

Section 1

Teacher Retention Yields Positive Results for Schools and Students

If we are committed to making sure that no child is left behind, school districts across the country will need to develop successful strategies both to support new teachers and to keep veteran teachers in place.

Alliance for Excellent Education, 2002

Teaching touches the lives of all children from a variety of backgrounds, including those from families that exhibit a wide range of cultural and linguistic diversity. Teaching also touches the lives of children with varying ability levels, including those with disabilities. It is the profession in which we have a chance to provide opportunities that might otherwise be lost. Sometimes, we have the opportunity to actually change the course of future events for many children who come to school with significant disadvantages, such as poverty, parental and societal neglect, as well as intellectual, social and physical disabilities. It is a profession, however, that loses thousands of dedicated members each year, putting those most vulnerable children and youth at risk of failing to realize opportunities afforded to them through quality education.

Understanding why teachers leave is the first step in getting them to stay. Teachers leave when they encounter environments that lack essential professional supports, e.g., 1) support from school leadership, 2) organizational structures and workforce conditions that convey respect and value for them, and 3) induction and mentoring programs for new and experienced teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, and Peske, 2001). Yet, because of the complexity of the issues embedded in retaining high quality teachers, administrators find addressing these essential issues to be a daunting task. This guide is intended to assist administrators in planning, implementing and evaluating a high quality teacher retention program that will keep the best teachers in the hardest to staff disciplines and teaching in the most challenging classrooms.

While good teachers are needed in all settings, there are particular fields of teaching and geographic areas in which it is more difficult to recruit and keep qualified professionals. For more than 25 years, the American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) has

consistently reported that the areas of greatest need in education-related disciplines nationwide include teachers and related service personnel in special education, mathematics, and science (AAEE, 2003). While there are other areas of need in particular geographic areas of the country, these three teaching disciplines are especially difficult to staff in urban and rural schools. In particular, urban schools with high poverty rates are challenged in their attempts to recruit and retain qualified teachers. In high-poverty high schools almost 30 percent of all classes are being taught by teachers who did not major in the subject they are teaching, and in high-poverty middle schools, more than 50 percent of classes face the same problem (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2002).

Special educators, the professionals in greatest need in public schools today (AAEE, 2003), work daily to deliver on the promises of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), yet the complexities of the profession and the environments in which they often work conspire to convince them to leave. Across states of the Northeast, 28percent of all special educators were undecided about remaining in the field or intended to stay only until something else comes along (Westat, 2002a). The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) cited unmanageable workloads, the interference of paperwork with teaching, and teaching children from four or more disability categories as reasons given specifically by special education teachers who intended to leave as soon as possible (Westat, 2002b). Other reasons for leaving included unsupportive school climates, minimal professional development opportunities, non-licensure or certification status, administrative burdens associated with IDEA, caseloads with multiple areas of disabilities, and role conflict or dissonance (Billingsley, 2003). Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, and Weber (1998) noted that six percent of all special education teachers leave the teaching field each year with an additional five percent of special education teachers transferring to another field of teaching.

As a result, administrators face a chronic shortage of licensed special educators, in addition to math and science teachers, in an era of increasing accountability for *all* teachers to be highly qualified and for *all* students to make adequate yearly progress. Yet, never was the effectiveness of a special education, math or science teacher more important than in today's educational arena. Therefore, this document, while applicable to all teachers, will focus on retaining teachers in the hard to staff teaching positions, particularly the various positions within special education teaching. Issues presented here, along with retention strategies for

implementation and recommendations for action, can be applied to any teaching field, but because of the enormous challenges they face, teachers who work with students with disabilities in a variety of settings are given additional consideration.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has challenged the nation to improve teacher retention by 50 percent by 2006 (NCTAF, 2003). The operational aspects of this challenge are daunting, particularly given the overlay of retention challenges within special education, and the math and science disciplines. The goal does provide, however, an opportunity to focus on workforce development more clearly. Two issues that are fundamental to visualizing a successful retention program in your school or district -- increased student achievement and realized savings in replacement costs for teachers who previously would have left-- are discussed more explicitly in the next two subsections.

Retaining high quality teachers is fundamental to increasing student achievement

The individual achievement of children is highly dependent on the effectiveness of the teacher, and the impact of ineffective or unqualified teachers across years dooms children to instructional losses that cannot be regained (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). University of Tennessee researchers W. L. Sanders and J. C. Rivers found that within grade levels, the most dominant factor affecting students' achievement was the effect of the teacher, and that this effect increased over time. Likewise, Darling-Hammond (2000) reported that inexperienced teachers, i.e., those with less than three years of experience, were typically less effective than more senior teachers, though these effects tended to level off after five years. Kati Haycock (2002) of The Education Trust drew from the 1998 Boston Public Schools' (BPS) High School Restructuring when she noted that within one academic year in BPS's high schools, the top third of teachers judged to be effective produced as much as six times the learning growth as the bottom third of teachers. Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1989) noted that "research suggests that teachers make marked gains in effectiveness during their first years in the classroom. Consequently, reducing the frequency with which children are taught by a successive stream of novice teachers may be one step toward improving educational quality" (p. 343). Steff, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) reviewed the literature on the life cycle of a teacher and the time it takes for a new teacher to become proficient. They concluded

"The apprentice phase begins for most teachers when they receive responsibility for planning and delivering instruction on their own. This phase continues until integration and synthesis of knowledge, pedagogy, and confidence merges, marking the beginning of the professional period. Typically, the apprentice phase includes the induction period and extends into the second or third year of teaching." p.6

Teacher retention initiatives are most often based on this recognized need to keep in classrooms those teachers who are qualified and utilize effective teaching strategies, demonstrated by increased student achievement year after year.

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While some of the dynamics of retention are not in our control, e.g., family moves, birth of children, retirement (Billingsley, 1993), investing in resources that effectively address the reasons for teacher attrition increases the likelihood that a highly qualified teacher who increases student achievement will stay in the field. Special educators have indicated that they were more likely to stay in teaching when their workload was manageable, their school was supportive of staff and students, and paperwork did not interfere significantly with their teaching (Westat, 2002b). Retaining professionals in special education, math and science, particularly in urban and rural settings and in the early years of their professional life, when they are most vulnerable to leaving the field, is a local district's first step in developing highly qualified hard to place teachers who can increase achievement of all students.

Retaining qualified teachers makes good 'cents'!

Addressing teacher retention in the midst of high attrition, may at first glance, seem costly and out of reach for school districts that are trying to cover the costs of mandated instruction programs recommended for increasing student achievement. Yet, the costs of teachers leaving – termination processes, hiring substitutes, recruitment and hiring processes, orientation, and initial professional development – are costs that cannot be ignored. Resources that could be spent on

building an experienced and high quality education workforce are drained off for efforts such as these (Norton, 1999).

The Texas State Board of Educator Certification discovered through its Cost of Teacher Turnover study (Texas Center for Educational Research, November 2000) that the cost associated with teacher turnover

“...represents a cost to public education beyond the expense of operating schools and is a wasted expense that does not contribute to the education of Texas children...High teacher turnover is a burden of cost and inefficiency to the Texas public school system, and turnover may also affect student performance, particularly in schools where the turnover rate is consistently high” (page 1).

Using one industry employee turnover model and its own empirical data, the Texas study concluded that the cost of teacher turnover could be estimated conservatively as 20 percent of the leaving teacher's annual salary. Using other employee turnover models, estimates for teacher turnover costs were as high as 50 percent to 200 percent of the leaver's salary (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000; Norton, 1999).

In planning for a teacher retention initiative, administrators must also consider district-wide policies and practices designed to reduce costs for salaries, such as early retirement initiatives and the subsequent reduced costs of salaries for less experienced teachers. Human Resource Departments in local school districts are usually staffed with the same number of employees, whether teachers are staying or leaving, therefore some fixed costs will prevail, regardless of the “state of teacher attrition” within a district. Once all of these factors are accounted for, a yearly reporting mechanism should be put in place that clearly demonstrates the savings in resources that do accrue when unintended attrition is lowered. The use of lower turnover cost savings can then be focused on teacher retention activities. One source of funding to assist in planning for recruitment and retention initiatives can be accessed through the timely implementation of the Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), which encourages local districts to develop and implement mechanisms to assist schools to effectively recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, principals and specialists in core academic subject areas.

A teacher workforce that is well trained, engaged in continuing professional development, and committed to staying in your state or district will result in all students receiving appropriate instruction and subsequent increased student achievement for all, as well. Administrators assuming leadership of a retention effort as part of a long-range plan for developing the district's

teaching force is an important first step. With a focus on actively supporting teachers to remain, those reclaimed turnover costs could be targeted at ameliorating conditions that special educators, in particular, have given for leaving the profession.

Teacher Retention Happens at the School Level

“ . . . the key to addressing shortages lies . . . in schools and classrooms where teachers must find success and satisfaction. It is there they will decide whether or not to continue to teach.”

*The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers
Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Research on new teachers' attitudes, values and responses to conditions found in their first and second years of teaching, conducted by Susan Moore Johnson and her colleagues (2001) at the *Project on the Next Generation of Teachers*, has reported similar findings by others in the field. These findings have indicated that new teachers make their decisions to stay in teaching based on the level of support and acceptance they receive at the building level. Research on why teachers leave the profession or migrate to another district or state has indicated that addressing retention through professional development activities that 1) improve organizational structures and working conditions and 2) improve professional supports through targeted leadership preparation are most effective in retaining high quality teachers. In addition, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality <http://www.teachingquality.org/> reported that districts that are developing induction and mentoring programs with well designed assessment and support components are producing positive retention trends for all teachers (Barry, Hopkins-Thompson, & Hoke, 2002). Therefore, this manual will concentrate on the following three areas in assisting local school districts to reduce teacher attrition and improve professional development for all teachers.

1) Administrative Support and Leadership Preparation.

There is research that indicates that administrative leadership is the most important factor in determining the climate of a school and there are specific leader activities that allow all teachers to feel supported in their work. Not only do these activities and supports facilitate the maintenance of professional relationships within a school, they also provide needed resources for effective teacher practice (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Gerlach, 2001; Evans, 1999; Goor, Schwenn, & Boyer, 1997; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; CEC, 2001).

The Philadelphia Education Fund study (2001) noted that schools in which there was a low turnover of teachers had principals whom demonstrated specific skills and management styles. These included

- implementing a strong induction program that reflected the principal's personal involvement in meeting with new teachers, having their office open for conversations, assigning new teachers classroom rosters that were not heavily weighted with challenging students, and providing mentors early in the school year;
- overseeing a safe and orderly school environment with active support for teachers on disciplinary issues;
- maintaining a welcoming and respectful administrative approach toward all staff, the children, their parents, and school visitors;
- developing the leadership skills of school staff; and
- providing materials and supplies to all teachers in a consistent, timely, and inclusive manner.

A management style grounded in respect for all those in the school environment, along with strong communication and interpersonal skills, and effective organizational strategies, encourages all teachers to feel supported and to acquire a sense of commitment to the school and to their responsibilities.

Effective administrators also recognize that special education teachers often feel isolated and uncertain of their role in the organization of the school. There are, then, specific aspects of administrator support that are important to special education teachers. Special education teachers know they are supported when a school's mission and goals are inclusive of all children and when they have been involved in development of these goals. Special educators know they are supported when the school principal or leader participates knowledgeably in the development of a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or in the resolution of a discipline issue, basing decisions on IDEA. All teachers know they are supported in teaching children with disabilities when school leaders develop professional evaluations that document specific knowledge and skills that are used in the instruction of a child with unique learning needs.

Professional development resources can be used to promote an "inclusive" administrative leadership that values the tasks of all teachers in the following ways:

- development of essential beliefs that all children can learn and principals are responsible for the learning of all children in their building;
- careful consideration of the impact of disabilities on student performance, referral-to-placement procedures, confidentiality procedures, standards for highly qualified special education teachers, and discipline procedures;
- collaborative planning and decision making, including the coordination of effective teacher supports; and
- informed advocacy for inclusive schools.

Administrative supports for teachers of students with disabilities, as well as teachers of all students, assist in the development of collegiality and collaboration among those who are too often left out of the day-to-day communication and support networks. Involvement of all teachers in these components of a schools' culture is necessary to promote the kind of inter-relating within a school's professional environment that will result in more effective informal methods of professional training and, eventually, higher teacher retention.

2) Workforce Conditions

The climate within a school building and the workforce conditions it encompasses act as either a support or a deterrent for teacher retention (Westat, 2002c; Ingersoll, 2001; Gersten, et.al., 2001; Johnson, et.al., 2001). Workforce conditions that encourage the capabilities and emphasize the worth of individuals contribute to retention (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2001, p. 40). School climates and working conditions that include teacher decision-making practices regarding both instruction and school governance issues, enforce student discipline policies, incorporate professional development opportunities, strive for teaching assignments aligned with certification and background, and provide extra compensation for difficult and time-consuming duties facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills among new, mid-career, and more experienced teachers. They are also more successful in retaining all teachers than school buildings that leave these functions up to the happenstance of building alliances or impromptu conversations in the teachers' lounge.

In particular, special education teachers are more likely to not only stay in their teaching position when building level conditions are supportive of them professionally, but they are more likely to stay in teaching, per se (Billingsley, 2003). Likewise, the availability of material resources for all teachers, but especially special educators, impacts feelings of satisfaction and self-efficacy (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000;

