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# Retaining the Next Generation of Teachers: The Importance of School-Based Support

*Clever incentives may attract new teachers, but only improving the culture and working conditions of schools will keep them*

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Throughout the United States, school officials are either anticipating or already experiencing a teacher shortage. The projected need to fill 2.2 million vacancies by 2010 will be intensely felt in high-poverty schools and in certain subjects (math, science, and foreign languages) and programs (bilingual and special education). Recognizing this, policymakers are devising ways to make teaching more attractive, and the competition for high-quality teachers is fierce. Recruiters in various districts can now waive preservice training, offer signing bonuses, forgive student loans, and even provide mortgage subsidies or health club memberships. While such strategies may well increase the supply of new teachers to schools, they provide no assurance of keeping them there, for they are but short-term responses to long-term challenges.

The challenge of attracting and retaining quality teachers is heightened by increased pressure for district and school accountability, often in the form of high-stakes testing and mandated curricular standards. In response to these mandates, districts are introducing reforms and initiatives at a frenetic pace. As a result, new teachers are struggling to learn their craft in dynamic and frequently chaotic environments.

At the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, our research suggests that the key to addressing shortages lies not in attractive recruitment policies but in support and training for new teachers at the school site. For it is in schools and

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classrooms where teachers must find success and satisfaction. It is there they will decide whether or not to continue to teach.

As Richard Ingersoll at the University of Pennsylvania has found, the “revolving door” of teacher attrition and turnover is a primary contributor to school staffing shortages, particularly in urban schools. Poor working conditions and lack of significant on-the-job training and support are major reasons why many new teachers leave the profession within five years. Our interviews with 50 first- and second-year Massachusetts teachers working in a wide range of schools revealed that many who are eager to become teachers find that they need much more encouragement and direction than their schools currently provide.

For instance, we found that new teachers had few of the traditional supports that one might expect would be routine. They reported receiving little guidance about what to teach or how to teach it. Instead, most described struggling on their own each day to cobble together content and materials, often with no coherent, long-term plan for meeting specific learning objectives. Although virtually all of the new teachers we interviewed had official mentors assigned by their districts, those mentors frequently taught in different schools, levels, or subjects, and meetings with them were intermittent and brief at best. Our respondents yearned for ongoing observations and feedback, but classroom visits by colleagues and administrators were rare.

Learning to teach well is slow, difficult work. Managing a classroom, choosing or creating curriculum, developing sound instructional strategies, accurately assessing student understanding, and adjusting to student needs are complex tasks, and new teachers need time and support to develop the necessary knowledge and skills. However, few of the new teachers in our study said their schools were organized to help them cope with difficulties and become better teachers. As novices, they were eager to watch the experts and develop their craft under guidance, but only a small number of our respondents had access to the wisdom of experienced colleagues.

Neither the structures nor the cultures of their schools seemed to be geared toward their needs as novice teachers. Schedules rarely provided regular time for joint planning and observation, nor was such collaboration expected or encouraged. Meetings were designed to dispense information to individuals, rather than to share struggles and strategies, which is necessary to fulfill a collective responsibility for educating the school's

students. Mentoring and other induction programs were limited because they were not embedded within a professional culture that valued and supported these relationships and activities. In the worst cases, school leaders played no role in creating a culture that was welcoming and supportive to new teachers.

The new teachers who reported feeling the most supported described their schools as having what we called “integrated professional cultures.” There, new teachers could expect frequent and meaningful interaction among faculty members across all experience levels, and an appropriate novice status that accounted for their developmental needs while not underestimating their potential contributions. In addition, responsibility for the school and its students was shared among all colleagues within the school. In contrast, many new teachers found themselves subtly excluded from professional contact with veterans. Others, particularly those in charter schools that were staffed mostly with novices, found that there were no senior teachers to whom they could turn for advice or expertise.

While states and districts can assume responsibility for increasing pay, reducing or altering entry requirements, or creating career ladders, such initiatives will ultimately make little difference if a teacher is dissatisfied with teaching. And it is at the school site, rather than at the district, where key factors influencing new teachers’ experiences converge; it is there that induction efforts should be centered. Well-matched mentors, curriculum guidance, collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and inspired leadership all support new teachers in ways that recruitment incentives never can.

The success of school-based induction programs hinges on how teachers work together, and the principal can play a central role in establishing faculty norms and facilitating interaction among teachers with various levels of experience. Successful induction may also be promoted by having teachers and principals play greater roles in the hiring process and in selecting their future colleagues. School-based hiring can be an important tool for shaping professional culture and building school capacity.

Establishing support programs at the school would benefit not only new teachers, but all teachers in schools striving to improve instructional practice for students. For example, novices and veterans both benefit from frequent and meaningful interaction with colleagues. Veteran teachers may well learn from and with their novice colleagues about standards-based instruction, the latest approaches to literacy, or strategies for integrating technology into the classroom.

Therefore, the benefits of these school-based efforts are not limited to novice teacher induction, for they provide renewal for experienced teachers and the foundation for school-wide improvement.

Improving working conditions and restructuring schools to support individual, group, and organizational learning is a big task. While teachers and principals must do most of the heavy lifting, fostering integrated professional cultures and creating truly supportive school-based induction programs will require time and money, resources often in short supply in public schools. As policymakers direct new resources into recruitment, they would be wise to direct a good portion of those resources toward the schools, for it is at the individual school site where the potential to address the teacher shortage truly rests.

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### For Further Information

R.M. Ingersoll. *A Different Approach to Solving the Teacher Shortage Problem* (Teaching Quality Policy Brief No. 3). Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2001.  
<http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/>

S.M. Kardos, S. M. Johnson, H.G. Peske, D. Kauffman, and E. Liu. "Counting on Colleagues: New Teachers Encounter the Professional Cultures of Their Schools." *Educational Administration Quarterly* (forthcoming).

D. Kauffman, S.M. Johnson, S.M. Kardos, E. Liu, and H.G. Peske. "'Lost at Sea': New Teachers' Experiences with Curriculum and Assessment." *Teachers College Record* (forthcoming).

H.G. Peske, E. Liu, S.M. Johnson, D. Kauffman, and S.M. Kardos. "The Next Generation of Teachers: Changing Conceptions of a Career in Teaching." *Phi Delta Kappan* (forthcoming).

*Other useful resources:*

National Commission on Teaching & America's Future,  
Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th St., Box  
117, New York, NY 10027; 212-678-4153; fax: 212-678-4039.  
[www.nctaf.org](http://www.nctaf.org)

National Council on Teacher Quality. Online at [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)

Education Week. "Quality Counts 2000: Who Should Teach?"  
Available online at [www.edweek.org/sreports/qc00/](http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc00/)

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