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Induction Programs That Keep Working

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In elementary school, no one ever picked me. That rejection and its resulting hurt stayed with me through life. So when I became a teacher, I vowed never to allow my students to be rejected. But how could I do that when rejection was the initial experience I encountered on my very first day as a new teacher? I was not introduced to the staff. I was not shown to my room. I was not told how to get supplies. I was not told how I would fit in and how I could contribute. I was not even shown the bathrooms! I left after my first year. Looking back, the reason is obvious. There was no culture at this school, so I could not fit in to something that did not exist. It was simply a place where people worked behind closed doors.

This story and many others like it have been shared with me over the years as I crisscross the country working with teachers.

The Most Significant Process

Research suggests that the most academically talented teachers leave in the greatest numbers. In a study from the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (Hare & Heap, 2001), a majority of superintendents in the region indicated that 75 to 100 percent of the teachers leaving the profession were

“effective” or “very effective” in the classroom. Why did these capable teachers leave?

People crave connection. New teachers want more than a job: They want hope. They want to contribute to a group. They want to make a difference.

Belonging, a basic human need, provides the key to keeping skilled teachers. Structured, intensive induction programs can provide the connection teachers need—if these programs are built around sustained professional development within a learning community that treats new and veteran teachers with respect and that values their contributions.

Because new teachers want to be part of a team and part of a culture, the induction process should immerse them in the district’s culture and unite them with everyone in the district as a cohesive, supportive instructional team. Under these conditions, new teachers quickly become a part of the district’s “family.”

Induction Programs That Provide Ongoing Learning

Induction is the process of preparing, supporting, and retaining new teachers. It includes all the things done to support new teachers and to acculturate them to teaching. Strong induction programs introduce new teachers to the responsibilities, missions, and philosophies of their schools, and treat teachers as lifelong learners from their very first day of teaching. The following three school districts and one school have highly successful new teacher induction programs. Their results speak volumes.

Newport-Mesa Schools, California

Christina Jurenko, director of Newport-Mesa’s induction program, reports that the annual retention rate of new teachers was 85 percent in 1997. After the district installed a two-year induction program patterned after California’s Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment model, the retention rate increased to 97 percent.

Sustained professional development is the method used in this induction program. The district fosters an atmosphere in which teachers want to learn and continue to grow as professionals. It sponsors teachers who want to attend conferences but requires that new teachers, veteran teachers, and administrators attend in groups to support the district’s focus on teamwork.

The district encourages site administrators to organize study groups of learning teams on campus. These structures provide the type of organizational support that results in teacher learning. Teachers meet weekly in pairs and triads to reflect on practice, analyze student work, and study the impact of teaching on student growth. Networking, conducting case studies, coaching, creating teacher portfolios, and shadowing students are just a few of the techniques that study groups use to facilitate and sustain teacher growth and effectiveness.

Lafourche Parish Schools, Louisiana

Gary Babin, superintendent of Lafourche Parish, observes that in his district, “new teachers became highly successful and all were coming back the following year. This had never happened until we implemented an induction program.”

New teachers in the district meet frequently: four days in early August with the induction team, which includes three curriculum coordinators and one principal; one day in late August with the three curriculum coordinators; once a month on-site with their facilitators; once a month at the district level with their support group; and weekly with their mentors. They participate in ongoing observations all year. They observe their mentors, and their mentors, administrators, curriculum facilitators, and curriculum coordinators observe them. They have two more days of meetings in January to prepare them for the Louisiana State Assessment that all new teachers in the state must pass during their third semester of teaching in order to receive certification. In addition, they meet for another full day in April for an induction review conducted by the three curriculum coordinators, in which new teachers share their first-year successes and receive further training in anticipation of their second year.

These support activities focus on establishing good classroom management; implementing basic, proven instructional strategies; and meeting the requirements set by the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching. In addition, new teachers write professional development plans during their second semester of teaching, with the help of their mentors and administrators. These plans determine the kinds of ongoing individual help the new teachers receive from veteran teachers in their school.

The benefits of all these activities are clear. Lafourche retained 45 out of 46 new teachers hired in 2001–2002. More than 99 percent of the new teachers who have participated in the district’s induction program have successfully completed state teacher certification requirements. The Louisiana Department of Education has adopted the Lafourche induction program as the model for the entire state.

Islip Public Schools, New York

Linda Lippman, the director of human resources and of the new teacher induction program for Islip Schools in New York, has the dual responsibility of training the teachers she hires. Her efforts have paid off. In the 1998–1999 school year, before Islip installed a formal induction program, the district retained only 29 of the 46 new teachers hired. In the subsequent three school years from 1999 to 2002, when a formal, three-year teacher induction program was installed, the district retained 65 teachers of 68 hired.

As part of their contract, teachers in their first three years attend monthly 90-minute study group meetings after school. The teachers are divided into groups by years in the district and by grade level, elementary (K–5) or secondary (6–12). Study group activities, led by veteran teachers and district curriculum leaders, focus on building skills in such areas as parent-teacher conferences, classroom management, lesson plans, and cooperative discipline. Teachers network, work on team-building and problem-solving techniques, and participate in sharing sessions in which they “steal” ideas from one another.

As new teachers proceed through their three-year tenure-track program, team-building activities promote a sense of cohesion and belonging and help them build relationships in support groups. Collegial circles meet informally between formal monthly meetings. Social studies teacher John Christie says that at Islip, “the induction program allowed me to share new teacher concerns, realize I wasn’t alone, and discover solutions in a collegial environment.”

Islip’s new teachers participate in a Web quest workshop that gives them the opportunity to tailor activities to their respective education settings. The outcome is enriched curriculum activities and highly motivated adult learners. Workshop leaders model exemplary lessons and add to the new teachers’ growing knowledge base.

Goldfarb Elementary School, Nevada

The best induction programs are sustained, on-site, and on time (Johnson & Kardos, 2002). Goldfarb Elementary School in Las Vegas, Nevada, typifies such a program. For the past six years, the school has enjoyed a 100 percent retention rate.

Goldfarb Elementary School builds on Clark County School District's three-year induction and training program, which includes such activities as an orientation program prior to the beginning of the school year; a Community Day at a mall sponsored by local businesses; a teaching strategy resource manual, *Great Beginnings*; monthly training sessions in everything from classroom management to lesson delivery; a teacher-training cadre available for training and assistance; on-site mentor-facilitators; monthly newsletters; new-teacher socials; and intranet services. A cadre of administrators and teachers oversees the induction program.

Training varies from year to year, depending on how many new teachers are hired, but it typically includes meeting three days before school begins for a dialogue on schoolwide procedures and expectations, and attending as many as 24 meetings during the school year for training on such topics as technology, balanced literacy, effective math lessons, Accelerated Schools, and guided reading.

Goldfarb Elementary School is a learning community—a place where teachers and administrators study, work, and learn together with the mission of improving student achievement. The school no longer uses mentors (Wong & Wong, 2002). Instead, the administration conducts a survey to determine the needs of student teachers and new teachers and publicizes the list. “Tons” of experienced teachers respond with offers to answer questions, help with problems, or present information at in-house training sessions. In this true learning community of educators committed to sharing with and helping fellow educators on a sustained basis, new teachers believe that they can contribute and make a difference.

Induction Means More Than Mentoring

Induction and mentoring are not the same. Induction entails much more than connecting the novice with a veteran teacher—it is an organized, sustained, multiyear program structured by a school or district. Induction is a group

process that organizes the expertise of educators within the shared values of a culture, whereas mentoring is a one-on-one process concerned with supporting individual teachers.

It takes five to seven years to develop an effective teacher. A mentor may help in a neophyte teacher's first year or two, but professional development should continue throughout the teacher's career. Therefore, we must stop trying to portray mentoring as an effective stand-alone method for supporting and retaining teachers.

After 20 years of experimenting with mentoring as a process for helping new teachers, researchers have produced few comprehensive studies to validate its effectiveness (Feiman-Nemser, 1996). The results of mentor programs may be uneven because in too many instances, the mentor is simply a veteran teacher who has been haphazardly selected by the principal and assigned to a new teacher, resulting in a "blind date" (Saphier, Freedman, & Aschheim, 2001).

Mentors can offer important support for new teachers, but they must be carefully selected and highly trained, have a clear understanding of their purpose, and serve as contributing members of an overall comprehensive induction program. Prince George's County Schools in Maryland, the 19th-largest school district in the United States, provides 40 hours of training for the mentoring component of its three-year induction process.

Effective Professional Development

Both new and veteran teachers often feel isolated in their jobs and thirst for more opportunities to network, share, and collaborate with their peers. They want a culture that acknowledges, respects, and nurtures them as professionals. They want to be involved in decision-making and leadership in their schools. They want time to collaborate with their peers and reflect on their craft. They want more opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills and to advance in their careers. And they want these opportunities to be available from the beginning to the end of their teaching careers.

An organized, sustained professional development program provides these opportunities, encouraging new teachers and veteran teachers to stay in a district. The best professional development programs allow teachers to observe others, to be observed by others, and to be part of groups in which teachers share together, grow together, and learn to respect one another's work. According to a national study conducted by Garet, Porter, Desmoine, Birman,

and Yoon (2001), teachers learn more in teacher networks and study groups than with mentoring, and they gain more from longer, sustained, and intensive professional development programs than from shorter ones.

Thus, professional development programs will make the strongest contribution to training and retaining good teachers when they

- Have networks that create learning communities.
- Treat every colleague as a valuable contributor.
- Turn ownership of learning over to the learners in study groups.
- Create learning communities in which everyone, new teachers as well as veteran teachers, gains knowledge.
- Demonstrate that quality teaching becomes not just an individual, but also a group, responsibility.

The professional development department at Flowing Wells Schools in Tucson, Arizona, operates under the banner of the Institute for Teacher Renewal and Growth. The induction phase of the program takes the new teachers through three stages during the first three years, from *novice* in their first year, to *advanced beginner* in their second year, and then to *competent teacher* in their third year. At these stages, they learn such skills as classroom management, essential elements of instruction, reading strategies, task analysis, and learning styles.

Teachers then enter a four-year growth stage. Teachers grow from *proficient* in their fourth year to an *expert teacher* in their eighth year. During these years, they take such courses as peer coaching, attention deficit disorder, multiple intelligences, assistive technology, cognitive coaching, honoring diverse student needs, question/response patterns, alignment of curriculum with state standards, and current research topics. Finally, the teacher enters seamlessly into a veteran teacher renewal program that is a career-long process for all staff members in the district. This program may explain why Flowing Wells has produced 12 finalists for teachers of the year for the state of Arizona, more than any other school district in the state.

The Real Beneficiaries

Research consistently supports the need for systematic induction of new teachers and the ongoing professional development of all teachers. Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler (2002), who write about building and sustaining a professional knowledge base for teaching, point to a growing consensus that professional development yields the best results when it is long-term, school-based, collaborative, focused on student learning, and linked to the curriculum. When all new teachers participate in a structured and sustained induction process that treats them as lifelong learners, the real beneficiaries are the students who reap the rewards of skillful, knowledgeable, effective teachers.

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