

Why New Teachers Leave ...

By Leslie Baldacci

My classroom was just one deck chair on the Titanic. The kids ran wild. They swore, fought, refused to work. At assemblies they booed the principal. The only punishment was suspension, and that wasn't so terrible. As one of my students, Cortez, put it, "At least it's better than having to come up here."

This was seventh and eighth grade in a poverty-level, urban school on the South Side of Chicago. Our classes were bursting at the seams with 35, 36, and 37 kids apiece. Tough kids, many of them raising themselves in tough circumstances. There was barely room to walk around the classrooms for all the desks. When the kids were in the room, there was no room left. The noise and heat levels were like a steel mill.

I understand the teacher shortage and why one-third of new teachers quit after three years and nearly half bail out after five years. I believe my experience was more typical than extraordinary.

What was not typical about my experience was my background. As a newspaperwoman for 25 years, I had reported on Chicago's education crises long before the city's "school reform" effort started in the late 1980s. By 1999, Chicago's schools had improved their finances, halted a disastrous cycle of teacher strikes, fixed crumbling buildings, and put up new ones. Student test scores were beginning to improve. Yet, Mayor Daley worried about sustaining the momentum. He asked, "How do you know that we set the foundation and it's not going to fall back?"

(Continued on page 10)

By Susan Moore Johnson and
The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers

Esther spent nine years as an engineer designing flight simulators for Navy pilots before she considered teaching. She loved her job for its intellectual challenge, the collegial nature of her workplace, and the variety of tasks and responsibilities it offered. But she resigned when her first child was born because she did not think the demands of the job were compatible with raising a family. Her substantial salary had allowed Esther and her husband to build savings that would support them for several years on a single wage. However, after six years, their savings were low, prompting Esther to decide to work part-time as a substitute teacher in her children's school where she already served as a volunteer.

Gradually, Esther began to think about becoming a teacher. People had always said that she was good at explaining things, and she had enjoyed her work as a substitute. Also, teaching would make it possible for her to be home with her children after school and during vacations. But the decision was not easy. A beginning teacher's salary would be at least \$30,000 less than she could earn if she returned to work as an engineer.

Nonetheless, Esther began to investigate education programs that would lead to a teaching license. Then, in spring 1999, the Massachusetts Department of Education announced the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program (MSBP), which offered outstanding candidates \$20,000 to participate in an intensive summer training institute and then teach in the state's public schools for at least four years. Massachusetts legislators intended the program to recruit talented individuals who traditionally would not have considered teaching, particularly in high-need subject areas, such as math, science, or

... and Why New Teachers Stay

special education, and in schools serving low-income populations (Fowler, 2001, 2003).

Esther found the bonus and its selectivity appealing, but she was most attracted by the fast-track alternative preparation program that state officials created to move bonus recipients quickly into the classroom. A seven-week institute, which included student teaching in a summer school, would enable Esther to have her own classroom of students by September. Given the length and expense of traditional teacher education programs, she found this very attractive and applied. She recalled, "It got me in at least a full year, if not more, earlier than I would have [entered]."

Soon after Esther learned that she had received the bonus, she was encouraged to apply for a job working on the space shuttle, a job she would have pursued if a suitable job had been available for her husband nearby. But this did not work out, so Esther completed the summer institute for MSBP teachers, and accepted a position teaching ninth-grade math in an urban, vocational high school. Given the shortage of mathematics and science teachers, particularly in urban areas, Esther was just the sort of skilled, unconventional candidate Massachusetts reformers had hoped to recruit. With idealism and enthusiasm, she hoped to draw



on her experience as an engineer to help her students enjoy learning math. But after her first year, Esther left for a more affluent school in the suburbs. What happened? And what happens across the nation to the 50 percent of new teachers who quit teaching all together within five years?

As Esther and her counterparts began teaching in 1999, public educators and policymakers across the country were preparing in earnest for a predicted teacher shortage. At the start of the new century, about 30 percent—approximately one million—of the nation's public school teachers were over 50 years old (NCES, 2002) and expected to retire by 2010. At the same time, increasing birth and immigration

(Continued on page 13)



Why New Teachers Leave

(Continued from page 8)

I believed the answer lay in the front-line troops, teachers. So, after being accepted to the alternative certification program called Teachers For Chicago, I turned in my press credentials to become a teacher. The program would pay for my master's degree, minimize the requirements for entering graduate school, and put me in a classroom immediately as a teacher, with a mentor looking over my shoulder and working with me daily. I would earn \$24,000 a year.

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My school had two buildings—a beautiful old yellow brick school, built like a fortress in 1925, and another from the 1970s, a poured-concrete prefab shell three stories high. Built as a temporary solution to overcrowding, it had long ago outlived its intended lifespan. Over time, the windows had become a cloudy opaque, impossible to see in or out.

I walked in a side door, past a security guard who did not question me, and introduced myself to the ladies in the office as “the new Teachers For Chicago intern.”

“Hello!” they said, friendly and smiling.

They paged the principal, who came right away and took me into his office to chat. He looked weary. His eyes were bloodshot. Above his desk, tufts of pink insulation poked through a hole where ceiling tiles were missing. Other tiles were water-stained.

When I asked the principal for copies of the books I'd be using when school started in eight weeks, he sighed heavily and folded his hands on his desk. It wasn't that simple, he said. He wasn't sure what grade I'd be teaching. He was still working on his organizational lineup for fall. He assured me that my Teachers For Chicago mentor would be in touch and help me with the details of getting set up.

In late July, when I stopped by the school again, the principal emerged from behind closed doors to level his bloodshot eyes at me and tell me he still wasn't sure what grade I was going to get, but it would definitely be fifth grade or higher. Two more teachers had quit, I later learned, and he had requested four additional Teachers For Chicago interns to fill the many empty spots on his organizational chart. The school's first experience with the nine-year-old internship program would place interns in eight of his classrooms. The poor man looked beleaguered. Running a school with 900 kids, 89 percent from poverty-level homes, had to be tough. Student achievement was low: At third grade, 86 percent of the student body was below grade level standards in reading and 79 percent was below grade level in math. On top of that, experienced teachers were bailing out right and left.

It was precisely the setting I wanted. The optimist in me, by virtue of a scant six weeks of education training, thought,

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Where was my backup? What were the consequences? Everyone I sent to the office bounced right back in.

There was no detention.



“What if this turns out to be a turning point for the school? What if all these new people coming in with their energy and ideas make a difference?”

“I'm counting on you,” he told me. I pledged my allegiance with a handshake.

“Put me where you need me,” I told him. I sent up a simple prayer, “Thy will be done.”

About two weeks before school started I finally heard from my mentor; I would be teaching seventh grade in Room 118.

Room 118 was painted seafoam green, which didn't look nearly as putrid with the dark woodwork as the pink in the library across the hall. The ceilings were so high the room echoed. My desk had four drawers; my chair was broken. The cupboards were full of junk I would never use, coated with years of dust. There were 40 desks, which seemed excessive.

All the maps and the AV screen were pulled down. What was behind them? I clomped and creaked over the wood floors to the far corner of the room and tried to roll up the AV screen. A huge chunk of blackboard, ancient, heavy slate, jagged and lethal, lunged forward behind the screen, threatening to slash right through it. Behind the slate was exposed brick, internal walls, vintage 1925. Behind the maps were unsightly chalk boards ruined by years of wear and subsequent efforts to cover them with contact paper and other sticky stuff. What a mess.

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I had never seen kids act like that in a classroom with an adult present. Throughout the first week, they talked incessantly. They shouted to be heard over the talking. They didn't do their work. They got up out of their seats without permission and wandered around, touching and bothering each other on their way. They shouted out questions and comments, including, “This is stupid.” Any little ripple set off a chain reaction. Someone passed gas and everyone leapt from his seat fanning the air and jumping around. They threw

things. They hit. I had broken up two fist fights already. They yelled out the window to their gang-banger friends and relatives, who gathered outside at dismissal time. They swore like sailors. I felt like the old woman who lived in the shoe; I had so many children I didn't know what to do. In addition to the 35 students in my homeroom, more than 100 other students, seventh- and eighth-graders, called me their English teacher.

And where was my backup? What were the consequences? Everyone I sent to the office bounced right back in. There was no detention. There had been no suspensions, even for fighting. I was beginning to think “alternative” schools for poorly behaved students were a myth made up by the board of education. Was my school an alternative school and no one told me about it?

All good questions, but ones I could not resolve. These were issues I needed to discuss with an experienced hand, but I had not seen much of my mentor. I felt like a prisoner in solitary confinement, thrown into a cell and forgotten. I was lucky to get to the bathroom in the course of a day.

* * *

A five-week reorganization brought new levels of angst. I had never heard of such a thing. My children had always had the same teacher from the first day of school to the last. There were no switcheroos unless someone had a baby or got sick. But apparently a principal has a right to shake things up through the fifth week of school. He can move teachers around and fine-tune the operation if things aren't going well. This, it seems, is an annual event at some schools.

That is how my colleague Astrid got switched from seventh-grade social studies to a sixth-grade, self-contained classroom and how Mr. Diaz joined the seventh- and eighth-grade team. Jennifer, an intern with a third-grade class, got switched to second grade.

Astrid was devastated at leaving her seventh-graders and starting over with a sixth-grade class. New faces, new books, new routines. And she had to teach every subject! Her seventh-graders gave her a farewell party. They took a collection and raised \$13.00. Donna went to Sam's Club and bought a cake decorated with “Movin' On Up!” Astrid's new classroom was on the second floor.

When one intern explained to her third-graders that they were getting a new teacher, a student asked, “Why are you giving us up?” The enormity of the question caused the first-year teacher to lose her composure. She started to cry. Then the kids all started bawling. They spent the rest of the day watching a video. “We couldn't do anything else,” she said. “We were wrecked.”

Besides disrupting children's classroom situations, no one seemed to have given any thought to which children should or shouldn't be together. Most of the kids had been together since they were tiny. They had history together. Yet no teachers seemed to have been asked for insight on the group dynamic. At my children's public school, teachers met at the end of the school year to make their lists with an eye toward who worked well with whom and who needed to be separated.

Then again, at a school like mine with a 40 percent mobility rate, who knew who would be back? Year to year, five weeks into the year, changes came.

The seventh and eighth grades would no longer be departmentalized. No more changing classes. Each of us would teach all subjects to our homerooms. Starting that day.



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My students were ignorant of geography. They didn't know the states; they had vague ideas of continents. I decided to craft a research project around travel so they'd get some geography along with language arts. The project was planning their dream trip. I went to a couple of travel agents and grabbed every glossy brochure I could get my hands on.

They had to decide where they wanted to go and how far it was from Chicago. They had to determine the cost, pack a suitcase, and write an itinerary of sightseeing and other activities specific to their destination. They had to find out the currency, the language, what different foods they might eat, and what were good souvenirs to buy. They had to convert currency and account for time zones.

Destinations included Mexico, Jamaica, Africa, Wyoming, Florida, California, and England. The dream trip project, with its cross-curricular integrations of math and social studies, came in handy when, two days before first-quarter report card pick-up, our principal informed Mr. Diaz and me that our worst fear had been realized: The seventh and eighth grades would no longer be departmentalized. No more changing classes. Each of us would teach all subjects to our homerooms. Starting that day.

Apparently, he had decided this some weeks before. He had informed the eighth-grade teachers the week before. “I should have told you, too. My fault. Apologies,” he said curtly before turning on his heel and walking away.

We were in shock. Suddenly, we were on the hook for lesson plans in all subjects, coming up to speed on the curriculum, and teaching the lessons. But that was only a week-by-week crisis. The deeper crisis was whether or not we were up to the task of teaching our students in all subjects. Seventh-grade standardized test scores determine a child's high school options. What if my ineptitude kept someone from getting into an accelerated

program or a better high school? I'd become comfortable with language arts. This new responsibility was daunting.

When my graduate school advisor came to observe just a few days later, she was so upset that she called for the mentor and the principal. "This is a joke," she informed them. She reminded the mentor that her job was to spend an hour each day in each intern's room, co-teaching and modeling for us how to teach. The mentor replied that she was the "disciplinarian."

"You're the mentor," my advisor told her. "If you can't do that job, maybe someone else should. And maybe if this school can't give these interns the support they need, Teachers For Chicago doesn't belong in this school."

I prayed they wouldn't pull us out. There were so many things I had learned already but much I still needed to find out. Why weren't there any television sets or VCRs? Why were there so few books in the library? Why didn't the upper grades get time in the computer lab? Were chronic, truly dangerous kids ever sent to alternative schools?

The bottom line was, I couldn't leave the class. The upset of the reorganization made me realize how desperately they needed continuity. There had to be some value in coming back day after day, trying hard, doing my best, even if my best was woefully inadequate. Those were the only terms under which I could ask the same from them.

After my advisor left, the principal and mentor returned to my room.

"Where's your fire escape plan?" asked my mentor.

"Hanging right there, by the door," I said, pointing to the pink sheets. The children watched, rapt.

"Where's your schedule?"

"Nichelle, please put up the map at the back of the room. The schedule is behind it."

"Where's your grading scale?"

"Bulletin board, lower right corner."

"Where's your time distribution chart?"

"I don't know what that is."

"You should have it posted in the classroom," she said. "Have it on my desk at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

They turned and left.

* * *

Near the end of the school year, the principal informed me that I would be teaching second grade the following year. I assured him I would do my best.

I walked back to my classroom with conflicting emotions. We had filled out wish lists and I had asked for seventh grade again, feeling I could do better now that I knew the pitfalls. My second choice was sixth grade, my third choice fourth. Being sent to second grade, clearly not what I desired, looked like a punishment. Had I been such a dismal failure with my seventh-graders, self-contained in the largest classroom in the school with all of our personalities and problems? Surely someone else would have been a better teacher for them than I was. Was it criminal to leave them with me all year? Would I be equally as dismal with second-graders? My eyes were watery with tears.

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While the whole group of interns was exhausted, as the old-

est I may have been feeling it more than the others. And the fatigue was not just physical. It was mental as well. I was drained more every day by the limits of poverty, the unprofessional manner in which our school was run, the criticism, the nitpicking, the zero encouragement or respect. No one ever told you when you did a good job. It was like no other job situation I had ever experienced.

Toward the end of my second year of teaching, I did a mental count of the teacher interns who had come through the doors and who had left. By my tally, 16 interns came on board in my two years. All but five left in one circumstance or another. I had to find a more supportive school where I was viewed as competent and dedicated.

I made only one effort to find another job. I wrote to a principal who had come up to me after a speech I gave to the Annenberg Foundation a year before, a woman with a short blond Afro and fantastic jewelry who told me, "When you're done with your internship, call me. I like your attitude." Her school was known throughout the city as an exciting school that works for kids.

She called me soon after she received my letter to set up an interview. When I returned her call at 5:40 P.M., she answered the office phone herself. I was not surprised. By then, I understood the extraordinary dedication it took to be a strong school leader.

I set my sights on this school and this leader.

With bags under my eyes, wearing a ridiculous flowered dress and a jean jacket, I went for my interview at the new school. The day happened to be the day of the annual school carnival. I arrived as students were being dismissed. I couldn't believe how many children's names the principal knew. As the students left the building, they were walking, not running. Most were quiet, but if they were talking, it was in normal conversational tones, not screaming. At least 20 kids said to their principal as they left, "Thanks for the carnival."

The principal, vice principal, and I talked for nearly two hours. About teaching children. About testing. About assessment. About curriculum integration. About teams of teachers working collaboratively. The school, with corridors that looked like a museum of African art, had three bands, sports teams, afterschool dance and art programs, an entrepreneurship initiative and video club and book clubs, among other programs. We talked about a school paper and what they would like to see on a fifth-grade reading list.

I realized that I was poised on the brink of an excellent opportunity to see in action the kind of leadership that made this school stand out among 700 elementary schools in our city. I very much wanted to be part of an organization working hard, plowing forward. The faculty was dedicated, innovative, bright. Initiative was applauded. Everyone wore many hats. There were responsibilities to serve on committees, to formulate policies and philosophies. It was a unique team, constantly evolving, positive.

"I'm going to do something strange and forgo the secret conference with the vice principal and listen to my heart," the principal said. "I'm going to offer you the job right now."

I accepted the position on the spot, with sincere gratitude and humility. □

Why New Teachers Stay

(Continued from page 9)

rates and, in some states, class-size reductions further expanded the need for new teachers. Experts projected that public schools would have to hire 2.2 million teachers during the first decade of the new century (Hussar, 1999).

This enormous hiring challenge is exacerbated by the very high turnover rates of new teachers. Nationally, approximately 15 percent of new teachers leave teaching within the first year, 30 percent within three years, and 40 to 50 percent within five years (Ingersoll, 2002; Smith and Ingersoll, 2003). To make matters worse, each year, 15 percent of new teachers change schools (Smith and Ingersoll, 2003).

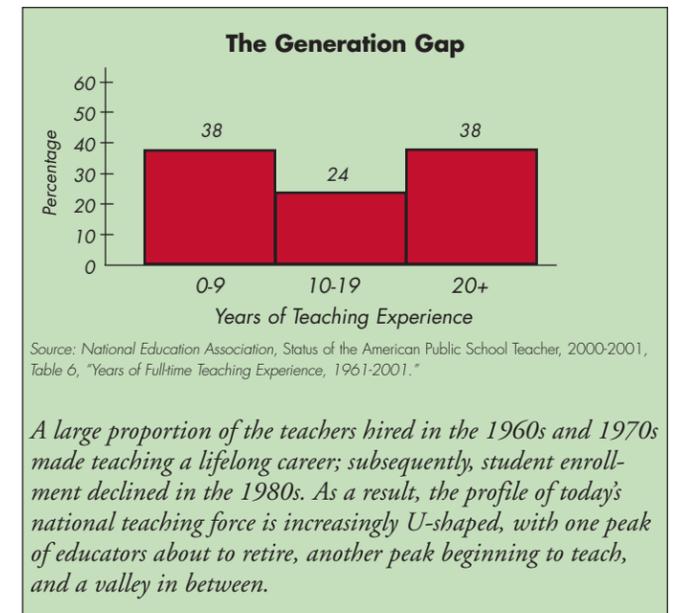
The cost of this turnover is staggering: The Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) estimates the cost of teachers leaving their schools to be \$4.9 billion per year. Of course, the greatest cost is not so easily quantified; it's the price paid in student learning. Researchers have consistently found that first-year teachers are dramatically less effective than their more experienced colleagues (Hanushek et al., 2004).

How can the constant turnover be reduced so our classrooms can be stably staffed? We can only answer the question by understanding the motivations, priorities, and experiences of the next generation of teachers. To do just that, in 1999, we began a four-year study of 50 first- and second-year Massachusetts teachers, including Esther,* who had entered teaching via various paths: traditional teacher education programs, the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program, and charter schools (which, at that time, could hire teachers without state licenses). As we selected participants, we ensured that our sample included variation by race, gender, ethnicity, and career stage.

In our interviews and follow-up surveys, we sought to understand why they had chosen to teach, how they prepared, what their career plans were, what they encountered in their jobs, and why they ultimately chose to stay in their schools, switch schools, or leave the profession altogether.** In a nutshell, what we found was this: This next generation of teachers approaches teaching somewhat tentatively; they will only stay in the classroom if they feel successful and they are most likely to feel successful if they've received support in their jobs—specific, ongoing help from colleagues, administrators, and mentors—and been able to work in conditions that enable good teaching.

In this article, we'll look at three aspects of our research

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that bring us to this conclusion: First, we'll consider the labor context in which these new teachers find themselves—and which makes them, like others in their generation, so much more open to changing jobs. Second, we'll look at the types of problems that thwart new teachers' classroom success, and then return to discover why she didn't feel successful in her vocational high school. Finally, we'll see that whether or not new teachers stay is strongly shaped by the amount of help they receive. Recognizing that success is possible, a sidebar (p. 20) looks at the case of Fred to understand how a strong induction experience, combined with a strong professional, collegial environment, can help teachers succeed—and in doing so, also lead them to stay a while.

I. The Next Generation Is Open to Job-Switching

The next generation of teachers makes career decisions in a labor context strikingly different from 40 years ago, and the interests and options of today's prospective teachers are unlike those of any teachers who preceded them. Until the mid-1960s, teaching was the primary career option for large numbers of well-educated women and people of color, for whom other professions were formally or informally off limits. That is no longer true. Individuals who consider teaching today have many more career options than the retiring generation—many of them with much higher salaries and better working conditions than teaching. In addition, today's new teachers are encountering unprecedented demands: The public now expects schools to teach all students so that they meet high standards—rich and poor, immigrant and native-born, white and

* Pseudonyms are used throughout this article to protect the teachers who participated in our research.

**Although the focus of this article is our longitudinal study of 50 teachers, we have conducted many related studies, including a four-state survey of 486 randomly selected first- and second-year teachers that was designed to generate broader, more generalizable findings.

minority, special needs and mainstream—and to take on new functions beyond the traditional scope of schools' responsibility. Teachers bear the burden of society's newer, higher expectations for schools (Hargreaves, 2003).

Let's briefly examine three significant ways in which the next generation of teachers differs from the retiring generation: the stage in their career in which they enter teaching, the routes they take to the classroom, and the number of years they expect to spend teaching (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, and Kardos, 2001).

Entering Teaching at Different Career Stages

Many of today's new teachers are entering teaching midcareer (far more than ever before), most having worked for a substantial period of time in another field. In our carefully selected sample of 50 Massachusetts first- and second-year teachers, 52 percent entered teaching as a first career, at an average age of 24, whereas 48 percent entered at midcareer, at an average age of 36. Although the number of midcareer entrants in our sample may seem high, subsequent random samples of first- and second-year teachers in seven states revealed that our sample was fairly representative; we found a range of midcareer entrants from 28 percent in Michigan to 47 percent in California (Kardos, 2001, 2003; Kauffman, 2004; Liu, 2001, 2003).

Many of the first-career entrants are similar to the retiring generation in that they always wanted to teach and never seriously considered any other careers: "I feel like I always just knew," explained one. "It sounds corny, but I was born wanting to teach," echoed another. They believed that teaching would be socially valuable and personally rewarding work, yet recognized that the work was neither high-paying nor high-status.

The 24 midcareer entrants in our study came to teaching later, believing that it offered more meaningful work than did their previous employment. As a group, these midcareer entrants brought with them a familiarity with large and small organizations, for-profit and non-profit enterprises, entrepreneurial and bureaucratic settings. Some had worked for multiple supervisors, whereas others had been supervisors themselves. Some had experienced well-defined, useful, and ongoing on-the-job training; some had devised such training for other employees. Thus, midcareer entrants often enter their new school expecting a workplace that was better equipped, more flexible, and more committed to their success than the one they found. They were often dismayed when they found that their new workplaces were dreary or dilapidated, that they had scant access to telephones or the time to use them, that basic resources such as paper were in short supply, and that they had to use precious time to do routine, clerical tasks.

Taking Multiple Routes to the Classroom

Thirty-two of the 50 new teachers we studied entered teaching by traditional routes, pursuing undergraduate and graduate programs that included at least one academic year of coursework, supervised student teaching for six weeks to 10 months, and, ultimately, certification. In general, they appreciated that their programs offered valuable information about

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pedagogy and opportunities to practice their craft under the supervision of an experienced veteran during the school year.

Eighteen teachers in our study entered through an alternate route—five via charter schools and 13 via the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program (MSBP). The teachers who went to work in charter schools completed no teacher preparation program. The MSBP participants completed a seven-week, summer preparation program operated by the state, including a short stint of student teaching in summer school. Nine of these 13 had entered the MSBP with no prior teacher preparation; three others had previously completed certification requirements in traditional master's programs before joining the program, and one had completed all but the student teaching requirement in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. In general, the nontraditional entrants counted more on the value of innate teaching ability and professional experience than on the content of education courses or a student teaching experience. The alternative route was particularly appealing for the midcareer entrants who otherwise would have had to forego a year's pay while completing a traditional program.

Committing for a While, Not a Lifetime

In contrast to their veteran colleagues who will retire from a lifelong career in the classroom, many new teachers in our sample approached teaching tentatively, conditionally, or as one of several careers they expected to have. Although some expected to remain in the field of education long-term, surprisingly few envisioned remaining exclusively in the class-

room long-term. Even the first-career entrants, who 30 years ago would probably have approached teaching as a long-term endeavor, were surprisingly tentative about a career limited to classroom teaching. In fact, only four of the 26 first-career entrants said that they planned to remain classroom teachers until they retire. Likewise, even though they had fewer working years left, only six of the 24 midcareer teachers intended to stay in the classroom full time for the rest of their careers.

Many of the teachers—11 first-careers and 13 midcareers—stated explicitly that they did not intend to stay for the rest of their careers. One respondent, a former software developer, explained, "I'm a career changer. I figured, Why not explore a new field?" Another, a recent college graduate, planned to enroll in medical school after teaching for two years. He said, "I knew I wanted to go to medical school. I knew I did not want to go right after college, and so I decided, What can I do that won't pay too badly and that will make me feel like I'm doing something interesting and important?" Though these teachers made only a short-term commitment, they were not at all casual about what they hoped to achieve in the classroom. They intended to pour themselves into the job, giving it all they had, but only for a few years.

II. What New Teachers Want—and Often Aren't Getting

Given the career options and lack of long-term commitment to teaching that characterize the next generation of teachers, schools and districts that hope to hold on to new teachers will have to pay close attention to what these teachers say they want: support. The new teachers in our study described in considerable detail the internal workings of their schools, explaining the ways in which those schools succeeded or failed in supporting learning (of both the teachers and the students). Their accounts make it clear that the support they seek isn't just a matter of wanting their jobs to be easier—it's a matter of making their jobs doable, and giving them a chance to experience the success with their students that is teaching's primary reward.

Threaded through the new teachers' stories were accounts of inattentive or abusive principals, inappropriate or unfair assignments, inadequate supplies, ad hoc approaches to discipline, insufficient time with other teachers, and insufficient opportunities to grow—each of which we briefly discuss below. New teachers who worked in schools lacking these basic supports were demoralized and often felt ineffective with their students. They typically were the ones who left teaching.

Problems with Principals

These new teachers' accounts reinforce the finding of repeated research studies that the principal is central in shaping how, and how well, a school works (Murphy, 2002). Teachers we studied spoke intently about how their principals related to them personally and professionally. They wanted administrators to be present, positive, and actively engaged in the instructional life of the school. Often, the principals failed to meet these teachers' expectations. Most were said to succeed in some things but fall short in others. A surprising number

were, in these teachers' views, ineffectual, demoralizing, or even destructive.

Teachers frequently said that the principal was preoccupied and did not make time for them. Carolyn, who worked in a large, urban elementary school where 70 percent of the students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch, found her principal "a little gruff," and said she was disappointed to see her keep such a distance from the staff: "She has bulletins that she sends out. It's really her main form of communication with us." As a result, Carolyn explained, "there is a sense of the administration being higher and separate from the teachers." Carolyn looked to her principal for direction, but said that she often took problems out of Carolyn's hands with a brusque "I'll take care of it," rather than recommending how she might respond. Like other new teachers, Carolyn wanted to learn from her principal: "So a lot of time, I'll have to keep probing her [by asking], 'In another scenario, how would I handle this...?' or 'What are the consequences [for the student] that the school has for this?'"

Problems with Teaching Assignments

In the typical professional setting, it is common to give inexperienced staff less responsibility combined with fairly intensive oversight by a veteran—but not in teaching. No teacher in our study had a reduced teaching assignment. Bernie's high school load in the history department was typical: "I have two honors classes and three of what they have labeled as 'open' classes [for low-achieving students]. Open classes also have special ed kids.... Five classes, five times a week: The kids have seven periods. I have one free period a day. Otherwise, I'm on hall duty, or bathroom duty, or what have you." Bernie, whose time as a corporate lawyer had been billed by the minute, was dismayed to find that his time as a teacher was used to "make sure that nobody smokes in the boys' room."

Not only was Bernie's assignment not reduced, but he, like many in our study, actually had a more difficult assignment than his more experienced colleagues. "I have the highest class size of any open [lower track] class. All the other open classes in the school, I found out this week, are all like 10 kids. Mine are 30 and 25." Moreover, Bernie had no classroom or desk to call his own and moved from room-to-room during the day as an itinerant instructor. Throughout the study, teachers described assignments that, although technically comparable to those of their colleagues (the same number of students, the same number of classes), were actually far more challenging. Their loads included a preponderance of low-level classes, grade-levels in which students would take the state exam, split grades, or assignments that required traveling from classroom-to-classroom or school-to-school.

Problems with Supplies and Equipment

There was wide variation in the equipment and supplies provided to the new teachers, with predictable differences between urban and suburban schools (although some teachers in urban schools said that they had all they needed). Like many who came from other careers, Esther was stunned at how ill-

(Continued on page 18)

Teachers transfer out of high-poverty, low-support schools because of conditions ... not union transfer provisions

By F. Howard Nelson

High-poverty schools tend to employ staff with less experience than other schools. This could be a source of great inequity. What causes it?

A group of policymakers and researchers have argued that the cause is collectively bargained contracts that give senior teachers greater transfer rights. For example, the Hoover Institute's Terry Moe (2006) asserts that "hard evidence or no, there are compelling reasons for thinking that transfer rights should have profoundly negative effects on the schools...."

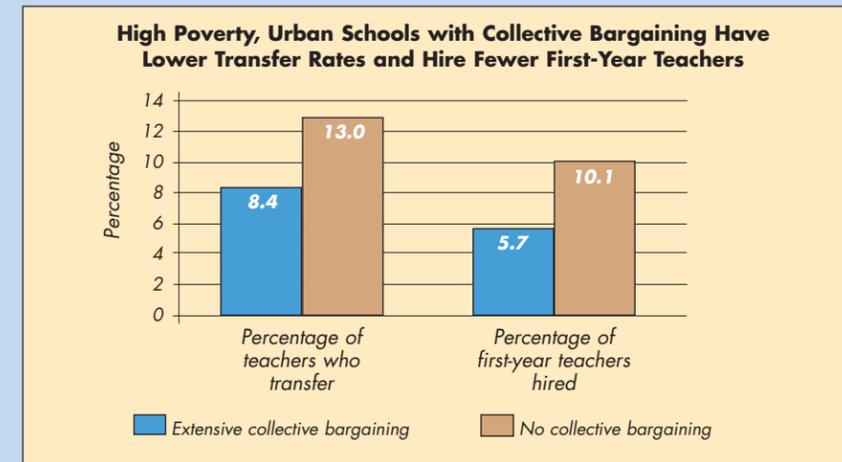
[T]ransfer rights give senior teachers much more latitude in choosing where to teach.... In districts with transfer rules, then, disadvantaged schools should find themselves burdened with even more inexperienced teachers than they otherwise would."

Likewise, Paul Hill and others at the Center for Reinventing Public Education (2005) argue that, "Teacher preferences are usually honored according to seniority, frequently backed up by labor contracts. The most senior ... teachers very often receive their preference to be assigned to schools with the fewest teaching challenges. The greenest teachers ... are generally assigned to schools that are struggling."

But are these assumptions correct? My research data provide a clear answer: No.

Using data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and the

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companion 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey, I found that both nationally and in urban areas, teachers who work under a collectively bargained contract are *less likely* to transfer to another school than teachers who do not have a collectively bargained contract. This is especially true of teachers in high-poverty urban schools: Just 8.4 percent of those in states with extensive collective bargaining transferred to another school in 2000-2001, compared to 13 percent of those in states without collective bargaining.

Of course, how many teachers are transferring is not the only, or even the most important, issue. The real question is this: Who fills the vacancy when a teacher does transfer? Folks like Moe and Hill have asserted that teachers always prefer to work in more affluent schools and neighborhoods, and that their seniority-based transfer rights enable them to do so. This is devastating for high-poverty urban schools, they argue, because such schools are then stuck hiring (and soon thereafter losing) inexperienced teachers.

Once again, the data disagree. I found that high-poverty schools in states with extensive collective bar-

gaining are *less likely* to fill their vacancies with inexperienced teachers. Among high-poverty urban schools, in states with extensive collective bargaining just 5.7 percent of the teachers filling vacancies were inexperienced, compared to 10.1 percent in states without collective bargaining.

The message from these data is clear: Collective bargaining contracts do not induce experienced teachers to leave high poverty schools.

Why then do high-poverty schools employ a larger number of new teachers? My data do not provide an answer. But the research conducted by Susan Moore Johnson begins to paint a picture that does. Teachers in high-poverty schools, in both districts with and without collective bargaining, face more difficult conditions and less support than their counterparts in more affluent schools. These teachers are thus more likely to leave teaching all together. And, they are more likely than their counterparts to change schools—or switch, like Esther in the main article, to an entirely different school district, where they can find a school and conditions that enable them to find teaching success.

(References on page 45)

Teacher unions can support new teachers' desire for assistance and professional growth—while aiding teacher effectiveness

By Susan Moore Johnson and Morgaen L. Donaldson

Given the mobility of workers in today's economy, as well as the aspirations and options of new teachers, recruitment and retention of these teachers may require the creation of new teacher roles. In a survey of recent college graduates, 70 percent felt that teaching did not offer adequate "opportunities for advancement," but their current jobs did (Farkas et al., 2000). Similarly, research by Henke, Chen, and Geis (2000) found that about one-third of all new teachers and 50 percent of new black teachers wanted to move into school leadership positions.

Further, in response to the influx of new teachers and the growing concern about their readiness and ultimate retention, issues of induction and mentoring are moving center-stage. Across the country, the quality of induction and mentoring programs varies widely (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Yet recent research has shown that when new teachers take part in comprehensive induction programs that include time for collaboration and a mentor who teaches the same subject, they are less likely to leave the profession (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004).

Unions and districts can work together to create structures that help support and retain the talented teachers that our schools need. One long-running effort to do this is in Toledo,

This sidebar is adapted with permission from "The Effects of Collective Bargaining on Teacher Quality," a chapter in *Collective Bargaining in Education: Negotiating Change in Today's Schools*, Jane Hannaway and Andrew J. Rotherham, Eds. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Press, 2006.

Collective bargaining could play a central role in assuring teacher quality and retention—and put unions in the enviable position of providing their new members the support they desperately need.

where in 1981, the Toledo Federation of Teachers and the Toledo school district jointly created, and adopted through collective bargaining, a peer assistance and review program in which experienced teachers leave their classrooms for three years to mentor and evaluate all teachers new to the district. After one year of closely supervising new teachers' work and modeling expert practice, the peer reviewers recommend to a joint labor-management committee whether or not each new teacher should be reemployed. The program, which received the Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2001, has been shown to yield higher retention and dismissal rates than comparable districts where administrators are the sole evaluators.

Also in the 1980s, the Rochester Teachers Association and the Rochester school district created the Career in Teaching (CIT) program, which differentiates teachers into four sub-groups:

interns, resident teachers, professional teachers, and lead teachers. Lead teachers are released from the classroom part-time to mentor interns (beginning teachers) and coach veteran colleagues who administrators identify as struggling. They also evaluate interns and struggling veterans. In fact, interns cannot move into the resident teacher category without the lead teacher's approval. Once they receive tenure, teachers attain "professional" status. They may then apply to become lead teachers, thereby qualifying for additional compensation and leadership roles like those described. The CIT receives favorable reviews from new and experienced teachers in Rochester's public schools.

In 2002, the Minneapolis Public Schools and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers created the Achievement of Tenure Process for New Teachers. The program aims to simultaneously provide new teachers with the assistance they need to teach successfully and assure that the tenure award is made only to effective teachers. Among the many supports provided to new teachers are release time to observe effective colleagues and various forms of professional development.

Today, prospective and current teachers entertain a range of career options outside teaching. If they are dissatisfied, they may leave the classroom without looking back. By focusing on what induces strong candidates into the classroom, what helps teachers become more effective on the job, and what sustains them over a career, collective bargaining could play a central role in assuring teacher quality and retention—and put unions in the enviable position of providing their new members the support they desperately need. (References on page 45)

(Continued from page 15)

equipped her school was, particularly compared to the suburban school where she had done substitute teaching. She recalled a time when there was no paper available and “the secretary was taking out her secret stash.” Likewise, Bernie said it was “just ridiculous” that he was allotted three reams of paper per quarter. With no classroom of his own, Bernie had to rely on photocopied handouts rather than blackboards in order to convey important information to students. Three reams of paper didn’t last long: “I go through that probably in ... a week and a half, two weeks.” He said only somewhat wryly, “Some of the most useful tips I’ve gotten from veteran teachers have to do with font size and making sure I copy on both sides of paper...” Bernie, like many others, complained that the photocopiers in his school never worked. He observed, “In the business world, they would have a photocopy center where you could either do it yourself, or have somebody on staff [do it].”

Problems with Student Behavior

There is no more immediate and worrisome challenge for new teachers than establishing and maintaining order in their classroom. Some new teachers worked in schools that deliberately focused everyone’s efforts on instruction and systematically discouraged disruption and distraction; they supported instruction respectfully with a calm and purposeful environment. Far more often, however, teachers talked about coping on their own, without the benefit of a schoolwide approach to discipline that was endorsed and upheld by teachers and administrators alike. Many teachers complained about school administrators who failed to follow through on discipline. Often, new teachers reported being reluctant to ask for help from school administrators, believing that their requests would evoke disapproval. For example, Bernie was not confident he could rely on administrators for support: “I’m not sure that they back people up. I’ve heard stories that have made me really nervous about teachers being called to the mat ... for something as simple as removing a kid from the classroom because they’re disruptive.”

Problems with Scheduling Time to Collaborate

How their time was scheduled was very important to the new teachers, particularly whether their preparation periods—usually one per day—were coordinated with those of other teachers who taught the same subject or students. New teachers praised schools that deliberately arranged their schedules so that they could plan classes or review students’ progress together.

Secondary schools that featured project-based learning, interdisciplinary classes, or team-based instruction often arranged time for teachers to collaborate. But in more traditional secondary schools, preparation periods often seemed haphazardly assigned, more likely the byproduct of a computerized scheduling program than the result of deliberate planning. Bernie was dismayed that teachers—particularly new ones—did not have the benefit of their peers’ knowledge and advice. He thought that the teachers in his school would have worked more closely together if their assignments had made that possible.

Those who thought that their school’s lack of support interfered with successful teaching often moved on—either to another school or another career.



At the elementary level, teachers were even less likely to have coordinated planning or grade-level meeting time. Keisha, who worked in a school where 83 percent of the students were below grade level in reading, wished that there were opportunities to observe other teachers in their classrooms, “but we don’t have that type of release time. Our [paraprofessionals] are hung up doing whatever. We can’t get subs.” However, Victoria said that in her suburban school, time was reserved for weekly grade-level meetings to “just go over what’s happening.”

Problems with Professional Growth Opportunities

Focused though they were on developing classroom competence, the new teachers nonetheless continued to assess what a career in teaching could offer them over time. Many of these teachers hoped to eventually take on a new role that would allow them to continue, at least part-time, as classroom teachers. They did not want to exit the classroom entirely and become a principal or district administrator, but they also did not want to be confined to the classroom. They believed that a hybrid role might combat boredom and burnout while offering new challenges and rewards that would keep them engaged in teaching over the long term.

Some new teachers liked the professional advancement inherent in a career ladder. As novices, they saw that such positions could offer a formal conduit through which experts could pass on teaching expertise—and they looked forward to taking on roles as expert teachers in the future. Mary, who had done crisis work with adults for six years before becoming a

teacher, explained, “My sense is that there are a lot of people coming in and then leaving, with very little connection between the new people and the experienced people. Then you get experienced people ... who want to share their experience, but don’t really know how.... There would be a value in passing along their experience and knowledge.” Without such roles, Mary said, “I don’t think people will stay.”

Despite considerable interest in differentiated roles, with the exception of the well-established position of department head, few could point to examples of the kind of role they had in mind. One new teacher bemoaned this situation: “You’re either a teacher or you’re a coach or you’re a principal, and I don’t like that idea at all.”

All new teachers believed that schools could either facilitate or impede good teaching. When the basics like supplies and a schoolwide discipline plan were combined with an administration that offered useful feedback and scheduled time for teachers to collaborate, new teachers were very likely to stay in their schools. Unfortunately, such schools were not the norm. Nonetheless, even when the new teachers were only reasonably hopeful that they could become effective with their students, they were still likely to stay. However, those who thought that their school’s lack of support interfered with successful teaching often moved on—either to another school or another career. The table below provides the bare facts on the numbers of new teachers who stayed, switched schools, or left teaching after the first year of our study and after the fourth year. The new teachers are broken down by first-career vs. midcareer entrants to highlight one interesting trend: Midcareer entrants were more likely to switch schools right away. Since they had already changed jobs at least once when they entered teaching, they knew that work sites could vary tremendously. They did not regard the problems they encountered as inevitable, so they quickly looked for a place where they could give teaching another chance.

Esther did just that.

Who Stayed? Who Moved? Who Left? First-career vs. Midcareer Entrants after the First Year of Our Study and after the Fourth Year				
	After 1 year		After 4 years	
	First-Career Entrants	Midcareer Entrants	First-Career Entrants	Midcareer Entrants
Stayed in the school where they started	21	13	8	9
Moved to another school	1	7	8	8
Left public school teaching	4	4	10	7

Esther Struggles—and Moves On

Esther, a MSBP participant and former engineer, was dropped into teaching math at an urban vocational high school with virtually no explanation or advice. She summarized the guid-

ance she had: “Here are your keys, here’s your room, good luck.” Entering a complex vocational school with only summer preservice training behind her, Esther was bewildered and overwhelmed. A sudden and solo entry not only stymies new teachers, it shortchanges students. Success in a new assignment requires much more than having a set of keys and knowing where the classroom is.

During the first two weeks, Esther thought about quitting every day. She could not figure out how to get her students to listen to her. In December of that first year, she reported, “They won’t sit still; their rudeness; their total disrespect for each other, for the teacher, their language, everything. They can’t speak to you; they only yell ... I have never seen anything like it.”

Esther received little help in reaching students from the teachers and administrators in her school. She said her ineffectual principal—whom her colleagues openly mocked in the teachers’ room—did not seem to like her, and other teachers kept their doors closed before and after school. Aside from another new teacher with whom she shared ideas and one veteran who offered informal advice when they saw each other during hall duty, she felt she was on her own in learning to reach her students.

Esther was assigned a mentor, but she was a special education teacher who knew little about the math that Esther was teaching: “I’ve spoken to this lady twice, maybe for five minutes.... She’s very nice and stuff, but she kind of goes by and kind of gives me a worried look [and says], ‘How’s it going?’ I say, ‘OK.’ And then, that’s it.” But Esther had hoped for curricular and instructional support from someone who knew how to teach math. One person she logically looked to for help was the math department head. However, the department head explained that she could not step in as Esther’s mentor because she was responsible for evaluating her, and she could only observe her class for the purpose of formal review. Learning to teach was hard enough; learning to teach on her own, with students whose disengagement and behavior so surprised her, was overwhelming.

Feeling exhausted and defeated in the spring of her first year, she decided to look elsewhere for work. “It was too hard emotionally. There was nothing I could do.... I think I would have tried it another year because there were kids there that were very nice, but the administration was not ... supportive.” Esther found a job teaching math at a more affluent high school near her home in the suburbs. As she left the vocational high school she was surprised and touched by the students’ reactions. “It was funny. When I quit the last day of school last year ... when I told the kids I wasn’t coming back, they said, ‘Why are you leaving us? What did we do to you?’ I am thinking, ‘What did you do to me? What did you call me?’”

At her new high school, Esther found supportive colleagues and administrators. She recalled, “I had a director who ... said ‘What can I do for you? Come to me with your questions.’” Moreover, Esther benefited from her department’s deliberate introduction to the math curriculum: “At the beginning of the year, we sat down, and they told us what chapters to teach. You know, ‘This is what we do. This is the order we do it.’”

She also achieved a much greater sense of success. She recalled that at the end of the year at her new school, “I had several students say ‘You have to keep teaching. You did a good job.’” The positive feedback heartened her—reaching students was a key reason she had switched careers in the first place.

Esther regarded her decision to leave her urban vocational school with some regret, wishing she had found a way to succeed with her students there. But her decision is not unusual. Recent work by researchers studying teacher turnover in Texas and New York (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2001; Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2002) reveals that teachers consistently move to schools with “higher achieving, non-minority, non-low-income students” (Hanushek et al., 2001, p.12). In fact, large, urban schools that serve low-income students have nearly twice the annual teacher turnover as large, suburban schools that serve fewer low-income students (19 percent versus 11 percent) (Ingersoll, 2006).

Why? Working conditions are key. Recently, a survey of 3,336 teachers in California, Wisconsin, and New York was conducted to learn how working conditions differed in low-income versus affluent communities (Carroll, Fulton, Abercrombie, and Yoon, 2004). Researchers found that schools serving large numbers of low-income students and children of color were reported to have a much higher incidence of inadequate physical facilities than other schools; evidence of vermin (cockroaches, mice, and rats) in the school buildings; dirty, closed, or inoperative student bathrooms; inadequate textbooks and materials for students to use in class or to take home; inadequate computers and limited Internet access; inadequate science equipment and materials; and higher personal expenditures by teachers to compensate for insufficient classroom materials and supplies.

Another reason why teachers move to more affluent schools is that learning to teach is difficult, complex work. New teach-

ers need support and guidance in order to achieve success. But we have found that support is often hardest to come by in low-income urban and rural schools, which very often have few institutional resources and low levels of student achievement. Our work shows that more affluent schools tend to provide more support to help new teachers succeed.

III. Support Breeds Success and Stability

When we examined teachers’ reasons for staying in their school, transferring to another school, or leaving public school teaching entirely, we realized there were three distinct kinds of schools—and only one of them was doing a good job supporting, and holding on to, new teachers. The key was in the schools’ professional culture. The first kind of school had a mix of veterans and novices, but teachers worked in isolation instead of learning from one another. The second kind had a teaching staff comprised almost entirely of novices who were

bound by their enthusiasm, but lacking skill. The third kind had veterans and novices who were encouraged to work together, sharing expertise and fresh ideas. In our sample of 50 new Massachusetts teachers, 17 began their careers in schools that fostered such collaborations—and 82 percent of them stayed in those schools after the first year of our study. In contrast, just 57 percent of the 21 teachers who began their careers in schools where teachers worked in isolation stayed, as did just 67 percent of the 12 who began in schools filled with novices. Just what does a school where teachers collaborate look like? Fred’s experience, described in the sidebar (p. 20), provides an excellent example.

New teachers yearn for professional colleagues who can help them acclimate to their school’s unique culture, help them solve the complicated, daily dilemmas of
(Continued on page 45)

Fred Plans to Stay “Forever”

Fred began his teaching career at a small, urban secondary school. He was deeply committed to his students’ success and to the continuing development of his school. When we first met Fred, his school included grades seven, eight, and nine, and school leaders planned to add one grade every year through grade 12. Though it is a neighborhood public school, drawing its students from the low-income community that immediately surrounds it, it is also a professional development school, the result of a unique partnership between a local university and the city school district. The faculty includes both highly experienced teachers and newer teachers. Most of the newer teachers have traditional teacher preparation, master’s degrees, and internship experience at the school.

To Fred, his school is about high expectations, collaboration, and ongoing teacher learning, all in the service of high student achievement. As he explained, “the expectations are so clear ... we’re gearing these kids to college, that that’s our ultimate goal: to get the kids ready for college.” The expectations are high for student and teacher performance, but neither is left alone to achieve the mission.

Given that these students had varying levels of academic skills and prima-

rily came from low-income neighborhoods, every aspect of the school had to focus on academic success—even the approach to managing student behavior. Both the faculty and the administration, Fred said, “treat every problem, no matter how minute, as a significant disciplinary issue. And because of that, we don’t have the typical problems that other schools do. I mean, problems that other schools would laugh at in terms of discipline are dealt with pretty harshly here. But I think that has created an atmosphere that is conducive to good discipline.” In the school’s three-year history, there had been no fights among students. “And that’s pretty remarkable when you think that it’s seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-graders.” He credited the principal with setting the standard: “Things are dealt with immediately by the principal. She’s got a good relationship with the kids. They know not to disappoint her.”

But the principal wasn’t just the disciplinarian. She founded the professional development school and was deeply involved in making it work. Fred said, “She’s an innovator. She’s an example. ... She’s constantly looking for new ideas and new ways of solving old problems, which is unique. ... No problem is too large [for her] and ...

you don’t have to guess where she stands on the issues.” But at the same time, “She’s very good at telling us what kind of job we do and how she appreciates it. ... She’s willing to put her confidence in the hands of the professionals that are teachers here.” He explained, “That type of freedom and confidence creates a good feeling amongst the faculty.”

According to Fred, the fact that the faculty included a mix of new and experienced teachers “promotes the best type of situation for faculty.” He described the interaction among novice and veteran teachers this way: “So we have a nice blend of veteran teachers who have been in the system for a long time and know the art of teaching. Then we also have a nice core of ... young teachers like myself with less than five years of teaching experience. And that creates a really good atmosphere. So I think the young teachers learn from the veteran teachers. And I think the veteran teachers get sparked a little bit from the young teachers coming in, you know, a new, fresh attitude. So it’s mutually enriching in that sense.”

It is important to note that there is nothing inherently beneficial about simply having a mix of novices and veterans within the same school. What is

exceptional at Fred’s school is that teachers of varying experience levels interact regularly, both formally and informally. Fred described a typical situation: “If I have a question or if I had something happen in class that perplexed me that I didn’t know how to deal with, then I go down to [Sue] or [Tom] and say, ‘I’m having trouble, how do I deal with this?’”

Fred said the school’s culture emphasizes “teachers as learners,” and it is expected that teachers will learn when they work together. The teachers had 90 minutes four times each week for preparation and collaborative work. Learning to teach is an ongoing process; a teacher masters the art by practicing, over time. Thus, administrators and teacher leaders at Fred’s school realized that it serves their school well to recognize that new teachers grow in skill and expertise day-to-day and year-to-year: “There’s an expectation that you would mature as a teacher and develop new strategies in various arenas that you may not have had in your bag of tricks to begin with.”

Fred also explained that his fellow teachers feel and act as if they are collectively responsible for the school, the students, and each other: “We’re all in the same game here together.” He explained that he believed it is his “responsibility, as it is everybody else’s, to share in the burden” of achieving the

The faculty and the administration, Fred said, “treat every problem, no matter how minute, as a significant disciplinary issue. And because of that, we don’t have the typical problems that other schools do.”

school’s mission. In speaking of his duty to all of the students in the school he said, “I’m not primarily a social studies teacher here; I’m a teacher here primarily.”

After just a few years of teaching in this supportive environment, Fred was ready to start venturing beyond the traditional role of a classroom teacher. He became the de facto head of the social studies department: “The principal has kind of put me in charge of making sure that the social studies curriculum

is being covered.” He also supervised two student teachers, which he especially enjoyed: “It worked great. I love it. Their ideas keep me fresh. And I think I lend a little bit of experience to them. And it’s mutually enriching, you know.” Fred looked forward to being able to take on even more in the years ahead; his school had specialized roles for master teachers who serve as staff developers and work with intern teachers. Fred observed that such positions were “enriching” both for the individuals holding them and for the people they assisted.

Clearly, those in Fred’s school believe that teachers hold knowledge and power, and that students are best served when teachers assist each other and share responsibility for their students’ learning as well as their own. Mentoring is organized to benefit both the novice and the experienced teachers, and the administration ensures that structures are in place to further facilitate teacher interaction and reinforce interdependence. Fred said he hoped to remain in his school “forever.” But he made it clear that, were it not for his school, he might have left teaching: “If I weren’t at this school, I wouldn’t be a teacher. I really don’t think I would be.” It was his appreciation for his school that reinforced his commitment: “I plan on making it a career. So, 20, 30 years.”

—S.M.J.

Why New Teachers Stay

(Continued from page 21)

classroom teaching, and guide their ongoing learning. When the 50 teachers in our study chose teaching, they envisioned the stimulating classroom they hoped to create and the buzz of their students engaged in learning. In the ideal, they also hoped for colleagues and administrators who would be committed to student learning and would help them, as new teachers, achieve success with their students.

Regardless of the quality or duration of new teacher's preservice preparation, novice teachers must continue to learn long after they enter the classroom. They continue to improve their skills and adjust their strategies for delivering engaging lessons. They learn about the philosophy of their school and what administrators, colleagues, and parents expect of them. They learn about the students, their families, and the community. They learn to keep order in their classroom, better manage their time, and differentiate instruction in response to students' needs. They become better at involving parents more effectively, fostering student responsibility, and assessing student progress. They learn to create curriculum, integrate technology into their teaching, and better prepare students for standardized tests. Leaving new teachers on their own to address these complex and dynamic challenges is both unreasonable and unnecessary, particularly since they are surrounded by colleagues doing similar work.

By building a career ladder for classroom teachers, schools can deliver what the new teachers in our study want—both a supportive work environment while they are new and opportunities to grow once they have more experience. With career ladders that formalize roles such as mentors, master teachers, curriculum developers, or professional development planners, schools can be organized so that novices have a well-integrated support system with plenty of colleagues to turn to, and veterans have options that will challenge them without removing them from the classroom completely. Ideally, school districts and teacher unions will collaborate to create these career ladders and help schools become supportive workplaces that foster new teachers' success. Our study demonstrated that such schools—schools like Fred's—have dramatically less attrition among new teachers. That's good for the schools' bottom line and great for students' academic achievement. □

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From page 16

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From page 17

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