

Save Millions— Train and Support New Teachers

Schools Spend \$50,000 to Replace Each New Teacher Who Quits

Every year, teacher turnover costs Texas schools between \$329 million and \$1.59 billion. New York City pays \$186 million annually to keep pace with teacher turnover. In 2000, the city school board spent more than \$8 million for a glossy Madison Avenue recruiting campaign that drew 8,334 new teachers—1,875 of whom quit after the first year (Wong and Asquith 2000).

Now for the good news. During the 2000–2001 school year:

- Lafourche Parish Schools in Louisiana hired 46 teachers and lost one.
- Islip Public Schools in New York hired 68 teachers and lost three.

- The Leyden High School District in Illinois hired 90 teachers and lost four.
- The Geneva Community Schools in New York hired 67 teachers and lost five.
- The Newport-Mesa School District in California hired 148 teachers and lost five.

The difference between school districts with high turnover and those with low turnover is quite simple. School districts with a low teacher attrition rate have an organized, multiyear, sustained program to train, support, and retain new recruits. This process is called *new teacher induction*, the purpose of which is to train, support, and then retain these effective teachers.



By Harry K. Wong, Ed.D.

Conversely, school districts with a high new-teacher attrition rate do what the great majority of schools do: They hire a teacher, give that teacher an assignment, and expect the individual to go forth and teach. Can you imagine an airline hiring a new pilot, providing no training, and then telling him or her to fly a planeload of passengers to Memphis? Can you imagine any private-sector company *not* training its newly hired employees?

The greatest tragedy in education today is the annual loss from *not* harnessing the potential intellectual capacity in new teachers. Think of the potential impact on student achievement. Each year, some 200,000 new teachers are hired. In urban schools, up to 17% of those teachers will leave after one year, and about 50% in all schools will leave within five years. The loss of a new teacher is more than an inconvenience and a brain drain. It also is a serious drain on a school district's limited and shrinking financial resources.

Human resource specialists in high-performance industries know that a bad hire costs a company nearly 2.5 times the employee's initial salary in recruitment and personnel expenditures and lost productivity. Applying this formula, even conservative figures put the cost of each teacher who leaves the profession during the first three years in excess of \$50,000. If 20 teachers are lost, that's \$1 million. Many school districts continue to ignore this fact because direct costs are invisible, hidden in salaries and spread across human resources, business services, and staff development budgets. However, the bottom line is that a million dollars is a million dollars! The indirect costs in extra work for existing employees, reduced teacher effectiveness, and, most importantly, lost student productivity are incalculable.

If you don't like the use of 2.5 times the employee's salary as an index of cost, assume that a district has 1,000 teachers, a 5% turnover rate (these days, an extremely conservative estimate), and an average teacher salary of \$25,000. Let's set the replacement costs for a professional employee at approximately 1.75 times the average salary. However, let's be conservative again and assume that the direct replacement costs for this district are only one-half this rate, approximately 0.875 times the average salary. The cost for recruiting and replacing 5% of the district's teachers (50 teachers) would be \$1,093,750—a loss no school board would, or should, choose to accept.

Induction Doesn't Cost, It Pays

The operating budget for the aforementioned Lafourche Parish Public Schools' new-teacher induction program is \$50,000 a year (Breux and Wong 2003), and there's always money left over! The money allocated covers the first three years of the induction process, including such expenses as stipends, supplies, refreshments, and equipment. If Lafourche Parish retains only one new teacher a year, it recoups its entire investment. In the 2000–2001 school year, the schools retained 45 of the 46 new teachers hired.

My Dream Turned Out Differently

New teachers are always excited and nervous for the first day of school, and I was no exception. At 26 years old, I had a college degree, a background in journalism, and dreams of teaching English to a classroom of low-income children. In Philadelphia, a recruiting campaign pushed the idea that we could make a difference, and the city's \$1,500 hiring bonus sweetened the offer. In September of 1999, I began my second career as one of the city's 1,200 new teachers. We were all filled with hope.

Right away, the troubles started. The district assigned me to middle school—the least desirable age group—and I unknowingly selected one of the most challenging schools in Philadelphia. I received one day of orientation, during which I mostly filled out forms. No one officially welcomed me or the other three new teachers at my school; in fact the veterans received us with skepticism, at best. Apparently, I was assigned a mentor, but she was busy with her own classroom. I'll never forget the first morning when a student asked me for a pass to the bathroom and I didn't know where it was. I have heard administrators describe a new teacher's first year as “sink or swim.” I began to sink.

At the end of September, the newspapers reported that 100 of Philadelphia's newly recruited teachers had already quit. During the year, six teachers in my school walked off the job, and I fought the temptation to join them. Isolated in my classroom with few supplies, no experience, and nowhere to turn for help, I struggled to control students. When the \$1,500 bonus arrived, it meant little to me—as I would have paid twice that amount to succeed. While I had it tough, the loss was greatest for my sixth graders, almost all of who failed the state writing tests in the spring. It was seeing their disappointed faces each day that pushed me out the door in June.

On many days, I truly loved teaching, but my lack of experience made the bad days too terrible for everyone involved. Overwhelmingly, I felt guilty, confused, and hopeless about the experience. Yet, in the back of my mind, I wondered if I hadn't been thrown in cold, if I had had some training, some support, could my brief career in teaching have turned out differently?

— Christina Asquith, new teacher

Thus, the induction program not only saved the district money, it actually “made” money.

For its investment in the induction program, Lafourche Parish has seen a staggering drop in the teacher attrition rate. Before implementing the program in 1996, Lafourche Parish schools had a 51% annual teacher attrition rate. That rate decreased to 15% almost immediately after implementing the program. Today, the district's teacher attrition rate hovers around 7%—a decrease of approximately

80% since the program's inception. Districts around the country are experiencing similar results.

With its induction program in place, the Leyden High School District in Franklin Park, Ill., has an attrition rate of only 4.4%. Leyden Superintendent Kathryn Robbins, who runs the program, says, "Our induction program has proved to be one of our best investments. Every district should absolutely be doing it." Leyden's induction program costs about \$100 a day, most of which is for food.

"At a time of budgetary crises, our Teacher Induction Institute is more critical than ever," says Kathy McCollum, director of new-teacher induction for Medford, Ore., schools. Yet another example can be found in Nevada's Clark County Schools, which hires more than 1,600 new teachers each year and has an attrition rate of less than 10%. According to Program Director Karyn Wright, "Induction more than pays for itself."

Mentoring Is Not Induction

New-teacher induction is nothing more than an organized, systematic training program similar to those used by the private sector. Large corporations—Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and American Airlines, for example—train their new employees, as do such small local businesses as real estate offices, dentists, and grocery stores.

Compare these businesses with schools, where new teachers sign some employment papers, receive a key and the name of a mentor (who may or may not be willing, able, or available to help), and are sent to a classroom, too often doomed to discouragement and failure. The cycle repeats as administrators scurry and spend more money to hire replacements that also leave within the first few years of employment. There is tremendous potential inside the raw material of new teachers, but these diamonds in the rough are being turned into coal and cast aside. Money is being wasted, and students are suffering.

Some school districts support their new teachers by providing a mentor. Despite the fact that the terms *mentoring* and *induction* often are used interchangeably, they are not

synonymous. Induction is a process used by districts and schools to train, support, and retain new teachers. It is a highly organized and comprehensive staff development process involving many people and components. This sustained process typically lasts from two to five years. Mentoring programs simply provide new teachers with a designated support person (the mentor), usually for a year. Mentors are important, but they are only one component of the induction process.

Mentors cannot replace or be the only form of formal or informal induction assistance. In 2003, researchers reported that the "induction programs" in more than 30 states comprised mentoring and little else (Britton et al. 2003).

Mentoring programs often lack real structure, relying instead on the willingness of the new teacher and veteran to seek out each other. It is important to note that assigning a mentor is not induction, and mentoring alone is insufficient to train and support new teachers.

Many mentors, according to Britton and his colleagues, are assigned to respond to a new teacher's day-to-day crises and provide teaching survival tips (2003). In other words, they are simply a safety net for new teachers. In itself, mentoring has no purpose, goal, or agenda for student achievement and thus provides no evidence of the connection between well-executed professional development and student learning.

Elements of a Successful Induction Program

Teacher induction is not a series of willy-nilly, hit-or-miss workshops. Effective teacher-induction programs typically kick off with four or five days of training before school begins and involve systematic professional development over two or three years. They include a strong sense of administrative support. They integrate a mentoring component and a structure for modeling effective teaching through the use of demonstration classrooms. Most importantly, induction programs provide networks through which new and veteran teachers interact, treat one another with respect, and are valued for their respective contributions (Wong 2003).

Although induction programs differ from school district to school district, they share certain characteristics. For example, all successful induction programs help new teachers establish effective classroom management procedures, routines, and instructional practices. They help develop a teacher's sensitivity to and understanding of the community, as well as his or her passion for lifelong learning and professional growth. Successful programs also promote unity and teamwork among the entire teaching and learning community.

Successful induction programs include the following elements (see figure 1, p. 22):

- Four or five days of training in classroom management and effective teaching techniques before school begins;
- A continuum of professional development through systematic training over a period of two or three years;

\$50,000: What Will It Buy?

- One Lexus LS 430
- Four first-class airline tickets to Europe
- 10 nights in the Presidential Suite at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco
- 500 tickets to *The Lion King* on Broadway
- 1,696 shares of Microsoft stock (valued on 5-21-03)
- 15,873 Happy Meals at McDonald's
- 50,000 California lottery tickets (odds of winning are 40 million to 1)
- 135,135 first-class U.S. postage stamps
- ∞ number of children's lives affected by just one knowledgeable, effective teacher

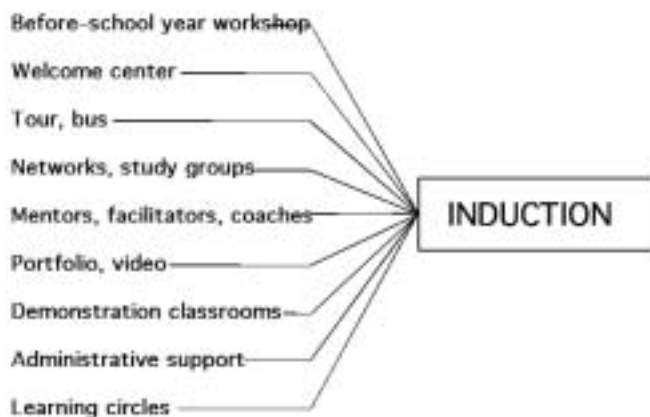


Figure 1. Some components of induction programs.

- Study groups in which new teachers can network and build support, commitment, and leadership within a learning community;
- A strong sense of administrative support;
- A supportive mentoring component;
- A structure for modeling effective teaching during inservices and mentoring; and
- Opportunities for inductees to visit demonstration classrooms.

Studies confirm that teacher quality has the greatest impact on student achievement. Therefore, it makes sense to strive not only to attract good teachers but also to train, support, and retain them. When we retain good teachers, our schools become more effective, and student achievement improves.

The Result Is Student Achievement

A large-scale study in 1997 revealed that every additional dollar spent on raising teacher quality netted greater student achievement gains than did any other use of school resources (Darling-Hammond 1997). The most cost-effective way to increase student achievement is to improve teacher competency, which can be achieved at a fraction of the cost of reducing class size or spending money on yet another quick-fix program or fad.

Harvard economist Ronald Ferguson studied 900 Texas school districts and concluded that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers resulted in greater increases in student achievement than other, non-instructional uses of school resources (Protheroe, Lewis, and Paik 2002).

Annette L. Breaux, director of the Lafourche Parish new-teacher induction program, writes in *New Teacher Induction: How to Train, Support, and Retain New Teachers*:

- Every new teacher is a human resource, a person who has invested years in preparing for a life dedicated to helping young people; we have a responsibility to ensure that these new teachers will learn and succeed, just as we have a responsibility to ensure that every child will learn and succeed.

- New teachers must be trained if we want them to succeed; it is much better to train new teachers and risk losing them than not to train them and risk keeping them.
- An induction process is the best way to send a message to your teachers that you value them and want them to succeed and stay. (Breaux and Wong 2003, p. v)

The answer has been right in front of us all along: Rather than allocate scarce funds for expensive efforts to recruit and replace teachers, let's save money by training, supporting, and thus keeping the many capable young teachers who truly can and will make a difference. Whether we consider the direct costs or the hidden costs associated with replacing a teacher, we must acknowledge and act to prevent the slow but steady leak that is depleting school budgets and hobbling efforts to make our schools truly effective. We can no longer afford *not* to induct our new teachers. The school districts can't afford the replacement costs, the new teachers can't afford the lack of training and support, and our children cannot afford to be taught by untrained teachers. If you induct your new teachers, they will stay, you will save, and children will succeed!

For additional information about specific induction programs, please visit <http://www.NewTeacher.com>.

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