance both classroom and mentoring responsibilities have more time to focus on the beginning teachers, are more flexible and often can respond to problems in a more timely way.

Not surprisingly, the amount of funding often affects the choice of ***induction*** activities. Some activities are low intensity and relatively low cost -- either one-shot or low-frequency events. These require short-term but focused coordination. Others are higher intensity, tend to be costlier, require sustained attention, and often must be coordinated with other school or district activities.

LOW-INTENSITY SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Low-intensity support strategies make minimal demands on district and school resources. Some are simply procedural, such as providing formal orientation or protecting new teachers from extracurricular responsibilities. When veteran teachers' involvement can be structured in ways that do not impinge on their regular teaching time -- in grade-level meetings, for example -- such strategies are low intensity. Beginning teachers find even low-intensity efforts valuable when those strategies feature lots of contact with veteran teachers, contact that generally provides personal or emotional support and helps them address unfamiliar tasks and problems. Studies suggest that such support from veteran teachers results in higher job satisfaction and higher retention rates for beginning teachers (Dianda et al., 1991; Wong-Park, 1997).

The following activities are low-intensity with little or no district involvement or funding:

Orienting new teachers. The week before school opens, beginning teachers receive a formal orientation to the community, district, curriculum, and school. Some districts include advice on setting up the classroom and/or classroom management.

Matching beginning and veteran teachers. Whether this pairing is low or high intensity depends on the degree of support the veteran teacher is expected to provide. In low-intensity ***programs***, the experienced teacher functions primarily as a buddy or, as one superintendent describes it, "a cheerleader," providing emotional support.

Any pairing strategy is strengthened when the veteran teacher receives a stipend and the pair is expected to set aside a regular time each week to meet together. Studies suggest that without regular, structured time set aside, paired teachers have less interaction. Matching the pair by grade level or content area also increases both the likelihood of regular interaction and the effectiveness of the support.

Adjusting working conditions. To make life less stressful for beginning teachers, administrators can reduce the number of students in their classrooms, refrain from assigning them the most challenging students, and minimize their extracurricular and committee assignments. At the elementary school level, in particular, administrators can avoid assigning combination grades. At the secondary school level, administrators can make sure that new teachers' course schedules require as few separate preparation efforts as possible.

Promoting collegial collaboration. Some schools have existing structures that foster collaboration between

beginning and veteran teachers, such as grade-level teams that coordinate instructional planning. Principals can also simply ask a veteran teacher to plan with a beginner teaching the same grade or the same course. At the secondary school level, this joint planning can be facilitated by common prep periods.

Study groups focused on specific topics, such as using running records or improving mathematics instruction, provide beginning teachers with collaborative problem-solving models. In such groups, novices hear how veteran teachers think about using and adapting instructional techniques.

Beginning teachers also can serve as resources for the school. New teachers may know more about new instructional approaches they have studied and used in student teaching. In certain disciplines -- the sciences, for example -- a new teacher may have more current content knowledge than a colleague who has been teaching for 10 or 15 years. Here, again, collaboration profits everyone.

HIGH-INTENSITY SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Research from the California New Teacher Project, a varied set of ***induction programs***, indicates that high-intensity support strategies, such as those described below, are more effective than the less-intensive strategies at improving beginning teaching performance (Dianda et al., 1991).

In high-intensity support efforts, however, much more is expected of veteran teachers. But if they are to operate as anything more than buddies or cheerleaders, they must be chosen carefully, receive appropriate training, and be given adequate time away from their own classroom responsibilities -- all of which requires a greater commitment on the part of the school or district.

Selecting and training effective support providers. Support providers should be successful teachers who are articulate about their practice. But even the most outstanding K-12 teacher is not automatically suited by skill or temperament to collegial work with other adults. For example, some extremely competent teachers seem to forget how long it took them to develop into effective practitioners.

Support providers can themselves profit from training in observation skills and specific strategies for working with adults. They also benefit from training in how to collect and analyze evidence of the learning taking place in a classroom and, therefore, the effectiveness of the teaching.

Providing released time. Beginning teachers can be released to attend seminars, to work with support providers in analyzing their students' work and the instruction it refects, or to observe other teachers for a specific purpose. Support providers can also be released from their own teaching duties to demonstrate lessons in beginners' classrooms. Veteran teachers might also observe beginning teachers in action.

Mini-courses addressing common challenges. Many of the issues that frustrate, stymie, or simply scare beginning teachers are predictable. Some, such as planning for back-to-school night or parent conferences, are relatively easy to address in a quick workshop. Others, such as student discipline, teaching English language learners, and assessment, are worthy of more attention.

Schools and districts can offer minicourses or seminars during released time, after school, in the evening, or on weekends. They can do so on their own or in partnership with universities, county offices of education, or a consortium of small districts.

Examining the evidence. Veteran teachers can help beginners collect evidence of their teaching practice and analyze it to identify strengths and areas for improvement. This strategy is most effective when the veteran and beginner pairs take a particular focus, either on a classroom problem or perhaps on competencies the beginner is expected to exhibit. Evidence may come from a veteran's observations of a beginner's interactions with his or her own students, from joint analysis of student work, or even from examining the arrangement of classroom materials and furniture. Often, an examination of evidence results in a professional development plan for the beginning teacher, with activities targeted to specific areas of growth.

Helping beginning teachers collect and analyze evidence related to the effectiveness of their teaching has high potential for promoting reflective teaching practice and, therefore, for improving teaching performance.

SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS

Institutional policies and practices can strengthen beginning teacher support efforts -- starting with an effective method for identifying new teachers and maintaining realistic expectations for these newcomers.

Early identification of beginning teachers by the personnel office. Few personnel offices are set up to formally identify new teachers (whether new to the profession, the state, or the district) and provide that information to the coordinator of an ***induction program***. Early identification does, however, aid in planning for specific support activities, such as orientation. It also allows support to begin much earlier in the year.

Realistic expectations for beginners. It takes time for teachers to learn their craft. ***Induction programs***

can accelerate beginning teacher growth, but most newcomers still need an extended period before they look like strong veteran teachers. Yet most teacher evaluation systems do not distinguish between beginning and veteran teachers.

Cooperative agreements with unions. While teacher unions and associations are generally supportive of teacher ***induction*** practices, they are wary of setting undesirable precedents. For example, teacher representatives may want to negotiate the amount of uncompensated time contributed by veteran teachers and beginning teachers in a support ***program***. They also typically are interested in how support providers are selected, especially if a stipend is involved.

Coordination of efforts. Even when adopting low-intensity support strategies, a district or school needs someone paying attention to implementation, dealing with obstacles, and ensuring consistency with other district policies. Whether considering beginning teacher orientations, seminars, coursework, or even pairing beginners with veteran teachers, someone with administrative authority must lay the groundwork. ... Veteran teachers willing to work with beginners must be identified, recruited, and trained. Both support and training for these mentors must be ongoing.

Released time. Protected time makes it more likely that classroom observations will take place, that veterans and beginners will actually meet, and that beginners will attend seminars at times when fatigue does not interfere with their ability to pay attention. The creative use of substitutes and staff development days can enhance the effectiveness of support activities.

CHALLENGES REMAIN

Like beginning teachers themselves, teacher ***induction programs*** face predictable challenges.

Choosing and preparing support providers. Finding teachers to serve as support providers is a constant challenge, especially if few incentives are available. A school or district can identify potential support providers by soliciting nominations from principals, staff developers, and teachers. Larger districts may create full-time positions for support providers, although this is expensive.

The selection process is further complicated by the fact that, as noted earlier, excellent classroom teachers do not always make the best support providers. Another selection challenge is the uneven distribution of effective support providers across schools. Meetings between beginners and support providers are more effective when the paired teachers teach at the same grade level or in the same content area, and the meetings generally occur with greater frequency when the paired teachers are at the same school.

Preparation of support providers is also an issue. Some ***programs*** focus preparation on coaching skills; others focus on collecting and interpreting evidence of teaching. The most extensive preparation includes both.

Providing time for support activities. Every support activity is more likely to happen if time is provided during regular working hours or if teachers are paid for attendance. However, this imposes a tremendous logistical and financial burden on teacher ***induction programs***. ***Programs*** manage this challenge by reserving time within the school day or with paid time for the activities deemed most important.

Managing the relationship between beginning teacher support and beginning teacher evaluation. Beginning teacher support ***programs*** focus on improving practice. Evaluation ***programs*** focus on comparing a teacher's practice to a standard that must be met if beginners are to keep their jobs. Many believe that in fairness to new teachers, the two efforts must be kept entirely separate. This separation precludes the principal, as the teachers' primary evaluator, from participating closely in support efforts.

In ***programs*** that separate support and evaluation, support providers can usually respond to principals' request to target assistance in a particular area, but they do not report on the perceived success of that effort. In all ***induction programs***, teacher evaluation criteria should be the same for both support and evaluation purposes, i.e., support providers should help new teachers achieve the same standards on which the they will be evaluated for retention. Such alignment helps avoid the kind of awkward situations -- and potential lawsuits -- that can come about when beginning teachers receive contradictory feedback from support providers and evaluators.

Getting resources to struggling teachers. While many beginners will perform adequately even with minimal assistance, some will struggle. These teachers require more support than that provided in most low-intensity strategies. In fact, even ***programs*** using high intensity strategies will need to determine how to strategically focus support.

Equally important, mentors should understand that, despite their best efforts, not all beginning teachers will be successful, because not everyone is suited to teaching. In these cases, support providers may need strategies for counseling beginning teachers out of the teaching profession.

CONCLUSION

Whatever strategies schools or districts select, all are valuable. Less intensive support increases retention and promotes personal and professional well-being, while intensive strategies are more effective at improving beginning teaching practice.

In creating an ***induction program***, however small, strategies and management of challenges require close attention to context and available resources. For example, schools should be prepared for the possibility that some support strategies may highlight difficult issues, such as compensation for additional work, released time priorities, and lack of professional, collegial conversations.

As with any ***program***, the first year or so of a beginning teacher support effort is likely to be bumpy. Success requires a commitment to learn from mistakes and to identify necessary changes in resources, policies, and practices. The potential payoffs -- lower teacher attrition, higher teacher morale, and, most importantly, improved teaching and learning -- make the effort worthwhile.

ADDED MATERIAL

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HOW TO FIND MORE

This article is excerpted from the WestEd brief, "Lifelines to the Classroom: Designing Support for Beginning Teachers." A PDF of the full brief is available on the WestEd Web site at web.WestEd.org/online_pubs/tchrbrief.pdf. Print copies are also available from WestEd at www.WestEd.org/cs/wew/view/rs/212. Used by permission of WestEd.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PROGRAMS

American Federation of Teachers affiliate-sponsored support ***programs***: The Rochester (New York) Teachers Association (RTA) mentor ***program*** for first-year teachers, online at www.rochesterteachers.com/cit.htm, or call Carl O'Connell at (585) 262-8541; the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers' ***program***, e-mail Denise Hewitt at dhewitt@cst-aft.org or call (513) 475-6042; the Poway, Calif., Professional Assistance ***Program*** sponsored by the Poway Federation of Teachers, call (858) 748-0010 ext. 2324 or e-mail ppappused@sdcod.k-12.ca.us.

Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment. This California ***program*** supports individuals in their first and second years of teaching through mentoring and coaching, professional development and training activities, and assessment of professional growth. It is currently transitioning to ***becoming*** a credentialing route for the second tier teaching credential. For information, contact Beth Graybill with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (bgraybill@ctc.ca.gov) or Tom Lugo with the California Department of Education, tlugo@cde.ca.gov or (916) 323-5592.

The New Teacher Center at University of California, Santa Cruz, offers support and assistance to school districts, universities, and other educational entities in developing teacher ***induction programs***. For more information, call (831) 459-4323, e-mail: ntc@zzyx.ucsc.edu., or visit www.newteachercenter.org.

The Pathwise ***Induction program***, available from Educational Testing Service (ETS), is a support and formative assessment process designed to assist beginning teachers' growth as reflective practitioners. For information, contact ETS at (800) 297-9051 or visit www.ETS.org/pathwise.

READING

Comprehensive Teacher ***Induction***: Systems for Early Career Learning, by Edward Britton, Lynn Paine, David Pimm, and Senta Raizen (Kluwer Academic Publishers and WestEd, 2002). Based on a study of ***induction programs*** in China, France, Japan, New Zealand, and Switzerland, the book calls for rethinking teacher ***induction***, including what the curriculum of ***induction*** should be and what policies, ***programs***, and practices are necessary for delivering it.

Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching, by Charlotte Danielson (ASCD, 1996). A framework of components of teaching practice, together with suggested data sources and descriptive scales to guide either self-reflection or support.

Mentoring: A Resource and Training Guide for Educators, by Anne Newton et al. (WestEd, 1994). A guide and an extensive set of activities for preparing mentors to support beginning teachers, with sample two-, three-, and five-day workshops.

Mentor Teacher ***Programs*** in the States (American Federation of Teachers, 1998). Educational issues Policy Brief #5.

Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development: A Resource for State Dialogue, by Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1992). Standards can be downloaded from gwia: ccsso.org/intasc.html. For more information, call Jean Miller at (202) 336-7048.