

# SUPPORTING

Induction programs are a lifeboat  
in the sink-or-swim world of the new teacher

BY HARRY K. WONG AND CHRISTINA ASQUITH

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

Right away, the troubles started. The district assigned me to middle school—the least desirable age group—and I unknowingly selected one of the most challenging schools in Philadelphia. I received one day of orientation, during which I mostly filled out forms. No one officially welcomed me or the other three new teachers to my school; in fact the veterans received us with skepticism, at best. Apparently, I was assigned a mentor, but she was busy with her own classroom.

I'll never forget the first morning when a student asked me for a pass to the bathroom and I didn't know where it was. I have heard administrators describe a new teacher's first year

as a "sink or swim" experience. I began to sink.

At the end of September, the newspapers reported that 100 of Philadelphia's newly recruited teachers had already quit. During the year, six teachers in my school walked off the job, and I fought the temptation to join them. Isolated in my classroom with few supplies, no experience, and nowhere to turn for help, I struggled to control the students. When the \$1,500 bonus arrived, it meant little to me—I would have paid twice that to succeed.

On many days I truly loved teaching, but my lack of experience made the bad days too terrible for everyone involved. Overwhelmingly, I felt guilty, confused, and hopeless. Yet, in the back of my mind, I wondered if I hadn't been thrown in cold, if I had had some support and training—any training—might my brief career in teaching have turned out differently? While I had it tough, the loss was greatest for my sixth-graders, almost all of whom failed the state writing tests in the spring. It was seeing their disappointed faces each day that pushed me out the door in June.

—Christina Asquith

## Every lost teacher costs \$50,000

Each year thousands of qualified teachers are recruited happily into the profession, only to quit in frustration a year or two later. Gone is more than just a much-needed classroom leader: Every teacher who leaves within three years costs taxpayers an estimated \$50,000 (based on an industry standard of calculating 2.5 times the employee's initial salary in recruitment, personnel expenditures, and lost productivity). This \$50,000 does not include the invisible cost of forgone student achievement, which can only be corrected through the guidance of a steady, trained team of teachers.

Despite the tremendous monetary and human costs, school districts continue to discard teachers at alarming rates, only to rehire a new round and lose them, too. Sadly, studies show it is often the most effective and talented teachers who leave. In urban and rural districts, where turnover is the highest, the

classroom is like a battlefield—teachers are marched in, defeated, and then replenished with fresh troops.

But the first year is turning out differently for hundreds of teachers whose school boards and administrations invest in preparing and supporting them. In Southern Louisiana, for example, the Lafourche Parish Public Schools dropped its teacher attrition rate from 56 percent to 7 percent in just a few years. The Leyden High School District in Illinois has lost only four of the last 90 teachers it hired. And there are other success stories. The answer does not lie in signing bonuses, higher salaries, or class size reduction. The answer is a solid teacher training process called induction.

Induction is the key to retaining teachers. The process is an organized, multi-year district initiative with the major goals of welcoming, training, and supporting new teachers so they are effective from day one and are valued as members of the dis-

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trict's learning community. Induction can include workshops before school opens, lessons on classroom management, demonstration classrooms, mentoring, school orientation, networking opportunities, and the prospect of ongoing support. A good induction program starts before the teacher's first day and runs for several years, guiding new teachers as they learn the ropes.

Given the 2 million new teachers to be hired in the next several years, the need for induction is urgent. Close to one-third of these new teachers will be "alternatively certified," meaning they might not have much formal training in teaching. They arrive with dreams of making a difference, and they shouldn't be left to fend for themselves. Without induction, these teachers might not even know the basics—how to conduct a lesson, take attendance, or even respond to a fire drill. Schools must invest in keeping teachers or they will lose them.

## **New teachers come FIRST**

Six years ago, Lafourche was losing more than half of its new hires. Nestled into the farms and oil fields of southern Louisiana, the school system serves 15,000 students in 30 schools and competed with neighboring districts for teachers. At the time, test scores were lower than the state average. Curriculum coordinator Annette Breaux was one of only three people in place to support 80 to 100 new teachers each year. Her description of a typical new teacher's experience was predictable.

"We just handed them the classroom keys," she says. "They weren't formally welcomed or inducted or given any new training. They just fell in line with whatever other staff development was in place. They struggled with classroom management ... We had to do something."

What Breaux did was research successful induction programs around the country. In 1995, she designed an induction program and applied for a \$20,000 grant from the state.

The program—called FIRST (Framework for Inducting, Retaining, and Supporting Teachers)—begins with a warm welcome from the superintendent and his staff. Teachers receive four days of training, mostly on effective classroom management procedures and routines and instructional practices. During this time, new teachers are introduced to the school's

culture and the community's characteristics and made to feel a part of the district "family."

Angie Chatagnier, 22, went through the induction when she joined Lafourche as a kindergarten teacher in 2001. She remembers the first day of her induction because one of the trainers came dressed in jeans. Angie and the rest of the new teachers were shocked. They later learned that they had been set up by the trainers, who were driving the point home that professional attire makes a difference.

"It was excellent; it was positive; it was well organized; and you could see that they know how to teach," she says of the program. "I always knew that if I had some problem, I had someone to turn to."

Over the past five years, Breaux has expanded the induction from four days in August to three full years of ongoing training and support. Lafourche's FIRST program has become so successful that last year Louisiana adopted it as a statewide model called Louisiana FIRST. This year, the state has budgeted \$400,000, most of which goes to mini-grants for school districts to design their own programs.

Last year, every one of the new Lafourche teachers passed the state teacher assessment. Breaux says one indication of the district's success is that it can compete with neighboring districts that pay teachers more than Lafourche's \$27,883 starting salary.

"New teachers want to be successful," she says. "They will forego a neighboring district that pays more if they think they will be successful with us."

Excluding staff salaries, Lafourche runs its induction program on only \$50,000 a year—the cost of losing one teacher. "Our new teachers became successful, and they were coming back the following year," says Elmo Broussard, superintendent for the Lafourche Parish Public Schools. "This had never happened until we implemented an induction program."

## **Save money by spending money**

If you think \$50,000 is a lot of money to spend on training new teachers, consider how much is already being spent on fancy strategies that produce low results. In New York City, the school board spent \$8 million in 2000 for a glossy, Madison Avenue recruiting campaign. The city drew in 8,334 new teachers—1,875

of whom quit after the first year. If the district lost 23 percent after one year, imagine how many are lost in three to five years. Will New York City taxpayers agree to spend \$8 million every year just to replace the original teachers?

Massachusetts didn't have much luck either when the state offered new teachers signing bonuses of \$20,000 in 1999. After just one year, one-third of the new teachers left, and four out of five said the bonuses didn't affect their decisions to stay or go.

"The money gets them in the door, but whether they stay depends on whether they feel trained, supported, and as though they belong," says Jacqueline Landry, associate superintendent for professional development/training in the Dallas Independent School District.

Administrators at Flowing Wells School District in Tucson, Ariz., didn't have the deep pockets of their neighboring districts, but they did have a bright idea. Since 1984, the district has had mandatory induction for all new teachers during their first and second years, followed by a continuum of professional development throughout their careers. The objective is to bring teachers into the culture and community of the school and to train them in classroom management. The induction includes a welcome bus tour, demonstration classrooms, observations and opportunities to network with trained teachers, mentoring, and a celebration luncheon. Since the program's inception, Flowing Wells has produced 12 finalists for Arizona teachers of the year.

"It's had a tremendous effect in building the culture, in promoting teamwork, and recruiting the best teachers," says Susie Heintz, the district's staff development coordinator. "People want to come to our district even though we pay less because we offer nurturing. People like to work here."

Districts that show the most success in retaining new teachers are those that invest up front in sustained training programs. While induction programs are sprouting up in districts across the country, only a few states have structured, funded statewide plans for new teachers. California provides \$72 million of state funding for a thoroughly outlined two-year program called California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program. The attrition rate for teachers in this program is 9 percent, compared to 37 percent for those who have not been through the program. States such as Connecticut and South Carolina have extensive, sustained, comprehensive multiyear induction programs, with much success. But nationally, progress is slow, and each year thousands of new teachers flee the profession.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only half of public school teachers have participated in an induction program in their first three years on the job. And keep in mind that some schools that say they offer "induction" in fact only offer a day of orientation or simply assign a mentor. New teachers need more than that.

Although mentoring can be helpful, it is just one component of induction. Mentoring alone does not have any positive effect on teacher effectiveness or longevity—especially if it's not done well. Many new teachers complain that their mentors don't have the time to sit in their classrooms and observe them or re-

view lesson plans, and few mentors receive any training on how to be a mentor. A buddy system that pairs a veteran teacher with a new teacher, mentoring often turns out like a blind date: It's a shot in the dark that the new teacher and the mentor will get along and form a good relationship.

In a well-intentioned effort to draw new teachers, the Iowa state legislature approved a \$40 million package for new teachers in 2001; of this, \$31.2 million went to higher salaries and \$2.4 went to a mentor program. But these efforts alone will not be enough to recruit and keep teachers. Without a serious induction program, Iowa will probably not see its attrition problem improve. And the same goes for states such as Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Texas, which advocate the use of mentors but do not call for the other elements of induction.

### **What new teachers need**

"The questions and uncertainty new teachers bring to school require far more than an orientation meeting, a mentor in the building, and a written copy of the school's discipline policy," says Susan Moore Johnson of Harvard University's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. "What new teachers need is sustained, school-based professional development."

A decade ago, the Texas Legislature passed an amendment to the state's education code requiring new teachers to go through orientation and be mentored—but legislators provided no funding or guidance, and most districts just cobbled together their own programs. This year, Dallas administrators decided to launch their own induction program with trainers, coaches, and mentors. A major feature is an online curriculum so that teachers can review what they've learned at their convenience. The Dallas program focuses not just on training teachers in their first year, but also in supporting them over their entire career.

Linda Lippman, director of the successful induction program at New York's Islip Public School District, also takes the long view. "You walk into a classroom with an induction-trained coaching plan and you see the difference," she says. "You see joyful learning. You are making a 30-year investment in a teacher. You want to be able to craft and shape [the teacher] and raise expectations. So by putting the money up front with a sustained approach, your end product is a master teacher."

Schools are only as strong as the teachers who ignite the light of learning in each child's eye. We must stop dropping new teachers into the deep waters of the classroom and letting them sink unaided. Induction is the life jacket they need until they feel safe in the waters and become strong swimmers. A \$50,000 induction program isn't much to spend to save the life of a teacher and a classroom full of children.

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Harry K. Wong ([harrykrose@aol.com](mailto:harrykrose@aol.com)) is a former high school teacher and the author, with Annette Breaux, of *New Teacher Induction: How to Train, Support, and Retain New Teachers*.

Christina Asquith ([clasquith@aol.com](mailto:clasquith@aol.com)) is a former *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter who recently completed a book about her first year of teaching.