



# Middle

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# Matters

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## Effective Teacher Induction: Stemming the Tide of Exiting Educators

*One university/community partnership aims to provide training that can reverse the trend.*

H. Jurgen Combs

**W**e know that the first years in the career of a teacher are critical. It is estimated that 30 percent to 40 percent of teachers leave the classroom during their first five years.

There are a number of costs associated with this turnover. Researchers have estimated that it costs approximately 20 percent to 25 percent of a teacher's salary to replace that person; in Virginia, that works out to be about \$11,000 to \$12,000 per teacher. Recruitment costs include such things as hiring incentives, administrative processing, training, and mentoring and induction support. In addition, a school with significant turnover often has a number of beginning teachers whose lack of experience impacts student learning.

However, according to Richard Ingersoll (2004), there really is no teacher shortage. The problem, he argues, is that there are too many teachers who have left a profession that has been said to eat its young by subjecting them to a "trial by fire" induction process.

Reducing the turnover rate can really pay off as teachers become more proficient educators, school reforms thrive, and—most importantly—student achievement improves.

### Training the Mentors

At Shenandoah University, we have addressed the need to retain teachers by examining the training of teacher mentors. As a result, we have partnered with several local school districts to provide that training. We offer one graduate credit to participants, who also receive a small stipend from the district. Training consists of a full day—often in August but sometimes in early October, depending on the need—as well as evening follow-ups one and two months after the initial training.

Participants acquire a model they can use to mentor or coach student teachers, and they identify various models of co-

teaching with student and novice teachers. Our participants are helped to identify areas where student teachers and novice teachers have needs, and to learn methods of providing assistance. Recently, we have added more information about working with adults of different generations.

The role of the mentors includes advising on teaching strategies and content, and offering demonstration lessons. They consult with teachers on planning and lesson delivery and offer advice about learning resources and student and parent relations. They offer information about the community, often providing maps with information about physicians, stores, and other things newcomers need to know. Mentors also observe new teachers, but the results of these visits are not shared with the school administration.

As soon as teachers are hired, the mentors contact them via e-mail and phone. They provide new teachers with "who to ask" information sheets, and some have started online discussion groups open only to the mentors and their mentees. Other mentors arrange periodic lunches or breakfasts for their mentees on staff development days. Many mentors develop calendars with "heads-up" information about upcoming school activities, PTO meetings, report cards, and other events.

### Benefits for Mentors and Mentees

One of the beneficial results of mentoring is improved performance by the mentors themselves. As they become more attuned to helping new teachers, they became increasingly reflective about their own practices and become more interested in improving their pedagogical skills.

When Shenandoah University and the member districts recognized the need to provide more training for the mentors, we applied for a grant that enabled us to fund additional activities. Consequently, we began a Level II training program consisting of a one-week summer course for which the university provides

two graduate credits. Teachers who complete Level I and Level II training and who enroll in our Master of Administration program also receive credit for one of the required classes.

Finally, we have added what we call Level 1.5 training for previously trained teachers who do not wish to take a graduate-level course but need some reinforcement of their earlier learning. In 2007-2008, we used some of our grant funds to provide this reinforcement training to approximately 50 teachers, and we have planned a follow-up for a similar number this year.

### **What We Have Found**

Our work in mentoring training has allowed us to draw some conclusions that may be helpful to others:

- Differentiate between teaching issues and procedural issues. Teachers often need more help with the procedural issues (e.g., Where is the paper? How do I get \_\_\_?).
- Don't overwhelm new teachers. In the process of helping, it is possible to provide too much help.
- Provide different strokes for different folks. Keep in mind that everyone does not need the same thing. Training should be provided even for experienced teachers who are

new to the division, but do not need the same kind of training as a novice teacher.

- Be proactive rather than reactive.
- Ensure that administration plays a key role. Administrative support is critical, both at the building level and at the central office.

Provide district standardization, yet allow for individual school differences.

For additional information, go to [www.edulink.org/mentor](http://www.edulink.org/mentor).

### **Reference**

Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). *Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

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**H. Jurgen Combs** is associate professor in the School of Education and Human Development and director of educator licensure at Shenandoah University in Virginia. His e-mail address is [jcombs@su.edu](mailto:jcombs@su.edu).